

# Your Next Gig: Taming Travis Kalanick?

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The *Wall Street Journal* reports that Uber is still searching for a new COO, with a focus on leaders with experience in large companies with complex operations and labor forces. The company's board is reported to be heavily involved, and Uber says the new hire would be a partner to CEO Travis Kalanick, rather than a subordinate.

According to the Journal's sources, recent prospects have included former Walt Disney COO Thomas Staggs, former Wal-Mart CIO Karenann Terrell, and former CVS Executive Vice President Helena Foulkes. Foulkes and Staggs are reportedly no longer being considered for the job.

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A new COO would be expected to address a host of problems, including a recent string of very public missteps, some rooted in the company's startup mindset. The trouble started in earnest in January, when Uber was seen—perhaps unfairly—to be undermining resistance to President Trump's immigration and travel restrictions. Then came equally damaging allegations of a misogynistic culture and poor human resource practices.

Uber has since lost several top-level executives, and faced a string of legal actions seeking to restrict its operations—in some cases, successfully.

Oh, and let's not forget the time Kalanick got into a videotaped fight with one of his own drivers over low pay. It was after that

incident that Kalanick admitted he needed to “grow up” and that “I need leadership help and I intend to get it.” That was two months ago.

Uber has also, despite outsized revenue, continued to post massive losses against earnings, and the new COO would likely be expected to lead a push towards profitability. With a large portion of Uber's costs tied up in driver pay, many observers have pinned hope for that turnaround on the successful deployment of self-driving vehicles, which faces major regulatory and technological hurdles—including, again, some that Uber has created for itself.

Most recently, the head of Uber's self-driving division, Anthony Levandowski, stepped down in response to a lawsuit claiming that he stole trade secrets from his former employer, Google. In March, internal documents suggested that Uber's self-driving program is significantly lagging competitors.

Even that list just hits the highlights of the strategic and cultural problems Uber is grappling with, and that any prospective COO would have to tackle. **Dora Vell**, an executive recruiter who spoke to the Journal, said it would be “very hard to find one person” who had everything the job demanded.

But if you think you're up for it, might as well dust off that resume.

*Dora Vell is the CEO of Vell Executive Search, a premier retained technology executive search firm in Boston. Ms. Vell is an internationally recognized expert in recruiting technology executives including: CEOs, COOs, CTOs, CMOs, CROs, board members and others. She works with VC-backed, PE-backed private companies and public companies. She can be reached at [dora@vell.com](mailto:dora@vell.com).*