

ChatGPT-maker OpenAI fires CEO Sam Altman, the face of the AI boom, for lack of candor with company

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Sam Altman participates in a discussion during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO Summit, Thursday, Nov. 16, 2023, in San Francisco. The board of ChatGPT-maker Open AI says it has pushed out Altman, its co-founder and CEO, and replaced him with an interim CEO. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File

ChatGPT-maker Open AI said Friday it has pushed out its co-founder and CEO Sam Altman after a review found he was "not consistently candid in his communications" with the board of directors.

"The board no longer has confidence in his ability to continue leading OpenAI," the artificial intelligence company said in a statement.

In the year since Altman catapulted ChatGPT to global fame, he has become Silicon Valley's sought-after voice on the promise and potential dangers of artificial intelligence and his sudden and mostly unexplained exit brought uncertainty to the industry's future.

Mira Murati, OpenAI's chief technology officer, will take over as interim CEO effective immediately, the company said, while it searches for a permanent replacement.

The announcement also said another OpenAI co-founder and top executive, Greg Brockman, the board's chairman, would step down from that role but remain at the company, where he serves as president. But later on X, formerly Twitter, Brockman posted a message he sent to OpenAI employees in which he wrote, "based on today's news, i quit."

In another X post on Friday night, Brockman said Altman was asked to join a video meeting at noon Friday with the company's board members, minus Brockman, during which OpenAI co-founder and Chief Scientist Ilya Sutskever informed Altman he was being fired.

"Sam and I are shocked and saddened by what the board did today," Brockman wrote, adding that he was informed of his removal from the board in a separate call with Sutskever a short time later.

OpenAI declined to answer questions on what Altman's alleged lack of candor was about. The statement said his behavior was hindering the

board's ability to exercise its responsibilities.



Sam Altman, right, then CEO of ChatGPT maker OpenAI, and Mira Murati, chief technology officer, appear at OpenAI DevDay, OpenAI's first developer conference, on Monday, Nov. 6, 2023 in San Francisco. The board of Open AI says it has pushed out Altman and appointed Murati as interim CEO role effective immediately. Credit: AP Photo/Barbara Ortutay

Altman posted Friday on X: "i loved my time at openai. it was transformative for me personally, and hopefully the world a little bit. most of all i loved working with such talented people. will have more to say about what's next later."

In another post on X early Saturday morning, he called what happened a "weird experience" and thanked his followers for the "outpouring of love."

"it has been sorta like reading your own eulogy while you're still alive," Altman wrote.

The Associated Press and OpenAI have a [licensing and technology agreement](#) allowing OpenAI access to part of the AP's text archives.

Altman helped start OpenAI as a nonprofit research laboratory in 2015. But it was ChatGPT's explosion into public consciousness that thrust Altman into the spotlight as a face of generative AI—technology that can produce novel imagery, passages of text and other media. On a world tour this year, he was mobbed by a crowd of adoring fans at an event in London.

He's sat with multiple heads of state to discuss AI's potential and perils. Just Thursday, he took part in a [CEO summit](#) at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference in San Francisco, where OpenAI is based.

He predicted AI will prove to be "the greatest leap forward of any of the big technological revolutions we've had so far." He also acknowledged the need for guardrails, calling attention to the existential dangers future AI could pose.

Some computer scientists have criticized that focus on far-off risks as distracting from the real-world limitations and harms of current AI products. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has [launched an investigation](#) into whether OpenAI violated consumer protection laws by scraping public data and publishing false information through its chatbot.



Mira Murati appears at OpenAI DevDay, OpenAI's first developer conference, on Monday, Nov. 6, 2023 in San Francisco. The board of Open AI says it has pushed out co-founder and CEO Sam Altman and appointed Murati, the company's chief technology officer, to an interim CEO role effective immediately. Credit: AP Photo/Barbara Ortutay

The company said its board consists of OpenAI's chief scientist, Ilya Sutskever, and three nonemployees: Quora CEO Adam D'Angelo, tech entrepreneur Tasha McCauley and Helen Toner of the Georgetown Center for Security and Emerging Technology.

OpenAI's key business partner, Microsoft, which has invested billions of dollars into the startup and helped provide the computing power to run

its AI systems, said that the transition won't affect its relationship.

"We have a long-term partnership with OpenAI and Microsoft remains committed to Mira and their team as we bring this next era of AI to our customers," said an emailed Microsoft statement.

While not trained as an AI engineer, Altman, now 38, has been seen as a Silicon Valley wunderkind since his early 20s. He was recruited in 2014 to take lead of the startup incubator YCombinator.

OpenAI started out as a nonprofit when it launched with financial backing from Tesla CEO Elon Musk and others. Its stated aims were to "advance digital intelligence in the way that is most likely to benefit humanity as a whole, unconstrained by a need to generate financial return."

That changed in 2018 when it incorporated a for-profit business Open AI LP, and shifted nearly all its staff into the business, not long after releasing its first generation of the GPT large language model for mimicking human writing. Around the same time, Musk, who had co-chaired its board with Altman, resigned from the board in a move that OpenAI said would eliminate a "potential future conflict for Elon" due to Tesla's work on building self-driving systems.

While OpenAI's board has preserved its nonprofit governance structure, the startup it oversees has increasingly sought to capitalize on its technology by tailoring its popular chatbot to business customers.

At its [first developer conference](#) last week, Altman was the main speaker showcasing a vision for a future of AI agents that could help people with a variety of tasks. Days later, he announced the company would have to pause new subscriptions to its premium version of ChatGPT because it had exceeded capacity.



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Altman's exit "is indeed shocking as he has been the face of" generative AI technology, said Gartner analyst Arun Chandrasekaran.

He said OpenAI still has a "deep bench of technical leaders" but its next executives will have to steer it through the challenges of scaling the business and meeting the expectations of regulators and society.

Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said he sees Altman's firing as a "black eye" for OpenAI and one that's likely to have ripple effects across Silicon Valley and Wall Street. He also speculated Altman's exit might complicate things for Microsoft.

"Altman goes from a friend to potentially a foe," Ives said.

Altman has a number of possible next steps. Even while running OpenAI, he placed large bets on several other ambitious projects.

Among them are Helion Energy, for developing fusion reactors that could produce prodigious amounts of energy from the hydrogen in seawater, and Retro Biosciences, which aims to add 10 years to the human lifespan using biotechnology. Altman also co-founded Worldcoin, a [biometric and cryptocurrency project](#) that's been scanning people's eyeballs with the goal of creating a vast digital identity and financial network.

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