

Here are the email exchanges between Marc Gunther, Megan O'Neil and Sue McAllister that led up to the publication of a story about the Silicon Valley Community Foundation in The Chronicle of Philanthropy on April 18, 2018.

April 12, 2018: Marc Gunther email to Sue McAllister

Hello Sue,

As you may have heard, I've been working on a story for the Chronicle of Philanthropy about the Silicon Valley Community Foundation that focuses on the workplace culture created by Mari Ellen Loijens. Megan O'Neil, the news editor at the Chronicle, is working with me on the story, and she's copied here.

I have talked to numerous former employees of the development department who describe Ms. Loijens as emotionally abusive and say the culture in the department has been toxic. They also describe an inappropriately sexualized workplace, where Ms. Loijens spoke about pornography and vibrators. One former employee said Ms. Loijens asked to kiss her at an after-work event; she continued to be assigned to work for Ms. Loijens, even after HR became aware of the inappropriate advance. Several people of color who worked at SVCF told me they were offended by her comments about race. Most of these interviews, I must say, were anonymous, but several people will be quoted by name in the story.

Most of the people I spoke with say it was the worst work experience of their lives.

Here are a few sample quotes from the story:

"Without a doubt, it was the worst (place I ever worked) Not even close. Her management style was just oppressive."

"It was not uncommon to hear Mari Ellen suddenly screaming at the top of her lungs, berating one of my colleagues about how stupid they were."

"Mari Ellen created an environment where no one felt supported".

"It is a very toxic work environment down there."

I'm told that several employees spoke directly to Emmett Carson about their unhappiness with Ms. Loijens. Some of these allegations are very recent and others go back to 2008. I've interviewed 17 people, so far..

I'd also like to ask you what turnover has been in that department since Jan 1 2016, or if it's easier to get, what turnover has been at the SVCF since Jan 1 2016. One review on GlassDoor said 85 people had left the SVCF since then. I understand and will note in the story that turnover is generally high in the fundraising world.

Megan and I are happy to talk about any of this by phone. Please feel free to call me (XXX-XXX-XXXX) or Megan (XXX-XXX-XXXX). We would like to get responses from you, Ms. Loijens and Emmett Carson early next week if at all possible.

Sincerely,

Marc Gunther

April 16: Sue McAllister email to Marc Gunther and Megan O'Neil

Hi Megan and Marc,

Thank you for reaching out on this. Here is the response from SVCF:

The specifics that you have shared with claims of sexual harassment are deeply concerning for SVCF, and as a result we have retained the services of Thompson Hine LLP to do a full investigation of these claims and the alleged behavior of Mari Ellen Loijens. At the conclusion of this investigation, we will take whatever action is necessary. Since we have now launched an investigation into claims specific to Mari Ellen Loijens, she will not be available to provide comment, nor will we be able to comment directly about any specific HR related questions.

We do not tolerate inappropriate conduct of any kind at SVCF. We ensure that our entire organization has access to confidential and discreet means of reporting any type of inappropriate behavior and any suspected financial improprieties, as well as access to and training of workplace best practices.

While we have been aware of work-life balance concerns expressed by current and former employees, we have worked hard over the past few years to provide more ways to facilitate work-life balance by expanding our benefits program to include flexible work hours, paid family leave, telecommuting options and a sabbatical program.

Since the start of 2016, 73 employees have left SVCF for a variety of reasons, including to join our nonprofit partners and other organizations on the frontlines doing incredible work in our communities, as well as seeking a shorter commute, going back to college to pursue a masters or doctorate degrees and relocating to an area with a lower cost of living. During that same time period, we have hired 91 employees and promoted 35 employees. The turnover rate of the past two years equates to 23% in 2016 and 26% in 2017; marginally higher than the 19% average annual turnover rate for nonprofit organizations within the U.S.

While we continue to monitor our turnover rate, we find employee tenure to be a more accurate measure of organizational wellbeing. The average tenure of our current staff is 3 years and 9 months. The average tenure of our leadership team (15 people) is 9 years and 8 months. The average tenure of the employees who have left over the past two years is 2 years and 3 months, which is similar to other large Silicon Valley based companies like Apple (2 years average tenure) and Yahoo (2 years and 4 months), based on data released by Payscale.

Please feel free to use any of the above for your story as a statement on behalf of Silicon Valley Community Foundation. If there are any additional questions you'd like to share, please send those through via email.

Thanks,
Sue

April 16: Marc Gunther and Megan O'Neil to Sue McAllister

Thanks, Sue. That's obviously very helpful.

Two follow up questions. (1) Would Emmett be willing to speak with Megan or me or the two of us? (2) Is Mari Ellen continuing to work as usual at SVCF or is she taking a leave, paid or unpaid, while the law firm investigates?

Thanks again.

best,
Marc and Megan

April 16: Sue McAllister to Marc Gunther and Megan O'Neil

Hi Marc and Megan,
If you have questions for Emmett, please put them in writing in an email and let us know your deadline for any responses.

Regarding your second question, please note in our earlier response that we have said we are not commenting on specific HR-related questions.

Thank you,
Sue

April 17: Marc Gunther and Megan O'Neil to Sue McAllister

Hi Sue,

Here are some questions for Emmett Carson.
I've also included excerpts from the story about Mari Ellen Loijen's work that I hope you can fact-check.
I don't know what the publication schedule is--that is up to Stacy Palmer, who is copied here--but it would be great if we can get responses by the end of your day today.
Any questions, feel free to call me or Megan.

best, Marc

About how many people, in all, work at the SVCF?

Is Mari Ellen Loijens continuing in her role at the SVCF during the investigation, or is she taking a paid or unpaid leave while it goes on?

Can you please share her telephone number or email so we can reach out to her directly?

Will the investigation focus narrowly on sexual harassment, or will it look more broadly at the workplace culture in the departments led by Ms. Loijens?

Before The Chronicle brought you questions about unprofessional workplace behavior by Mari Ellen Loijens, were you aware that she was a tough or abrasive boss? Did you make any effort to learn if her behavior went so far as to become unacceptable?

A former vice president at SVCF tells us the following. Do you care to respond?

It was well-known among all of SVCF Leadership that Emmett did not entertain anyone complaining about Mari Ellen. Anytime I tried to bring it up with Emmett, he immediately changed the subject. As a CEO, he either knew or should have known. He should have asked questions, particularly as he saw the turnover in her division and saw the exit interviews from staff."

[We also included an excerpt from the story and asked Sue to fact-check it for us.]

April 18: Sue McAllister to Marc Gunther and Megan O'Neil

Hi Marc – responses below from SVCF, in red:

About how many people, in all, work at the SVCF?

SVCF currently employs 137 people.

Is Mari Ellen Loijens continuing in her role at the SVCF during the investigation, or is she taking a paid or unpaid leave while it goes on?

We are not able to comment directly about any specific HR-related questions.

Can you please share her telephone number or email so we can reach out to her directly?

Mari Ellen is not available to provide comment.

Will the investigation focus narrowly on sexual harassment, or will it look more broadly at the workplace culture in the departments led by Ms. Loijens?

Our statement on the investigation was posted on our website yesterday, a link is provided here:
<https://www.siliconvalleyvcf.org/blog/announcements/svcf-statement-allegations-workplace-misconduct>

Before The Chronicle brought you questions about unprofessional workplace behavior by Mari Ellen Loijens, were you aware that she was a tough or abrasive boss? Did you make any effort to learn if her behavior went so far as to become unacceptable?

We do not tolerate inappropriate conduct of any kind at SVCF, and we investigate all claims of misconduct and take action.

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Thank you,
Sue

Sue McAllister
Marketing Director