# Gitpod executive’s tribunal case exposes toxic tech bro culture and gender bias claims



Shannon Burns, a high-ranking executive at Gitpod, is embroiled in a legal battle following her dismissal after a work trip to Austria, where she claims she was unfairly targeted for her behaviour in a male-dominated culture. The circumstances surrounding her departure have sparked significant controversy, particularly with claims regarding a pervasive "tech bro" environment that undermines women in the workplace.

During the Birmingham Employment Tribunal, Burns described an incident on a company off-site in Lofer, where the CEO, Johannes Landgraf, initiated a drinking session. According to Landgraf, following this event, Burns exhibited questionable conduct, including heavy drinking and losing her belongings. He maintained that her drunkenness was evident and more pronounced than that of her male colleagues, casting doubt on her assertion that she was dismissed due to gender bias.

Burns, who was brought on board with a six-figure salary and promises of a lucrative equity stake, alleges that her sacking is deeply intertwined with the company's problematic culture. She reported hearing from other female colleagues about Landgraf's "tech bro" reputation—an informal network often dismissive of women and marked by entitlement. Research highlights that such cultures not only marginalise female voices but perpetuate systemic inequalities, leading to workplaces that eschew diversity. This issue is particularly stark in the tech industry, where recent studies show only 21% of programming roles are held by women, reinforcing the need for cultural reform (summarising insights from articles on the subject).

In her testimony, Burns recounted an uncomfortable atmosphere during the Austria trip, feeling pressured to engage in discussions deemed intrusive. She indicated that her interactions with Landgraf shifted to questioning her competence under the influence of alcohol, which she argues contributed to the perception of her performance. Observers have noted that such workplace dynamics often stem from deeper issues within the tech sector, where a competitive mindset can foster exclusion and aggression, thereby damaging the overall work environment.

Landgraf's defence hinges on claims of inadequate performance on Burns' part since her hiring. He argued that her inability to transition into a leadership role contributed significantly to her firing, insisting that her dismissal was not motivated by gender. This denial aligns with broader patterns seen in tech firms, where male employees often escape accountability in similar situations. The culture prevalent in such organisations has frequently been scrutinised for tolerating misconduct under the guise of camaraderie—behaviour seen as typical among male peers.

Beyond the immediate claims of discrimination, the case underscores a more significant cultural crisis within tech firms, where aggressive behaviours and intoxication often go overlooked. Articles discussing Silicon Valley's "bro culture" highlight a trend where issues of sexual harassment and exclusion are frequently dismissed, as attitudes persist that trivialise such behaviour as merely “boys being boys." The necessity for a shift towards more equitable practices has never been more pressing, particularly for women in technology who frequently navigate these toxic environments without adequate support from their organisations.

The tribunal continues to hear evidence, while the tech industry grapples with the implications of Burns' claims—a microcosm of the broader struggle against entrenched biases that still pervade its cultures. As her case unfolds, it presents a crucial opportunity for introspection within the tech community, forcing a reckoning that could potentially reshape its landscape to foster inclusivity and respect.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: Source (1)
2. Paragraph 2: Source (1), (2), (3)
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5. Paragraph 5: Source (1), (6), (7)
6. Paragraph 6: Source (1), (2), (4)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14734877/Female-exec-sacked-job-getting-drunk-work-trip-Austria.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.allri.se/breaking-the-bro-code-dismantling-toxic-startup-culture-for-a-more-inclusive-future/> - This article examines the pervasive 'tech bro' culture in startups, highlighting how it fosters exclusion, toxic work environments, and systemic inequality. It discusses the roots and impacts of this culture, emphasizing the emphasis on hyper-masculinity and entitlement, which marginalizes diverse voices and stifles innovation. The piece also explores strategies for creating inclusive, high-performing workplaces that benefit everyone, advocating for diversity and inclusion through strategic hiring practices and supportive workplace cultures.
3. <https://www.wired.com/story/tyranny-tech-bros-silicon-valley-activism/> - This article delves into the diminishing influence of the 'tech bro' culture in Silicon Valley, discussing how the computing industry's glamor is fading. It highlights the industry's failure to recruit, retain, and respect women and nonbinary workers, attributing this to core values like precision questioning, abstraction, aggression, sexism, and a disdain for altruism. The piece critiques the 'Bro Code' for perpetuating high tolerance of sexual harassment and contributing to the field's stark segregation, with only 21% of computer programming positions held by women.
4. <https://www.infoworld.com/article/2253966/uber-ugliness-unmasks-silicon-valleys-bro-culture.html> - This article discusses the prevalence of 'bro culture' in Silicon Valley, using Uber as a case study. It highlights instances of sexual harassment, objectification, and violence against women within the tech industry. The piece critiques the industry's tendency to overlook such behaviors, often dismissing them as 'boys being boys,' and emphasizes the need for a cultural shift to address these issues. It also points out the industry's failure to rectify its stark segregation, with only 21% of computer programming positions held by women.
5. <https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=14490333> - This Hacker News thread features a discussion among women in tech about finding non-toxic work environments. Participants share experiences and insights on how 'bro culture' reflects immature corporate cultures that haven't addressed true diversity. They discuss how such environments can be unwelcoming to those who don't fit a specific mold and emphasize the importance of supportive workplaces that allow employees to be themselves without conforming to a particular culture.
6. <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/01/silicon-valley-sexual-harassment-startups> - This article reports on a survey revealing that 60% of women in tech have faced unwanted sexual advances, often from superiors. It discusses the prevalence of sexual harassment in Silicon Valley startups and the industry's failure to address these issues. The piece highlights the need for a cultural shift to create safer and more inclusive workplaces for women in tech.
7. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/carolineodonovan/silicon-valley-tech-culture-hr-harassment-discrimination> - This article examines how Silicon Valley's 'Wild West' culture makes it harder to root out sexual misconduct. It discusses how the deprioritization of human resources in startups leaves employees vulnerable to harassment and discrimination. The piece highlights the industry's tendency to overlook such behaviors, often dismissing them as part of the startup culture, and emphasizes the need for structural changes to address these issues.