

ELON MUSK FOUND TO BE CLINICALLY INSANE - The Inside Story Of Tesla's Feud With Federal Regulators

Profile picture for Tyler Durden

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Given the bizarre outbursts and increasingly grandiose performance-related promises (even as his company's Fremont factory has continued to struggle), many have speculated that Tesla CEO Elon Musk has been cracking under the pressure. In one sign that the pressures of running Tesla (not to mention SpaceX and Neuralink) have been weighing on the CEO, some have pointed out that he's becoming increasingly vindictive toward anybody who doubts or questions him: for example, he recently spent \$25 million of his own money on Tesla shares just to blow up a few shorts after tweeting threats of "unreal carnage".

In a story that lays bare Musk's obsession with his public image and his inability to tolerate criticism or dissent from his employees or the media, [Buzzfeed](#) published a piece late Thursday that's packed with alarming details, including the story of Musk's meltdown during a conversation with regulators from the National Transportation Safety Board.

Musk

An outburst from Musk that ended the conversation prompted the NTSB to announce that Tesla would no longer be cooperating with the investigation. **In a separate incident, Musk went "ballistic" during a conversation with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration after a representative informed Elon Musk that the agency would be announcing an investigation into a May 2016 crash involving a Tesla Model S in Florida.**

No one lectures Elon Musk. In April, the head of the National Transportation Safety Board discovered this after a call about his organization's investigation into one of Tesla Motors' autopiloted vehicles devolved into a heated exchange, leading the billionaire entrepreneur to hang up on the federal regulator. That fiery interaction eventually leaked to the press and ricocheted around the internet as further evidence that Musk was losing it.

[...]

For example, in June 2016 the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration had contacted Tesla as a courtesy heads-up that it would be announcing an investigation into a May crash that killed the driver of a Model S sedan on Autopilot. It was the kind of call that, at most companies, would require executive restraint and sensitivity. Musk was not originally supposed to be on the call with NHTSA officials, Tesla's general counsel, and the head of its Autopilot team, but chimed in as the conversation got underway. It was unfair that NHTSA was targeting his company, he said, noting that skeptics would just use the public investigation as evidence that Tesla was in trouble.

After failing to convince the government officials to keep their investigation private and forgo their announcement scheduled for the next day, Musk went ballistic and embarked on a profanity-laced tirade. He threatened to sue NHTSA for what he saw as unfair scrutiny and then abruptly disconnected the phone, leaving the people left on the line shocked.

"I couldn't believe it," said a former Tesla employee familiar with the call.

Musk's recent behavior isn't a deviation: ***It's more or less how he's always acted around his employees.***

But the thing is: None of this is new for Musk. He has always been the architect of his own image and has long run roughshod over journalists and his own communications team alike. In interviews with BuzzFeed News, nine people who previously worked with Musk, and who requested anonymity to preserve their personal and professional relationships, said that while the level of scrutiny on the CEO may be new, his behavior is not. What we are seeing is less a crack in his well-being than his facade. It is Elon unbound.

His short temper has "long been legend" inside Tesla and SpaceX, according to [Buzzfeed](#). The only thing that's changed, they say, is that Musk's profile - and the company's share price - has risen.

What's changed is simply that Musk's profile has risen while his staff's ability to keep him in check has waned. As pressure continues to mount and Musk sheds the executives who once provided advice and insulation, he's no longer just the Mars-bound genius with a promising electric car company. Depending on who you ask, he's an icon, an

environmental champion, or an attention-hungry micromanager, wielding Steve Jobs-level influence in 240-character Twitter diatribes, occasional public appearances, or mocking conference calls with analysts. But no matter which Elon you choose, it's become more apparent that there's no one who can rein him in.

Musk's inability to let go of anything remotely negative spouted by his critics and the media makes working on his communications staff - whether at Tesla or at SpaceX - a waking nightmare.

This obsession with the media makes working in communications under Musk, whether at Tesla or SpaceX, an unpredictable and grueling gig. Multiple former staffers recalled being kept up late or woken up in the middle of the night because Musk was upset about a headline or an article. Two other former senior employees described ***Musk as notoriously thin-skinned. "He'll read an obscure critical post by, like, some Belgian blogger at 3 in the morning and he'll wake up people on the comms team and demand this person be crushed,"*** one former employee said. *"It's all utterly disproportionate in response."*

If you're thinking that some of Musk's tendencies - particularly his treatment of the media - sound familiar, well, former Musk employees would agree. Several of [Buzzfeed](#)'s sources independently compared working for Musk with working in the Trump White House, the outlet said.

*The lack of control and continual need to put out PR fires wore on professionals, even those who personally liked Musk and believed in the missions of Tesla and SpaceX. Tesla is known for a high rate of turnover, and some communications staffers only last a few months. Some have done multiple stints, though have left or were fired after clashing with the chief executive. **Three people familiar with Musk's communications team independently compared the pressure and publicity, and chaos of the job to working in President Donald Trump's White House.***

This has already been a rough week for Tesla. Musk has already had to [downsize Solar City's residential solar business and finish laying off 9% of Tesla's staff](#) (while continuing to deny that the company is having funding troubles). And this embarrassing BuzzFeed story is one more distraction for the mogul, who's desperately trying to bring Model 3 production up to 2,500 cars a week by the end of June. **If he fails at that task, we imagine there will be another round of outbursts as Musk continues**

his crusade against the Tesla bears and everybody else who doubts his vision.