INSIGHTS

# SILICON VALLEY: THE NEW FOCUS ON TRUST

RICHARD EDELMAN / FEBRUARY 15, 2018

I have just returned from three days in the Bay Area, visiting with clients and doing several presentations of the Edelman Trust Barometer. This week, we released a special edition of the Trust Barometer focused on California. Here are a few of the findings:

1. **Gender Issues Are a Flashpoint —** 72 percent say that the tech industry has not done enough to respond to and deal with sexual harassment in the workplace. And 74 percent say that the tech industry has not done enough to deal with unfair treatment of women. Forty-six percent of women surveyed say they had been treated unfairly because of their gender and 32 percent say they had been sexually harassed at work.
2. **California Still Has a Mass Class Divide on Trust in Institutions —** Trust among elites did not crash in California as it did in the rest of the U.S., remaining strong at 57 percent. Meanwhile, trust in the general population remained at 39 percent, leaving an 18-point gap. Business is the most trusted institution, with government the least trusted.
3. **Tech Benefits California but Not the People —** Sixty percent agree that California benefits from technology but only 38 percent say that it "benefits me."
4. **Tech Now Seen as Corporate —** Nearly three quarters say that tech companies are part of corporate America.
5. **Tech Needs More Regulation —** Two-thirds say that the tech industry is under-regulated. The big concerns are around privacy, security and strained infrastructure from growth. For example, 89 percent say they would make tech companies liable for data breaches and 82 percent would raise taxes on tech companies if their manufacturing moves overseas.
6. **Speak Up —** 83 percent want tech companies to speak out against policies that hurt their employees or customers.
7. **Tech and Social Media Trust Diverge —** Tech is the most trusted industry at 65 percent,

social media the second least trusted at 35 percent. We also found in our main trust study that there is now a 40-point gap between social media and mainstream media.

During my discussion with Sara Fischer of *Axios* on Tuesday evening, she asked what pivotal moments changed the discussion around technology companies in 2017. I said that Google CEO Sundar Pichai's decision to remove the male engineer who wrote a toxic blog post about women in technology and the Uber board's decision to relieve founder Travis Kalanick of his responsibilities were the most important events. I should have added the demise of trust in social media and search; the article in *Wired* titled "Inside the Two Years That Shook Facebook and the World" was released when I was in San Francisco.

I believe in the technology sector's ability to manage its new power in a responsible way. Among the priorities for 2018 are to sketch out realistic regulatory solutions for privacy and security, to take on the emerging issue of job loss from automation and the need to reinforce women's role in the workplace in the wake of the #MeToo movement. One important insight from our survey is that the number one trusted institution is "My Employer"; that means tech CEOs should make their employees the communications priority in the coming year.

*Richard Edelman is president and CEO.*

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