


WeWork, Former CEO Adam Neumann Accused of Rampant Pregnancy and Gender Discrimination

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WeWork and its chief investor, SoftBank, recently paid out WeWork co-founder and self-declared candidate for “President of the World” Adam Neumann to the tune of \$1.7 billion just to get his ass out the door amid the company’s disastrous collapse. And he’s left quite a mess behind, with a proposed class-action complaint brought by a former female staffer stating that Neumann and other WeWork executives engaged in appalling behavior towards women.

According to a complaint filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Thursday, Neumann’s former chief of staff Medina Bardhi said that Neumann smoked weed on a jet in front of her, that female employees at the company made significantly less than their male colleagues, and that she was subject to workplace retaliation for taking pregnancy leave. Bardhi said that during her five years of employment at the company, she was pregnant and took associated leave twice, resulting in demotions obviously motivated by her time off.

“It is astonishing that WeWork could reward Adam Neumann’s blatant sexist behavior with a staggering and unprecedented golden parachute worth over a reported \$1 billion, while the Company has subjected Ms. Bardhi and other women to repeated and systematic marginalization, lesser pay than their male colleagues, and retaliation for having the courage to raise legitimate complaints of gender and pregnancy discrimination,” Douglas Wigdor of Wigdor LLP, who is representing Bardhi, told Gizmodo in a statement. “Our hope is that this class action complaint will send a loud and clear message to WeWork and other startups that pregnant women cannot be forced out of their jobs, that women must be paid fairly and afforded equal opportunities, and that you cannot retaliate against any person who voices a complaint of discrimination.”

The complaint states that during her initial interview in October 2013, Neumann “unlawfully and intrusively” asked Bardhi “when she was going to get married and become pregnant.” Three years later in 2016, the document says, she said that she was forced to announce a pregnancy early to avoid accompanying Neumann on business travel—at the time, he was reportedly fond of smoking weed on jets. Bardhi said that Neumann immediately told other members of staff that she was pregnant without her consent. She also said that an HR official referred to her planned maternity leave as a “problem” in need of a “solution,” and Neumann made comments such as “I hope you’re going to have fun on your vacation while we’re here working.”

WeWork then hired a man to take charge of the chief of staff role who was obviously intended to be permanent rather than temporary and who it paid \$400,000 with a \$175,000 signing bonus, according to the complaint. Bardhi's salary for the same job was \$150,000. She returned to the role in 2017, the documents continue, but again became pregnant and sought maternity leave in 2018. Neumann again had her replaced with a man and sidelined her duties, the complaint reads; Bardhi said she repeatedly brought up the discrimination with other company officials to no avail, and was fired after Neumann's departure from the company last month.

The complaint also states other female employees at WeWork were subject to widespread discrimination and that there is a wide pay gap between female and male workers performing the same duties. (WeWork has faced multiple lawsuits from other female executives claiming a culture of widespread harassment at the company.) The complaint is a proposed class action alleging violations of Title VII and the Equal Pay Act, and demands an EEOC investigation and appropriate damages paid out to female WeWork employees who endured discrimination.

Note that Neumann has previously claimed that WeWork champions women and wanted to "[bring] in the most talented women in the world."

"WeWork intends to vigorously defend itself against this claim," a WeWork spokesperson told Gizmodo in a statement. "We have zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind. We are committed to moving the company forward and building a company and culture that our employees can be proud of."

More on how WeWork is doing
