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KEVIN CULLEN

A man's personal experience with corporate heartlessness

**By [Kevin Cullen](#)** | GLOBE COLUMNIST MARCH 13, 2017

Don Davis is a cryptographer from Somerville. For 30 years he has worked in cyber security, and two years ago he landed a job with the Boston-based subsidiary of BAE Systems, a British company that is one of the world's biggest defense contractors.

At the time, his wife, Elisabeth Traumann, was dying from a rare form of stomach cancer.

On his first day on the job, Davis met with his supervisor, Chris Bryant, at the company's downtown office, and explained his family's situation. Davis told Bryant that his wife had only weeks to live, that he had two kids at home, and that while he had arranged for his wife to have caregivers during the work day, he was the primary caregiver at all other times.

Davis said he could work his normal 40-hour week, but that, for whatever time his wife had left, he had to be at home at nights and weekends to take care of her. The doctors estimated she'd live anywhere from two weeks to two months.

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Davis says Bryant responded the way you would hope any decent human being would: “I can’t imagine what you’re going through. We’ll work with you on this.”

But sympathy was not on offer when Davis explained his situation to the woman who ran the company’s human resources department.

“All she did was rant at me,” Davis told me.

In their 15-minute meeting, Davis said, the woman didn’t entertain temporary alternative arrangements, such as working from home if needed. She simply insisted he needed to be available at the office 24/7.

Later, Davis was summoned to a meeting with Bryant, the woman from human resources and the company’s senior vice president, where Davis was informed his job offer was being rescinded.

Don Davis had been in the office all of four hours.

Davis dreaded telling his wife the news.

She was in the hospital with an infection. Her husband’s new job had been a godsend, because it would ensure health insurance for her and their



DAVIS FAMILY

Elisabeth Traumann and Don Davis at their Somerville home.

daughter, who has a chronic medical condition.

Elisabeth Traumann had one last shot, a novel treatment using a drug regimen that had shown promise. But when Davis told her he had lost the job, she seemed to deflate. She later told her best friend that she blamed herself for ruining her husband's career.

"It just unraveled," Don Davis said. "The next day, we had to get her into hospice. It forestalled the treatment. There was no guarantee, but it was the last hope we had."

Elisabeth Traumann, a psychologist, died two months later. She was 57.

Don Davis recently filed a federal lawsuit against BAE. His lawyer, Rebecca Pontikes, contends Davis was discriminated against because the company "requires its male employees to be the stereotypical male breadwinner and to leave family responsibilities to women."

When it comes to being punished by a corporate culture that doesn't care about the work-life balance, women have often borne the brunt. But Pontikes says an increasing number of men are getting mistreated like Davis.

BAE issued a statement to me saying, "we do not tolerate discrimination of any kind and work hard to provide our employees with flexible working options that enable them to have a meaningful work/life balance." But, citing pending litigation, the company wouldn't discuss specifics.

If I was BAE's lawyer, I'd be pushing for a settlement. I wouldn't want to roll the dice with a jury, defending the soullessness of the machine.

But Davis told me he doesn't want to settle.

"I can't get even with them financially. The company's worth about \$22 billion," he said. "There's no jury award that would make a dent in them. The only revenge I can get is to expose this. It was pretty pitiless."

Davis doesn't want to ruin the individuals who gave the orders. He wants to put corporate heartlessness on trial.

"I'm a Christian," Don Davis said. "I have to forgive people. I don't have to forgive corporations."

Kevin Cullen is a Globe columnist. He can be reached at cullen@globe.com.

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LanterneRouge 03/13/17 06:08 PM

Welcome to 21st-century America.



liberal to a degree 03/13/17 06:32 PM

Trump and Ryan land.



westrover 03/13/17 06:40 PM

Please. Do you think the result would have been different a year or two ago? Not everything that sucks in this country is due to

Trump.

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hdroadking 03/13/17 06:19 PM

Sadly, these stories become more and more the norm and I'm actually shocked at his age he was hired by them.



outofsync 03/13/17 11:01 PM

Once upon a time I was a "Hired Hand", but then I became a: Worker -> Employee/Personnel -> Human Resource but now I'm just "Human Capital," which increasingly seems to be the preferred term.

I'm just a capital expenditure in a sense, similar to a machine or building, which depreciates over time until its useful life is over and it is ready for disposal.



Cavale 03/14/17 07:31 AM

My cousin worked for a large corporation. He was Mr. Death. He was the one who studied departments and determined who would stay and who would go. Heartless? Yes. He had good credentials, but the corporation was more powerful than his credentials. There was a corporation shakeup and he got fired. He told me, without a blink, that he understood the move. It made good business sense. That's the mindset. Inhuman? Yes, but they think alike and hold no emotional attachment between the act and the person. Cold. His credentials got him another job in another corporation.

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ChrisJLav 03/13/17 06:23 PM

What a devastating story. The poor family. Good for Don Davis exposing what happened. Companies need to learn that they will suffer consequences for action like that. It's hard to believe anybody could have been so heartless.



liberal to a degree 03/13/17 06:33 PM

Because we have learned to worship at the altar of the almighty dollar.



SL2W 03/13/17 07:41 PM

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury: Make Them Pay....!

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attaturk 03/13/17 06:27 PM

Fairly typical actually. The only mistake the gentlemen made was telling the company. He should have taken the job said nothing and then as soon as it was of ultimate importance to not be there, file under federal "family leave" policy. Screw'em. It's what they deserve.



materialgirl 03/13/17 06:49 PM

Atta

You have to work 12 months to qualify for FMLA, he would not have qualified. Hope the HR person rots in hell and that would be to good for her



attaturk 03/13/17 08:55 PM

I realize that I was hoping the "ultimate importance" could go that far. But as to the HR person. I don't know that may be too good for her. I prefer reincarnation into an appropriate new life. Say a cockroach and try to work her way back up.

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NHWarmByTheFire 03/13/17 06:44 PM

Classy HR person. She will get hers when she gets into her late 50's and finds herself replaced by a 30 something.



materialgirl 03/13/17 06:50 PM

Would somebody report the HR persons name so nobody else will hire this witch



MCH8231950 03/13/17 08:10 PM

Maybe, but the sackless Bryant and the HR person will die some day, let just hope they suffer like Ms. Traumann. My sympathies to Mr. Davis. I hope Ms. Pontikes comes from a wealthy law firm, because BEA has the resources to drag this out and kill he with pleadings.

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Rizzo18 03/13/17 06:46 PM

Honesty doesn't pay anymore. I agree with attaturk. He should have just



accepted their offer, taken the benefits and dealt with his wife's illness after he knew he would be covered under the family leave policy. Of course, they probably could have denied coverage since she was already ill. In the eyes of business we are all expendable and can be replaced in a second.



materialgirl 03/13/17 07:41 PM

See previous post, you have to work 12 months for accompany to qualify for FMLA



aidandad 03/13/17 08:29 PM

To Rizzo's point, a business does not experience emotions. Too many people fall in love with their job, unconsciously imagining that it is reciprocal. It is not. Your company does not love you - even if you are the owner. Don't get sucked in by unrequited love. You are a line item cost.



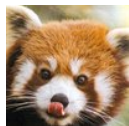
MG57 03/13/17 07:04 PM

Karma has a few more people in its sights. Horrible mistreatment of this family.



lordchaucer 03/13/17 07:31 PM

I do not believe this Karma stuff. Horrible people keep going and going and going! We can be a very mean-spirited and miserable country and the wealthy and powerfull and the bleepholes continue to WIN!!



Effrontery 03/13/17 10:02 PM

Well, the thing about karma in the traditional definition is that, much like hell, evil people don't get punished in THIS life but in whatever comes next. If you want the John Lennon instant version, you kind of have to take matters into your own hands.



champsmom 03/13/17 07:06 PM

But #trumpcare will fix it all 😊. I know Obama Care wasn't the fix to all but it's certainly better than the R's plan at this point.



Tipscorner 03/14/17 08:47 AM

What?? Perceived and real heartless towards individuals has always been a core characteristic of American corporations. As a former member of HR leadership, let me guarantee you that she was the playing the role of "enforcer"; that the idea to fire him did not originate with her. If senior management wanted to cut the guy a break, they would of. Also, lets be careful to pass judgement when hearing only one side of the story.

We don't know if he was originally given a job description where he agreed to being available 24/7, and then on the first day, tried to change an important job description. American Corporations can be heartless, but lets be careful when we hear only one side of the story.



Renboppo24 03/13/17 07:14 PM

HR is the worst. Its where people who can't do anything productive go



improvr 03/13/17 07:44 PM

You and I must work at the same place



lordchaucer 03/13/17 08:00 PM

Worked in HR for years - they get their marching orders from above. Mostly it is the heartless bastards above!

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materialgirl 03/13/17 07:43 PM

Gender bias, 83% of HR employees are women, such hate speech



J-10 03/13/17 08:33 PM

We found the mid-level HR manager commenting on the story...



J-10 03/13/17 08:33 PM

We found the mid-level HR manager commenting on the story...

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user_1700434 03/13/17 07:53 PM

Don Davis you are a Christian. I know that no financial award can make up for what you went through but I hope it would be large enough to help you and your children. I also hope that God's love surrounds your family as you grieve the loss of Elisabeth.



lordchaucer 03/13/17 08:03 PM

My sympathy for your loss and having to deal with all of the heartless bastards at BAE Systems.

That's BAE Systems for those of you who can decide or not decide to do business with that company!



Bostonnative1830 03/13/17 08:18 PM

I'm sure there are many who don't usually comment, but are thinking they wish you well, and offer sincere sympathy for what you and your wife went through. There are also many people who ask: Aren't we better than this, as a society? Is this the kind of corporate culture we want to support?

For many others, the answer is yes.

I offer my condolences.



greygull2 03/13/17 08:19 PM

This is going to affect BAE System's hiring ability in an already tight market. Who would want to work there after hearing this?



RZwarich 03/14/17 06:24 AM

If they have a job opening, they will have no trouble filling it. The Elites who control our nation have engineered conditions in our nation that assure that.

We are in a condition of excess labor, which is actually the semi-permanent condition of our economy. Whenever we get even near a condition of full employment, the Elites who control the

nation will take actions to again create conditions of excess labor.

The last time that companies were having to compete to fill job openings was in the late 90s/early 00s. The 'computer boom' had heated up the economy to a roaring fire, and there just weren't enough workers to fill all the jobs.

What did they do? They ram-rodged NAFTA down our throats, then used its terms to flood Mexico with heavily subsidized US corn. This corn was dumped on Mexico at a subsidized price 20% below the cost of growing it. This flood of cheap US corn put millions of Mexican farmers, agricultural workers, and food industry workers, out of work, and these millions of people were soon on the very edge of starvation itself.

They had to migrate to survive. NAFTA was signed into law by Slick Willie in December of 1993, and went into effect January 1, 1994. By 2004, in a single 10 year period, approximately 10% of the entire population of Mexico, made up from its poorest and most desperate citizens, had migrated to the US, looking for work, and desperate for any job, at any wage.

This deliberately engineered condition of excess labor drove down US wages dramatically, across the board. Companies were competing with each other to fill jobs in the late 90s. By 2004, workers were again in dog eat dog competition with each other for jobs.

'Tight market'? The 'real' unemployment rate, the official rate that includes "discouraged workers", (an actual 'official classification' of people who have lost all hope of finding a decent job), is still around 10%.

Corporations are monstrous entities only because we have

allowed them to become so. Corporations exist because they are 'chartered' by government. Theoretically they are therefore under the control of government, which in a democracy theoretically means they are under the control of 'the people'.

The basic form of the 'corporate charter' grants powers to corporations. The powers we have foolishly granted them have allowed the largest among them to become more powerful than government itself.

They now control our government, rather than our government controlling them.

We can, we must, and we WILL change this. The powers that 'we' (our democratic government) grant to corporations, in the basic corporate charter, can, must, and will be taken away.

We, the people, in a nominally democratic nation, have the power to bring corporations to heel, to force them to serve the Common Good. We can take away the power that they currently use to force us to serve them.



Tipscorner 03/14/17 08:56 AM

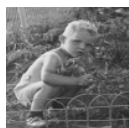
Wow RZwarich -- props for your response. You have your story down. Unfortunately reality is different than stories we are told by a lying president. NAFTA has caused major disruption...but wait a minute. This was a story about a cyber-security guy who thinks he got shafted. I know its hard, but what are your views on this situation specifically vs. making it about the state of the Universe, according to the Alt Right??

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Tonyats 03/13/17 08:19 PM

Please this has nothing to do with Trump. Corporate greed was here eons before the Donald. This is the inherent fault of most HR departments that are the core of brainless corporate policies. His honesty and integrity violated corporate speak and sent HR into a frenzy because a policy was violated by his desperate committment to a loved one.



RZwarich 03/14/17 06:43 AM

"Corporate greed" has not been here for "eons". Corporate greed has only been here since the modern legal form of the corporate charter was created in the 19th century, and particularly since the rights of 'personhood' were granted to corporations in the late 19th century.

Once corporations were granted the rights of 'personhood', (a legal decision handed down by a corrupted, bribed Judiciary), they immediately became the most powerful of 'people'. How could any single living breathing people, the actual citizens of the nation, possibly compete with these monsters that the basic corporate charter created?

A corporate charter is granted by government. Therefore it is under government control. In a democratic nation, that means (theoretically) that it is under the control of 'the people'. Surely we all know that "democracy" is from the Greek 'demos', (the people), and 'kratia', (rule).

It is within our own democratic power (theoretically) to alter the basic corporate charter.

The predicament we find ourselves in, of course, is that we

granted so much power to corporations that the largest among them now control our government. We are no longer a true 'democracy' at all. 'The people' no longer rule our nation.

Conditions change. Corporate power is NOT an 'act of God' that has existed for "eons". We were hoodwinked into granting them this power in the time of our grandparents, and great grandparents. (NOT "eons" ago).

We can, and WILL, take this power back from them.

Within the span of the lives of some people reading this, this power WILL be taken from them.

Watch and see.



MSWSue 03/14/17 05:14 PM

RZ, I like your optimism and resolve! You are so right that what is, is not ordained...



Oilcansman 03/13/17 08:41 PM

The reason Cullen didn't name the hr woman? Because he is not sure of the story and the globe would then have massive potential defamation exposure to her. There's a gaping hole here. The globe isn't sold on what Cullen us claiming occurred



greatfriend 03/13/17 10:07 PM

Oilcan, I agree, there is much more to this story besides the sensationalism from Cullen. Believe me, I despise Wall Street &

other corporate thugs they are scum & have stolen millions off of hard working American's. But, if the woman from HR & the senior Vice President were so heartless why didn't he name them? Why is he protecting them but not David Bryant?



Hansoribrother 03/13/17 08:42 PM

As this story proves, corporations are not inanimate objects. Corporations are people, people that make decisions like this wretched HR person and the putrid supervisor, Bryant. I hope they both feel like guilt-ridden pieces of shiite.

Corporations are people. Many of them make good decisions and care for their employees. I have a friend whose wife fell ill with multiple sclerosis at a young age. He was under financial stress so he found a higher paying job. When he gave his notice, his employer asked why he was leaving and he explained the situation. His supervisor said the company would take care of what he owed and pay for any other bills he got due to his wife's illness.

There are a lot of arseholes in the world. When they go to work they are still arseholes and make evil decisions.



Oilcansman 03/13/17 08:44 PM

The globe shouldn't print this unless the hr womans name is given. Pretty cowardly for Cullen nit to take the plunge. He's nnot certain.



attaturk 03/13/17 08:57 PM

Really?



Oilcansman 03/13/17 09:10 PM

Yed, really. We're talking about unforgivable subhuman behavior. The name should be printed.



da2005 03/13/17 09:08 PM

What can anyone do? If each person reading this article sent an email to BAE it might - might - get noticed. If every person reading this article was to contact a friend and they contact a friend on down the line. That makes social media work for individuals.



da2005 03/13/17 09:12 PM

Or tweet. Even large companies don't like negative tweets showing up in public internet. @BAESystemsInc



Newtonville22 03/13/17 10:07 PM

Corporations are amoral. It's in the genes.



Mac-DaNife 03/13/17 11:27 PM

What a silly story. Guy shows up for job and spells out all the reasons he can't do the job. What did he expect? How that relates to Trump or anything else is mysterious. Seems like a called in story after a night on the town.

7continents 03/14/17 07:26 AM

"What did he expect?"



Oh, maybe a little humanity? Silly man...



pete74 03/14/17 08:26 AM

Are you kidding?

Guy says he is happy to work 40 hours a week.

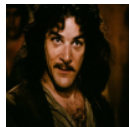
What kind of plantation do you run?

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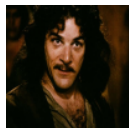
Baynina 03/14/17 01:38 AM

Seems you need to go to extreme measures to illicit compassion or even decency from corporate employers.



In1g0M0nt0ya 03/14/17 05:17 AM

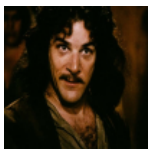
Elicit.



In1g0M0nt0ya 03/14/17 05:17 AM

Elicit.

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In1g0M0nt0ya 03/14/17 05:18 AM

Only wrote that once! Stoopid glitch.

WFC49 03/14/17 06:10 AM



Citizens United. Corporations are people. Most times, the people you don't have much use for.



WestGirl 03/14/17 06:29 AM

You go, Don Davis!

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