**The interview and your comments in the forum coincide with and started very close to the release of „Pillars of Eternity 2“. Was this mere coincidence? Did this timing ever give you pause or reason to consider delaying publication of the interview or answering questions in the forum?**

To be clear, I don’t have any issues with the developers at Obsidian or the games they create. My concerns are solely with upper management.

I don’t think the interview was the issue, it was the questions, comments and answers to those questions and comments that attracted attention. I didn’t go to a news publication, I was correcting something someone had said on forums because it kept surfacing.

What posters on forums would say that I had been a manager, I signed an NDA, and got severance when leaving. None of those things were true, I had not been a manager, I had not signed an NDA, and I got nothing when I left.

I had brought up similar (not all) of the points on Reddit and in other places before – on Reddit, I had even brought up the same information in the same context, not as a post, but as a response. Again, the interview I don’t think people noticed, what they noticed was my response.

So I set the record straight (again), gave the facts, and said that while I thought it’s good *business* for a company’s upper management to withhold contract payments, severance pay, and debts owed the employee to force concessions on other issues and force silence, it doesn’t do much for how they are viewed ethically. And at the point where you don’t need what they’re holding back, it’s time to speak out against the only thing they continually insisted on with regards to their business practices – silence.

On the timing for the response to the interview, there was never a good time for the response, although I imagine with the interview being posted (the timing wasn’t my decision) generated a number of responses and questions that normally wouldn’t have come up. But in short, there wasn’t a good time - if it had occurred during Pillars 2 production, before or during the Pillars 2 crowdsourcing campaign, Armored warfare layoffs, etc, etc. would have all raised the same timing question. Before the Armored Warfare layoffs, there was still time to work out issues with Obsidian but they either refused to answer or were met with “no.”

**You have stated in the thread that you only wish to set the record straight in regards to the upper management of Obsidian and you do not mean to harm the employees or the company. It could be argued that the two are not clearly seperable and that through your actions you may have harmed the employees or at least you could not be sure that your comments would cause them no harm with absolute certainty. How would you respond to that?**

That’s a fair question to raise. In raising it, there’s the implication the reverse is also true, and since I had facts to back that position up, being silent on upper management was a “yes, being silent on these practices hurts employees and should be changed.” It’s important to know that if you sacrifice your paycheck for your employer, that it will not be a question that you will be thanked and recompensated for your sacrifice when money comes back in. At Obsidian, it was a fight to get Feargus to replay the employees when the company was healthy again, and it was a conversation that didn’t need to take place, it should have just been done, immediately.

As I’ve said, I do believe that the success of upper management at Obsidian does not translate to success for the employees, or job security for even excellent employees, because of larger management issues.

I bring up a specific example of this in relation to the Stormlands cancelation – we had to let a lot of people go who had nothing to do with Stormlands’ failure and were also contributing to the company. But because of the management decisions and oversight, they were let go. Even more frustrating, family members of the owners were kept even if they contributed less or not at all (and were paid more). If they had been let go, great developers could have been kept. The company would have benefited.

Not many people were aware of that nepotism, but it’s a practice that should be re-evaluated or explained – some of the more recent reviews on Glassdoor commonly suggest that practice hasn’t ended since by departure (although Glassdoor reviews should be taken with a grain of salt, when certain themes are repeated – nepotism and favoritism among them – they might bear a closer look).

**Given the extent of your criticism of Feargus Urquhart: Are there any aspects of him as a person or company leader that you do have respect for at all?**

Sure. The biggest positives were Feargus keeping his relationship with BioWare which not only arguably made Black Isle what it was and allowed it to develop many of its RPGs through the Infinity engine, that relationship with BioWare also helped Obsidian get on its feet by offloading the properties they didn't want to do on to Obsidian.

Feargus also has skills as a "finisher" - it’s an actual producer position I believe they have at Ubisoft, it’s a producer with no close ties to the project coming in at the end and making the decisions needed to ship the game. This allows them to objectively see issues and gameplay without the attachment, and then cut or focusing on fixing certain elements so the game can ship. The only problem was if Feargus became involved earlier in the process (pitch or production), and there certainly have been times where cuts were delayed for questionable reasons, even when the teams were working hard on material the owners knew would be cut or changed.

The owners also made sure there were no mandatory crunch hours although a publisher could request them. I don't know if this still the case at the company.

**You have said you thought he (Urquhart ) had protected you from consequences of mistakes you made during your time at black isle. What were those mistakes you made and why did you feel so indebted to him while you thought he’d „had your back“? The way you described it this believe inspired loyalty that lasted for years, after all.**

Torment was my first time as lead, so I did make a number of mistakes, organizational, managerial, and even making the mistake of doing too much content as a lead. Feargus assured me that during some difficult times on Torment he had stepped in and had my back, and there’s nothing more supportive than knowing someone is going to help you keep your job – that kind of loyalty is something you want to pay back, and should.

The issues I had made were, but not limited to, localization (Torment was an expensive game to translate), and the translation costs were mounting, and weren’t well-received when they hit upper management. Interplay’s management was right to react as they did, btw. Feargus assured me had stepped in and protected me (I was worried I’d need a new job), but then a few years ago, said the exact opposite.

This loyalty did lead me to making a number of bad decisions at Obsidian – including turning away from a number of problems I thought were wrong at the company, although I did critique others I thought were wrong (the refusal to pay back employees).

Not only did this hit me hard, it also put all the previous events in a different light, and I realized I had been naïve to assume the same thing had observed happening with others hadn’t happened to me – these reversals of truth had occurred with other employees and situations.

**You describe a moment when it became clear to you that you had only been led to believe that Feargus Urquhart had protected you at Black Isle and how this revelation was a pivotal moment that changed your relationship fundamentally. Your statement statements seem to imply however you never confronted him about this. Unless this implication is actually incorrect: Why not?**

I did ask for clarity to make sure I’d heard him correctly, but one thing I had been conditioned to do was that “confronting” Feargus on sensitive issues had to be saved for rare opportunities, because the (angry) backlash could last for a while, so you had to choose your battles. (I wouldn’t normally even call it “confrontation” under normal circumstances, but when raised, it immediately felt that way.) Since this was close to the backlash about the confrontation in paying employees back, all my confrontation currency had been spent in that fight - a fight I initially lost, until another owner stepped in. Also, at the time, I didn’t think it was wise to say I’d based many years of my life on what he’d claimed, as it might have meant I would be de-ownered faster, and that was a threat leveled more than once against owners at the company.

His revelation was coupled with the fact that I’d seen the exact same reversals with other employees, so I didn’t have any reason to think he’d made a mistake. Thus, I didn’t bring it up beyond doing the only thing I needed to do – make sure he hadn’t misspoke and seek clarity. I was also worried if I brought up how important it was, he’d backpedal, and it was actually more important I hear him speak the truth when it seemed like something that was unimportant in the discussion, if that makes any sense – it’s one of the best ways to get at the truth, it’s what you say when you don’t think there’s any stakes or importance to saying it.

**You describe many structural fixes to the problems at Obsidian. But did you ever make an attempt to fix the breakdown of communication between you and Urquhart on a peronal level? (editor’s note for clarification: You describe how Urquhart would not listen to you on many occasions but could be convinced with the help of others that you feel had his respect. This appears to be a classic communications connundrum where the relationship between you and him is severly impaired on a personal level to the degree that what you said to him was no longer processed on the merit of the Information alone. I assume as an author you may be aware of the four-side-model of communication (or similar) I’m refering to:**[**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four-sides\_model**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four-sides_model)**--> communicational dysfunction like this can only be solved on a personal Level. Basically: you and Urquhart needed therapy not hirarchy – agree/disagree and did you try?)**

You’re right. there was the issue that the exact same thing one favored employee said was accepted, and an employee which may not have the same level of favor might say the exact same thing and be ignored/discounted, yes. This happened on a few projects. It happened to me, but not always.

Also, with regards to who to listen to and who to ignore, I admit I may suffer from a lack of business empathy in this, as I process information differently – even if I have conflicts with someone, it hasn’t prevented me from listening to the points they’re making, since there’s probably a reason they’re bringing it up with me. I’ve agreed and supported points of people I don’t get along with at all on a personal level, but I recognize they may be able to spot where a pipeline in the company is flawed where I can’t, especially if they have a skill set I don’t (animation, art, production). I suppose that with management, objective absorption of facts would be worthwhile skill or at least the desire to check those facts – I know this may sound naïve, but if you are genuinely presenting facts, the other person shouldn’t dismiss them out of hand, because at the least, there’s probably a way to check those facts.

But to your broader question, yes, I did bring up issues, and I even tried to resolve the specific problems that seemed to be leading to even larger issues – for example, if meetings get derailed, propose an agenda. If it seems hard to reach a conclusion, call for a clear vote. If you felt like responsibilities weren’t clear and that was causing issues, then you asked for them and then, suggested them to make it easier. If things we discussed were forgotten about and resulted in wasted work or misdirection of resources and time, resort to email communication and make sure the facts were explicitly laid out for later reference before it came out when a problem occurred.

What happened, however, is that when systems like this were proposed, they were ignored, forgotten, discarded, despite how very simple they are in practice. Worse, you’d get the answer of “I said you all could vote on this, but you didn’t arrive at the conclusion I wanted, so we’re going with my answer.” Even worse, these suggestions could make people very defensive, as if you were challenging their process, when all you want to do is fix a repeated problem. I very much believe that if you tackle underlying issues, you have a chance of working your way up to the major ones – and fixing those. That was not to be.

So for example, when the email and facts of a discussion were brought up, there was often “I didn’t agree to that,” then when the facts came out via email, the answer often was, “well, that’s not I feel today.” An answer like that causes a lot of additional problems, such as compromising future planning of projects and recognizing that any answer you get may suddenly change and the person won’t tell you. This also overshadowed any other decision that could be made – don’t get me wrong, it’s a manager’s right to change their mind, but in a company where there’s never enough money and never enough time to get projects to the level we’d like, you start to question all the decisions that lead up to that kind of an answer. When did they change their mind? Why did they do so? When did they tell you? *Did* they tell you? (They often hadn’t.) And hey, if the art team crunching for 70 hours a week b/c of this decision you’ve suddenly reversed your mind on, when were you planning to tell them or redirect their efforts? Overall, their very responses begin to erode credibility, and worse, compromise planning and projects.

Business-therapy is an interesting question. I do think it would have helped if we had had actual voting and discussion on various issues that were in contention, because that enforces a form of group discussion and people get let defensive/angry when points are brought up (especially if someone else in the room agrees). For example, while my initial request for paying back the employees was discounted, the fact it was brought up in a group meant that later on when another owner changed their mind and agreed with me, at least they were aware they felt as I do and could reach out to me to correct the issue. But on one hand, it’s equally demoralizing when you know the majority of people in the room have been conditioned to head-nod on the issues – and the majority of Obsidian owners are production staff (the “production-triad” we called them), so that happened quite a bit.

I did feel the problems were me having the wrong expectation about what I was doing or should be doing (despite asking, and then proposing my own responsibilities when no clear answers were given). But ultimately, I think the problem lay more in that Feargus and I are fundamentally different people in terms of how to treat others – I think he grew up with a different set of ethics than most, and often refuses to see or seek clarity in a situation vs. how he feels at any given time. While I feel I can usually break down an issue into black and white (I believe if you break down any problem deep enough, there’s things you can answer – is this legal or illegal? Will this take too long to make? Have we had this problem before?) with Feargus, it’s often “well, it’s a gray area.” Or “it’s that, but it isn’t.” This was often used to explain reversals or opinions without concrete information - which aren’t real answers to me and doesn’t make me have faith in the answers that are given.

In short, I raised the issue about paying back employees who sacrificed their paychecks for us because I felt that was a very noble thing for them to do (especially considering how much they were paid). As such, they shouldn’t have to wait for either the payback of funds or at least a plan to pay back those funds – and they shouldn’t have to ask us about it at all, we should do it as soon as the company’s finances were safe enough we could do it. However, I discovered that’s not the opinion Feargus shared, and he focused more on the fact he hadn’t *promised* to pay them back vs. doing the right thing, and going so far as a reason to take no more action on the matter.