

# What happened to Cory?

[Prologue](#)

[Just Asking Questions](#)

[On HR Business “Partners”, Part 1](#)

[On HR Business “Partners”, Part 2](#)

[What Is Retaliation?](#)

[How Do You Know if Your Employer is Retaliating Against You?](#)

[Why I’m Leaving](#)

[Freespeech@ footnote:](#)

*Note: I had originally planned on posting this the day I left Google (28 Jan 2016), but I did not do so at the time for various cowardly and selfish reasons.*

September 28th, 2015 is the day I decided to leave Google. Here’s why.

## Prologue

On July 30th, a sadly contentious thread was born on Industryinfo: [“If you think women in tech is just a pipeline problem, you haven’t been paying attention”](#). On August 3rd, Urs attempted to [settle the thread down](#), and it worked, for a bit, until it didn’t. On August 24th, Sridhar stepped in to try to [kill the thread all together](#) (which worked better):

Hi everyone,

As both the tech diversity lead at Google and someone who cares deeply about our workplace culture, I **respectfully ask that everyone stop engaging on this thread**. While there have been some great ideas and stories shared here, this thread as a whole has turned negative rather than constructive.

Google is not a debate club or a philosophy class. We are a workplace and we have an obligation to make sure our discussions remain respectful. Debates around topics like product excellence can support a wide variety of viewpoints and are great to have. I don’t think the same can be said for debates around sensitive issues such as gender, religion, race, or sexual orientation. These are deeply personal issues and it’s easy to offend someone even if your intentions are good. And once you have offended someone, the right thing to do is to apologize and step back—not continue to support your point. It’s not about being “right” or winning the argument; it’s about respecting someone else’s feelings.

Google has always had a strong culture around expression, but that culture relies on civility. I care too much about Google to let us go down the path this thread has taken. I believe we’re better than this.

--Sridhar

Emphasis *his*.

## Just Asking Questions

On September 2nd, I became aware of an external blog posting leaking portions of the aforementioned thread, made by an anonymous, and shittily racist/sexist “[neoreactionary](#)” Googler. So, I started a new thread, to show, hey, look, here’s why people begin to suspect you might not be “[Just Asking Questions](#)” if you constantly only ask questions on diversity topics.

Trigger Warning: your coworkers

I understand some folks who can’t comprehend why Social Justice Warriors (or, as I like to call us, “people who care about other people”) raise their hackles when yet another diversity thread is beset by stream of “reasonable, well-intentioned” (derailing) [questions](#).

Maybe this will help. It’s because at least *some*\* of those “questions” are - well, lets just say they’re not coming from a position of good faith.

This is one of your coworkers.

<https://wasenlightened.wordpress.com/2015/03/21/brief-introduction/>

“””

*Blacks are not equal to whites. Therefore the “inequality” between these races is expected and makes perfect sense. (This also explains why progressives are unable to come up with a black martyr who was not killed while committing a crime.)*

“””

<https://wasenlightened.wordpress.com/2015/04/11/old-mortality/>

“””

*Just another nice fellow who “dindu nuffin.”*

*The facts are clear, though it is forbidden to acknowledge them. Blacks are different than whites in cognitive ability and time preference. Thus, blacks are arrested at a higher rate than*

*whites. Thus, blacks are more likely to do idiotic things like run from police and wrestle with them.*

“””

<https://wasenlightened.wordpress.com/2015/08/30/untimely-death/>

“””

*Everyone knows that software engineers are literal minded, lack social graces to the extent that they can be perceived as rude, and love to discuss and analyze to death any hypothetical situation. People who claim to be leaders of software engineers must accept those foibles.*

“””

No. No we don't. Not even a little.

.C

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\*yes yes #notAllQuestioners - but at least N+1 "questioners."

## On HR Business “Partners”, Part 1

On September 9th I received a calendar invitation with my to “sync.”

Hey Cory,  
I need to have a quick sync with you about the recent blogger thread to get some data.  
thanks,  
x

“With you” turns out to be “with you, and your manager” which is the best kind of lie - the lie of omission.

It was explained to me that “someone” wanted to know what my motivation was in posting the September 2nd “Just Asking Questions” post. I stated it was info about our industry. Asked for further clarification, I declined to state. I was then asked if I saw Sridhar’s August 26th comment in the Industryinfo “pipeline” thread (yes, I had) and did I think it applied to my Sep 2 posting. No, I said, because he asked people to stop engaging in that thread. This was a new thread, with a new topic - why would it apply?

I continued posting (without commentary) articles of relevance to our industry about bias, discrimination, and social justice, as I believed (and continue to believe) these are important topics to address if any improvements are to be made.

The first: “Microsoft Accused of Discriminating Against Women in Lawsuit” - Sep 17

<https://groups.google.com/a/google.com/forum/#!topic/industryinfo/U2TRQ7DVpuo>

I began adding a footer in an attempt to avoid wasting time in future spurious HR investigations, while still being able to expose a broad audience to diversity issues in our (wait for it) industry:

**TO PRE-ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS RAISED BY HR INVESTIGATIONS THAT MAY BE LAUNCHED BY THIS POSTING:**

- 1) My intent in posting this is that it is info relevant to our industry, so, industryinfo@
- 2) To the best of my knowledge this posting is not subject to any prior restraint or requests to not post ... it.

The next article: “Being a woman in tech is hard.” - Sep 22

[https://groups.google.com/a/google.com/forum/#!topic/industryinfo/7b945G\\_YIm8](https://groups.google.com/a/google.com/forum/#!topic/industryinfo/7b945G_YIm8)

## On HR Business “Partners”, Part 2

Monday, September 28th, I return from a 4-day, no email-checking vacation to this:

Confidential Meeting Tomorrow

Inbox x



[Redacted]

Sep 24 (6 days ago) ☆



to me ▾

Hi Cory-

My name Mala and I'm an HBRP focused on Employee Relations. There's been an escalation and I need to meet with you tomorrow at 3pm (sorry it's the only time that works).

Appreciate your flexibility and speak tomorrow.

Best,

[Redacted]

...



[Redacted]

Sep 24 (6 days ago) ☆



to me ▾

Hi Cory-

It looks like you're OOO tomorrow. I've moved this meeting to Monday at 9:30am. I appreciate you adjusting your schedule to attend - especially given it's time sensitive.

Thank you,

[Redacted]

...



[Redacted]

Sep 27 (3 days ago) ☆



to me ▾

Hi Cory-

As I mentioned, this is time sensitive so thanks for joining the meeting tomorrow at 9:30am.

Best,

[Redacted]

...

I was expecting to meet with [Redacted], because, why would an HRBP lie? Imagine my surprise when the remote VC turns on and it's... [Urs](#). Urs opened by stating he was here to discuss my "worrying pattern of posting topics that are divisive going back to 2013<sup>1</sup>" and asking me to explain my goal for my recent Industryinfo postings. I said that I had already explained this, ad nauseum, in the original posting, and in the HR interview on September 10th. He persisted, asking that I explain again, for his benefit. I said "I don't think anything I will say right now will be a sufficient answer for you."

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<sup>1</sup> I asked to get a list of the topics/posts in question, and was told "there is nothing that I can send you directly. However, I can meet with you and we can discuss some of the postings and the concerns raised about them."

Urs insisted, stating that “surely I should be able to defend myself” - which was the moment my suspicion I was being attacked was confirmed.

I explained, again, that I wanted to point out that blanket assumptions of good faith in diversity topics aren't data driven, given that the data shows not everyone is acting from a position of good faith. Urs went on to repeat the lie that before I posted this, no one else at Google was aware. I corrected him, pointing to [Louis Gray's post the day before](#) (but failed to recall or mention [Russotto's post](#) from earlier on the 2nd as well). Regardless, he said, my choice of audience was the real problem. I attempted to argue my case for a bit (I'm not sure why, to be honest) but it quickly became clear that there was no reason to try. I can't recall everything that was said (I was in a bit of a state of shock throughout), but two major themes were covered.

First, Urs seemed to be under the impression that I my motivation was primarily to “be right” - scoring some imaginary intranet points, or something (if so, Memegen would be a better place). This could not be further from the truth. My motivation is to be *just*, not *right* - and moreover, for us (well, you, now, I guess) to be *just*. [Buying booths](#) at Grace Hopper doesn't do that. Acknowledging and addressing the actual, current problems, both in the industry at large and at Google, *might*.

Second, as far as I can tell Urs is of the “don't ask, don't tell” school with regards to diversity topics. This is best summed up by him saying “if the majority of your coworkers are Nazis, it is better if you don't know about it”<sup>2</sup> because productivity. We (well, you, now) should probably scrap the whole unconscious bias thing, lest we become conscious. [Not talking about bad behavior doesn't make it magically not happen.](#)

Later that evening (6:00 PM) I got the following (cc'ed to my HRB”P” as well as my manager and director; as far as I know, this would be the first time Urs let either of the people above me in my management chain know anything about this).

Hi Cory,

Thank you for meeting with me earlier today. As we discussed, while healthy debate and the ability to express oneself is part of Google's culture, we all have a responsibility to consider the impact of our words and how they might be perceived. I appreciate your commitment to diversity, but I believe your frequent posts about potentially divisive topics aren't appropriate in the workplace. Some of your posts appear to be intended to incite discussion on topics which may not be appropriate in the workplace:

- Introducing the topic of the KKK on the free speech alias.
- Posting regarding the external blog on industry info, which incited a variety of inflamed

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<sup>2</sup> This I remembered verbatim because I thought it was a savagely tactless analogy for a Swiss man to be making.

discussions that caused the appearance of an angry mob or witch hunt, which clearly isn't helpful. As you were aware, the issue was already being looked into by your team and Security. In our conversation I tried to explain that I didn't understand what you were hoping to gain by broadcasting it more generally to the Google population, and that I couldn't see a positive outcome from such a thread.

- Similarly, both Sridhar and I attempted to shut down the less than helpful commentary regarding gender issues on the industry info thread and it despite that, you started it back up by posting about the external blog.

As a member of the Security & Privacy team, it's important for you to be aware when you are engaging in conduct that might have an adverse impact on Google culture, especially where that adverse impact has been called out by management or HR before. Our goal is to work together by supporting each other to achieve the same outcomes. In the future, if you disagree with HR or management, feel free to address separately rather than publicly in a post.

As discussed, from now on I request that you avoid posting on controversial topics. I believe your intention is to make Google better; nevertheless I ask you to refrain from such posts since they are prone to inciting others to comment in a way which violates our policies.

Google does not tolerate retaliation, and thus you should refrain from any conduct which could be construed as retaliatory so please also refrain from posting about this "meta" topic -- who could have complained about you, whether it was correct to do so, what I said in our conversation, whether "silencing" employees should be allowed, etc. We will also treat this matter as confidential, only disclosing it on a need to know basis and so we expect you to do the same.

Please let me or x know if you have any questions.

Thanks,

-Urs

- 1) I have to assume the first bullet was added just to make sure this whole complaint wasn't about a single diversity thread (as the in-person conversation was). Also, it's 1) not actually correct 2) irrelevant. See [Freespeech@ footnote:](#)
- 2) At the time I posted, there was no investigation into the thread that I was aware of.
- 3) Urs also apparently does not know (or thinks I wouldn't know?) what "[retaliation](#)" is in the [workplace:](#)

### What Is Retaliation?

Retaliation occurs when an employer punishes an employee for engaging in legally protected activity. Retaliation

can include any negative job action, such as demotion, discipline, firing, salary reduction, or job or shift reassignment. But retaliation can also be more subtle.

Sometimes it's clear that an employer's action is negative -- for instance, when an employee is fired. But sometimes it's not. In those cases, according to the U.S. Supreme Court, you must consider the circumstances of the situation. For example, a change in job shift may not be objectionable to a lot of employees, but it could be very detrimental to a parent with young children and a less flexible schedule.

...

### How Do You Know if Your Employer is Retaliating Against You?

Sometimes, it's hard to tell whether your employer is retaliating against you. For example, if you complain about your supervisor's harassing conduct, his attitude and demeanor may change. But if the change means he acts more professionally towards you, that isn't retaliation even if he isn't as friendly as he once was. Only changes that have an adverse effect on your employment are retaliatory.

On the other hand, if something clearly negative happens shortly after you make a complaint -- like firing or demotion -- you'll have good reason to be suspicious. And remember, not every retaliatory act is obvious or necessarily means your job is threatened. It may come in the form of an unexpected and unfair poor performance review, the boss micromanaging everything you do, or sudden exclusion from staff meetings on a project you've been working on.

## Why I'm Leaving

Regardless of whether or not you think anything I posted was improper, intentionally inflammatory, or just plain stupid, I hope you'll understand this bit.

I'm leaving because I don't trust Urs. I'm afraid of Urs. He inserted himself into what *should have been a conversation with my direct manager*, and "requested" I stop doing talking about things he doesn't want me to talk about. In our VC, I said "of course I'm going to stop, you're my SVP, what did you think the outcome was going to be here?" He chuckled.

I've been bullied by an SVP with *ten thousand FTEs who roll up to him*, arguably the most powerful SVP in the company, who is also *\*my\** SVP, and the SVP I'll have in any position I'm qualified for at Google. I've left before, when it made sense to do so, and I came back - when it made sense to do so. I don't think it will ever make sense to do so again.

[I don't want to work with jerks.](#)



*I'm also leaving because I'm tired of working in a physical workspace hostile not only to my productivity, but also to my mental and physical health. But I dealt with that for six years, now, so leaving that behind is just a bonus.*

*Nota Bene: I received my first "Needs Improvement" rating shortly after the events described above.*

Freespeech@ footnote:

*Literally none of the following matters. I don't know why I even wrote it. You shouldn't read it. Go do anything else.*

On September 11th, I posted: ["Yet another university stifling speech"](#) - this was [fully on-topic](#) for [the list](#) ("A group dedicated to the promotion of free speech, both inside and outside of Google"), and was even a relatively pleasant, even light-hearted discussion until a list member came in with some grossly offensive racism apologia. At that point, the thread stopped.

Regardless, one month earlier, the *list owner* introduced the topic of the KKK in the ["UNC Chapel Hill Apologizes After Campus Police Attempt to Remove Professor's Sign"](#) thread:

*"However, that's what happened at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which was recently the center of controversy over the renaming of a building that had previously been named after a UNC Chapel Hill alumnus who was also a high-ranking member of North Carolina's Ku Klux Klan chapter."*