Case 7: Personnel Business

Brendan Eich developed the coding language JavaScript and helped found the Mozilla Foundation, an open source wing of Netscape. In 2005, Eich became chief technology officer of Mozilla Corporation, the foundation's profit making arm. In 2014, Eich was made CEO. After eleven days, Eich resigned under pressure from employees, consumers, and board members. Eich was forced out because of his support for California's Proposition 8, a ballot initiative to change the state's constitution to include a provision that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California."[30]

In California, donations to ballot measures in amounts above $100 are public record and the LA Times published a list of contributions for and against proposition 8. Eich contributed $1,000 to the campaign in support of restricting marriage to between one man and one woman. [31] According to Eich, his support for Prop 8 stems from a personal religious commitment and was separate from his role as CEO. Before his ouster, Eich tried to assuage concerns writing, "I am committed to ensuring that Mozilla is, and will remain, a place that includes and supports everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, economic status, or religion."[32]

Proponents of marriage equality and gay rights advocates called for a boycott of Mozilla's flagship product, Internet browser Firefox. Internet dating site OKCupid answered the call for boycott by blocking Firefox users from the site. When customers using Firefox attempted to access the site they received a message that read in part, "Hello there, Mozilla Firefox user. Pardon this interruption of your OkCupid experience. Mozilla's new CEO, Brendan Eich, is an opponent of equal rights for gay couples. We would therefore prefer that our users not use Mozilla software to access OkCupid."[33] According to many, this is an example of free speech being used effectively to combat intolerant speech.

However, some journalists are "questioning whether the episode undercuts the well-groomed image of Silicon Valley as a marketplace of ideas and diversity of thought, and whether, in this case, the tech world surrendered to political correctness enforced through a public shaming on social media."[34] Andrew Sullivan, a prominent advocate for

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[30] Text of Proposed Laws, http://voterguide.sos.ca.gov/past/2008/general/text-proposed-laws/text-of-proposed-laws.pdf#prop8

[31] Michelle Minkoff et. al. "Proposition 8: WHo Gave Money in the Gay Marriage Battle" LA Times, http://projects.latimes.com/prop8/

[32] Brendan Eich, "Inclusiveness at Mozilla" Blog Presentation, March 26, 2014, https://brendaneich.com/2014/03/inclusiveness-at-mozilla/

[33] Mario Aguilar, "OKCupid Tells Users Not to Use Firefox," Gizmodo, March 31, 2014, http://gizmodo.com/okcupid-tells-users-not-to-use-firefox-because-of-ceos-1555616237

[34] David Crary, et. al., "Mozilla CEO resignation raises free-speech issues" USA Today, April 4, 2014, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/04/04/mozilla-ceo-resignation-free-speech/7328759/

marriage equality has objected to Eich's treatment writing, "When people's lives and careers are subject to litmus tests, and fired if they do not publicly renounce what may well be their sincere conviction, we have crossed a line. This is McCarthyism applied by civil actors. This is the definition of intolerance."[35]

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[35] Andrew Sullivan, "Dissents of the Day" The Dish, April 4, 2014,
http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2014/04/04/dissents-of-the-day-63/