

Former 'Ellen DeGeneres Show' DJ says he felt 'toxicity'; Portia de Rossi defends wife

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USA TODAY

Colleagues and celebrities are speaking out about Ellen DeGeneres after several employees came forward last month with allegations of mistreatment at her daytime talk show.

Actor Tony Okungbowa – the resident DJ for "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" from 2003-06 and 2007-13 – opened up about his experience on the show Tuesday, revealing that he felt "toxicity" on set.

"I have been getting calls asking me about the Ellen Degeneres Show and I would like to address the time I spent there," he wrote on Instagram. "While I am grateful for the opportunity it afforded me, I did experience and feel the toxicity of the environment."

The "Bob Hearts Abishola" star didn't provide examples of the toxic work environment he said he endured at "Ellen," but Okungbowa expressed support to his former colleagues.

"I stand with my former colleagues in their quest to create a healthier and more inclusive workplace as the show moves forward," he concluded his social media statement.

In 2014, Stephen "tWitch" Boss replaced Okungbowa as DJ.

Former producer Hedda Muskat also made claims on Wednesday during an interview on the Australian television program Sunrise, saying she was "emotionally abused" while working on the show before being let go in 2004.

"I was fired for no reason. They told me that they were just going to take the show in a different direction," she said. "They ended up giving my job to a guy that I trained that was only about 24 years old that had no experience."

In an interview with Inside Edition Tuesday, Muskat added that the environment was "very nerve-racking, very stressful, we all walked on eggshells all the time."

She also recalled a time when DeGeneres laughed at executive producer Ed Glavin after he yelled at a crew member during a production meeting.

"I was hoping she was going to say, 'Ed, you can't be yelling at the crew this way, you can't be yelling at people this way.' (But) she laughed and she said, 'Pfft, every production needs their dog,' " Muskat said.

Muskat added that "it's a lie" that the host isn't aware of what's going on behind-the-scenes.

The former employees' claims come after DeGeneres' wife, Portia de Rossi, expressed her support for the comedian, posting the words "I Stand By Ellen" on Instagram Monday.

"To all our fans....we see you," the "Arrested Development" star wrote in the caption. "Thank you for your support. #stopbotattacks"

Katy Perry also defended DeGeneres in a series of tweets late Monday.

"I know I can't speak for anyone else's experience besides my own but I want to acknowledge that I have only ever had positive takeaways from my time with Ellen & on the @theellenshow," she wrote. "I think we all have witnessed the light & continual fight for equality that she has brought... to the world through her platform for decades. Sending you love & a hug, friend @TheEllenShow"

DeGeneres' brother Vance also took to Twitter to show support.

"If you think Ellen would knowingly allow bullying or racism on her show, you don't know my sister. She has been and continues to be a bright light in a dark world," he wrote. "She's one of the kindest, most generous people you'll ever meet. And one of the funniest."

Ashton Kutcher also came to her defense on Twitter.

"I haven't spoken with @TheEllenShow and can only speak from my own experience. She & her team have only treated me & my team w/ respect & kindness," he wrote Tuesday. "She never pandered to celebrity which I always saw as a refreshing honesty. When things aren't right she handles it and fixes."

Kutcher also replied to some comments that countered him. User @dearlydianak wrote, "Yes because you are a celebrity."

He replied, "But it extends to my team and people she didn't even know I work with."

User @DheerMD said, "Ashton the point is not her team handled a celebrity but how their team behaved with their own team members Get it?"

To which Kutcher responded, "I get it. I also feel people should be held accountable for THEIR actions."

Kevin Hart took to Instagram to vouch for DeGeneres' character, calling the comedian "one of the dopest people on the (expletive) planet."

"The internet has become a crazy world of negativity....we are falling in love with peoples down fall," he continued. "It's honestly sad...When did we get here?"

According to the comedian, DeGeneres has always treated his family and team with love and respect.

"I stand by the ones that I know and that I love," he added. "Looking forward to the future where we get back to loving one another."

After DeGeneres' apology Thursday, "Everybody Loves Raymond" star Brad Garrett said it was "common knowledge" people were mistreated on the set. But the actor faulted DeGeneres as much as the producers who were the targets of the allegations.

The host of the popular, long-running "Ellen DeGeneres Show," which has aired in syndication since 2003, apologized in a letter to staffers after an internal review of worker complaints conducted by parent company WarnerMedia. DeGeneres and the studio are "committed to ensuring a workplace based on respect and inclusion," the statement provided by Warner Bros. to USA TODAY read.

Despite DeGeneres' insistence of "ensuring this does not happen again," Garrett, who has appeared on her show numerous times, called on the TV personality to bear more responsibility for her producers' actions.

"Sorry but it comes from the top," he tweeted on Thursday, tagging her. "Know more than one who were treated horribly by her. Common knowledge."

"Back to the Future" actress Lea Thompson tweeted support for Garrett's account on Friday, retweeting an article about his statement and adding: "True story. It is."

In a tweet Friday, music mogul Scoter Braun came to the comedian's defense, saying people "love to take shots" at others.

"How quickly so many forget," he wrote, adding that Degeneres "is a kind, thoughtful, courageous human being who stands for what is right and highlights on her show the best of us. She has helped change the views for equality."

Braun was the subject of public criticism last year when Taylor Swift accused the manager of "incessant, manipulative bullying" after he paid \$300 million to acquire Big Machine Label Group – and, by extension, the masters of Swift's music.

"Needed to say this as I know first hand how she helps so many when we are watching and when we are not," he continued. "She isn't about what is popular she is about what is right. Sending love to Ellen today."

Actor Jerry O'Connell shared support for DeGeneres with a photo that said "I Stand By Ellen" on Twitter.

"Love @TheEllenShow & @portiaderossi," he wrote on Monday. "Always have. Always will."

Other users on Twitter also had a lot to say.

"If you think Ellen is nice, or a decent human being, read her apology," one user wrote. "It never accepts responsibility."

The Hollywood Reporter said one of three executive producers, Ed Glavin, was the source of many complaints and would be exiting soon. Warner Bros. declined to comment.

In her apology, DeGeneres appeared to dispute some statements from those working on the show, while alluding to her own experiences as a trailblazing entertainer in empathizing with those who feel they were treated unfairly.

"I'm also learning that people who work with me and for me are speaking on my behalf and misrepresenting who I am and that has to stop," she wrote. "As someone who was judged and

nearly lost everything for just being who I am, I truly understand and have deep compassion for those being looked at differently, or treated unfairly, not equal, or – worse – disregarded. To think that any one of you felt that way is awful to me."

Warner Bros. issued a statement to USA TODAY on Thursday about the investigation, in which dozens of current and former employees were interviewed.

"The Ellen DeGeneres Show' is, and has always strived to be, a place that brings positivity to the world. And though not all of the allegations were corroborated, we are disappointed that the primary findings of the investigation indicated some deficiencies related to the show's day-to-day management. We have identified several staffing changes, along with appropriate measures to address the issues that have been raised, and are taking the first steps to implement them," the statement said.

New allegations surfaced against Glavin along with his fellow executive producers, Kevin Leman and Jonathan Norman, in another [Buzzfeed](#) report published Thursday.

In the article, several anonymous former employees accuse the executive producers of varying levels of sexual misconduct with lower-level employees. The accusations include inappropriate touching, comments, groping and solicitation of sexual acts.

Leman and Norman denied the allegations in statements to BuzzFeed, and Glavin did not return the outlet's request for comment.

A rep for Warner Bros. told USA TODAY the company has no further comment at this time.