

After layoffs, ex-Amazon workers wonder about 'Earth's Best Employer'

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When their phone pinged with a meeting reminder in January, one former Amazon employee was confused. The company had let them go four days earlier—yet they were still getting invitations to new meetings.

It didn't seem like word had spread about who had been part of a wave of layoffs that included 18,000 workers companywide and 2,300 in the Puget Sound region of Washington—and whose jobs had been saved. The former [employee](#), who asked to remain anonymous to protect future job prospects, wasn't going to be the one to tell their old colleagues.

"One thing Amazon does is, when a process is broken, they write a paper on it. This is one that should be in that process," they said in a recent interview. "A lot of the leadership principles that are preached and lived every single day were not followed."

Like many [tech companies](#), Amazon spent a large part of the last year looking to trim costs. The company started job cuts in November and continued in January, ultimately eliminating 18,000 roles. Employees who were part of that wave of layoffs said the news came as a shock—and changed their perception of Amazon as a company that aimed to be, as former CEO Jeff Bezos liked to put it, "Earth's Best Employer."

In interviews and correspondence, 15 ex-Amazon employees contacted by The Seattle Times said their former employer mismanaged the layoff process.

Some pointed to confusion about how Amazon chose which roles to cut; others were disappointed they weren't told in a personal way. Some looked back at their time at the company and said they left feeling overworked and undervalued. While some said they would return to Amazon if given the chance, others said the layoff process clouded their view of a company they once yearned to work for. All 15 employees

asked to remain anonymous to protect future job prospects and avoid backlash for criticizing their former employer.

One laid-off employee said they felt there was a lack of leadership at Amazon. Another said the whole process lacked empathy.

Three others said they had been involved in strategic planning for 2023 when the news came. Two more said they had received assurances from their manager that, despite pending layoffs, their team or their role was safe. The former employee who was still getting meeting invites days after losing their job said a manager asked if they'd be able to take on additional work to make up for the gaps the expected job cuts would create.

Most employees learned Amazon was considering layoffs from news reports. In November, some affected workers got an unexpected calendar invite for a 15-minute meeting. In January, most found out through email.

"My identity is not wrapped up in being an Amazonian, but others, very much, they were," said one former employee in the human resources department. "If Amazon is seeking to be the Earth's best employer, then they need to learn to do better."

The process for notifying employees was so impersonal that it felt like reading a script for a [video game](#) filled with "boilerplate" language, the former HR worker said.

Overwhelmed by the stress of losing a new job, another former Amazonian ended up in the emergency room the weekend after learning their role at Prime Air had been eliminated.

That employee had recently moved their family to Lockeford,

California, for a job in Prime Air, Amazon's drone project. The family was two months into a 12-month lease.

As rumors swirled about layoffs in other parts of the company, the former employee said, managers called a meeting to assure everyone their jobs were safe. The project and its employees were funded through 2024, the former worker said they were told.

Days later, Amazon laid off a sizable part of the operation staff for Prime Air, including some of the managers who told others their jobs were safe, the former worker said.

In response to employees' concerns, Amazon said it prioritized clarity, focusing on getting information to affected employees as quickly as possible. In January, the most recent wave of layoffs, Amazon said it notified all impacted employees in the U.S., Canada and Costa Rica the same day.

Senior executives are "deeply aware that these role eliminations are difficult for people, and we don't take these decisions lightly or underestimate how much they might affect the lives of those who are impacted," CEO Andy Jassy wrote to employees in January.

"To those impacted by these reductions, I want you to know how grateful I am for your contributions to Amazon, and the work you have done on behalf of customers," he continued. "You have made a meaningful difference in a lot of customers' lives."

The company made sure cut workers still had access to email and chat so they could network with peers and search for new jobs, inside and outside Amazon. Because of that, Amazon expected some confusion, like the stray meeting invites that one laid-off worker was still getting.

To get more information about next steps, laid off employees could attend an individual conversation with a leader in their organization, Amazon said. Or, they could attend an information session, or use Amazon's internal app for employees, A to Z, on their personal devices.

But figuring out next steps hasn't always been easy. The app has "a lot of dead ends," said the former HR worker. A video that was supposed to help workers make sense of what came next included a slide with several links and jazz music playing in the background, they said. "And then it cut out. It was surreal."

For Amazon employees, the last several weeks were a whirlwind. News of the layoffs first broke in November. Amazon confirmed the job cuts and began eliminating roles days later. Jassy then told employees the cuts would continue into the new year as managers continued to evaluate their teams.

At the start of the new year, Amazon said the job cuts would likely total 18,000 people, a change from the reported 10,000. Throughout the process, Amazon had said the exact number of impacted roles was fluid. Jassy said on Jan. 4 that affected employees would find out on Jan. 18.

In that two-week gap, productivity fell as people went offline, managers tried to be lenient with deadlines, and meetings were pushed back because it wasn't clear if everyone on the invite list would still be an employee.

In Amazon's devices organization, the division responsible for its voice assistant Alexa, speakers, robots and other technology, one former worker said they weren't surprised by the way the company handled the layoffs. "I never had any expectation that they were going to provide any answers. Amazon is a company that thrives on unnecessary secrecy and siloing," they said.

That former worker said Amazon asked them to archive the team's work in case anyone wanted to pick up the project. They did, but after just two months, they said their effort is already likely out of date. With so many layoffs, the contacts they left behind are likely also gone.

"The specific story they gave us was that part of the company had grown too quickly ... and they were purging areas they thought had grown too quickly," they said. "I feel like we were just thrown away."

Another laid-off employee, who worked in Amazon's Stores division, said they felt burned out after just eight months at the company. At Amazon, "everyone cares about themselves," they said. "Everyone just wants to pass the time from Monday to Friday."

Amazon has offered to help employees find new roles, internally and externally, but several workers who spoke with The Seattle Times said there weren't many internal jobs available. As they look externally, they're bumping up against hiring freezes and layoffs at many other tech firms.

"There's thousands of my peers that were laid off," said one former recruiter at Amazon who was affected by the [job cuts](#). "There's a flood of us on the market."

At Amazon, that recruiter expects the impacts of the layoffs to have a long tail. They spent four months training. "If (Amazon) were to open a position today, you're talking six months before that person is going to start working" on finding candidates for new positions, they said. "That's a huge delay."

For some people still at Amazon, the "survivors' remorse" has set in, said one current employee in Amazon Web Services, a part of the company that was not heavily impacted by the layoffs. Some are left wondering

why friends lost their jobs, but they didn't. When they hear of a co-worker who needed that job for a visa, they wonder why it couldn't have been them instead.

That employee, who is a manager, said internal surveys show job satisfaction is suffering. Members of their team are still asking two main questions: Are the layoffs over? When will Amazon lift the hiring freeze imposed last November?

Since Amazon announced it would be cutting jobs, the AWS employee said it feels as if their work is being scrutinized. As teams feel the impact of missing workers, they're expecting managers will have to decide between asking Amazon to lift the hiring freeze and bring on more people to shoulder the workload—or accept that some goals for the year won't be met.

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