



Tim Armstrong – CEO, AOL
Email to all employees regarding the public firing of a Patch employee



AOLers -

I am writing you to acknowledge the mistake I made last Friday during the Patch all-hands meeting when I publicly fired Abel Lenz. It was an emotional response at the start of a difficult discussion dealing with many people's careers and livelihoods. I am the CEO and leader of the organization, and I take that responsibility seriously. We talk a lot about accountability and I am accountable for the way I handled the situation, and at a human level it was unfair to Abel. I've communicated to him directly and apologized for the way the matter was handled at the meeting.

My action was driven by the desire to openly communicate with over a thousand Patch employees across the US. The meeting on Friday was the second all-hands we had run that week and people came to Friday's meeting knowing we would be openly discussing some of the potential changes needed at Patch. As you know, I am a firm believer in open meetings, open Q&A, and this level of transparency requires trust across AOL. Internal meetings of a confidential nature should not be filmed or recorded so that our employees can feel free to discuss all topics openly. Abel had been told previously not to record a confidential meeting, and he repeated that behavior on Friday, which drove my actions.

We have been through many difficult situations in turning around AOL and I have done my best to make the best decisions in the long-term interest of the employees and the company. On Friday I acted too quickly and I learned a tremendous lesson and I wanted you to hear that directly from me.

We have tough decisions and work to do on Patch, but we're doing them thoughtfully and as openly as we can. At AOL, we had strong earnings last week and we're adding one of the best companies in the world to the team. AOL is in a great position, and we'll keep moving forward. -TA

Comment [1]: From what we can tell, this apology was released Tuesday. That's four days after the incident.

Comment [2]: The passive voice here is a mistake. It's as if there's not a person responsible for the emotional reaction. He should have said something like, "I got emotional, and regret that."

Comment [3]: It's the right thing to do to take accountability, which is what he's asking of his people at AOL. It's credibility enhancing to show you're holding yourself to the same standards as you hold others.

Comment [4]: At ANY level, it was unfair to Abel.

Comment [5]: Note what he doesn't say...how he feels after what he did. Does he feel remorse? He thinks it was unfair, but how does he feel? What's his human response?

Comment [6]: I take it Abel is still fired given how this is worded.

Comment [7]: What does he mean, "This action?" Does he mean the focus of the meeting...? His action was to fire and humiliate an employee in front of others, which is what he is apologizing for.

Comment [8]: While I imagine he was trying to set the context and explain his intention, this borders on sounding like an excuse for his bad behavior. Note how long this paragraph is. Thou dost protest too much.

Comment [9]: Why does he share this? So people excuse this behavior because of how he more broadly makes the best decisions for the company? This is not about you, Tim, except for your apology; this is about Abel and the employees at the meeting.

Comment [10]: Take note that there aren't any feelings he discussed in this memo. Him speaking to any remorse he has would likely engender empathy for him and where he was coming from (versus describing the facts of the meeting and what he wanted to accomplish.

Comment [11]: Directly from me is an excellent strategy, but timeliness also matters to employees. What took so long for him to apologize?

Comment [12]: The transparency – if that's what employees experienced – is to be lauded. Need more transparency inside organizations today.

Comment [13]: Why does he think there's a need for "rah-rah" hyperbole at the end of his letter? It's too much.

Comment [14]: Overall, this letter is way too long. An apology should be to-the-point and heartfelt: The gist should be, "I made a mistake and I'm sorry."