

CEO Jed York
Press Conference – January 2, 2017
San Francisco 49ers
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Opening comments:

“Good morning. My opening statement is going to be pretty short. I want to make sure that I get to your questions. First, I want to let the fans know that I apologize for a 2-14 season. I apologize for being back here again and making a change, but I think it’s very important that we reestablish a championship culture. We need to make sure that we move forward and find the right head coach and general manager, two guys that can work together and reestablish the level that we all expect and want for the San Francisco 49ers. I’m happy to take any questions you guys have.”

When nothing had changed throughout the entire season as far as former 49ers general manager Trent Baalke, why did you retain him as general manager and was he involved in the late season contract extensions?

“Sorry, can you say that again?”

The late season contract extensions that were taking place with general manager Trent Baalke. Why did you retain him through the entire season when it was clear early on that you guys would probably be moving in a different direction?

“Well, I mean, I think I said it last year that we were going to evaluate Trent. Trent had a very clear specific vision from me and clear, specific goals. But, I think when you looked at [TE] Vance [McDonald] and doing a contract extension, when you look at [LB] Ray-Ray [Armstrong] and doing a contract extension, I trust Trent’s evaluation and I wanted to make sure that the guys we have on this team are guys that are going to be here for a long time. Again, it was a team effort. We didn’t make a final decision until the very end of the season, but we still had to be professionals and we still had to do what was right for the San Francisco 49ers at any point in the year.”

Why are you competent to lead a search for a general manager and possibly a head coach too?

“Nothing that I’m going to say is going to be a satisfactory answer. We need to make sure that our success speaks for itself. Our actions have to speak for itself. I’ve done it before. We’ve put together a team that has had three NFC Championship runs. That was in the past. I can’t live on the past. I need to make sure that anything that I do is backed up by the results that are on the field.”

When you say ‘We,’ who is going to be making these decisions and is there any thought that you’re going to bring in someone above a general manager and coach to oversee the football operations, a sort of president-type or a head of football ops?

“So, ultimately the decision will rest with me. I will look at people inside the building and continue to consult people outside of the building, folks that I trust, folks that are very well respected. But, our system and our structure is going to be a head coach and a general manager and ultimately that decision will rest with me.”

Is it specifically you hire the general manager first or are you looking for both at the same time? Could you hire a coach first? Could you give the coach all the power and have him hire the executive?

"I think we need to be open and flexible to structure. We need to make sure that the head coach and the general manager know each other, have a good understanding for each other. Doesn't mean that they had to have worked together in the past, but they have to have a good respect for each other and a good understanding and know that they have similar visions and philosophies on building a football team. And, whatever structure is the best with the people that we're interviewing is the structure that we're going to go with."

You dismissed your general manager and coach because they didn't reach certain performance standards.

"That's part of it."

Okay, let's stick to that part. Why shouldn't you be dismissed or reassigned for the same reasons?

"Again, nothing I'm going to say is going to be satisfactory."

Say something.

"Nothing I'm going to say is going to be satisfactory. Again, we are going to be judged on what we do and what we accomplish. We haven't accomplished enough. I own this football team. You don't dismiss owners. I'm sorry that that's the facts and that's the case, but that's the fact. And, I'm going to do everything that I can to get this right. This isn't about a business and running an operation to make money. We're making sure that we're doing everything that we can to reestablish this culture. It's not an easy decision to dismiss a head coach and a general manager, especially people that have a lot of time left on their deals, but I think that's the best thing for us and that's what we need to do in order to get us back to where we want to be."

Less than a year ago you said 'Chip was going to be here for a long time, period.' He inherited a 5-11 team which arguably had less talent this year. What were your expectations as far as wins and losses and ultimately can you say there were these two reasons or three reasons why Chip had to go?

"Obviously, your record speaks for itself, but I think there's more to it than that and I think again if you're going to reestablish a culture and you're going to have everybody held accountable in the locker room, players accountable to each other, I think the best way to do that is a clean slate."

After three coaches in the last three years, how do you sell this organization as a stable place for prospective coaches and GMs?

"Again, I think when you're starting with a clean slate and you have two guys that are coming in to work together, two guys who are going to be fighting for each other and building what they see is necessary to get the 49ers back to where we need to be, that's what we're trying to put together. We're going to have the opportunity with a lot of draft picks. We're going to have the opportunity with a lot of salary cap room. There are some pieces here. I don't think there are enough pieces here, but there are some pieces that we can build around. But, again, it's got to be a partnership. It's got to be a collaboration between me, the head coach, and the general manager so that we can get this thing right."

We in the media, probably more than anyone, appreciate job security and longevity. How do you convince somebody coming in here that you'll give them that chance?

"Again, I think this is a reestablishment of culture. And it's a tough pill to swallow this year, but again, we need to make sure that when we're working with a coach, when we're working with a general manager, if they're on the same page and they're fighting for each other and they're fighting together, and I think if you'll talk to our coaches, if you'll talk to the people that have

been here, they know that I care about this team. I think our candidates know that I care about this team and that I'm going to do everything that we can to win. We're going to spend the money to win, we're going to do the right things culturally to win and we're going to make sure that they have every piece necessary in their arsenal to win. Again, when I talk about winning a championship, it might not be realistic for us to be in the Super Bowl next year, but the decisions that we're going to make are not going to be to have a quick fix, PR turnaround, go from a two-win team to an 8-8 team, but that's going to falter and not get to where we need to go. We need to know that we're going to build this thing and it's going to be a step function and we're getting our way back to a Super Bowl level. And, there are pieces that we need to build on the coaching staff and the roster and the personnel department. Everything across football ops, we need to make sure that we're continuing to build that and we're going to have a vision that's going to last for a long period of time and they're going to have the opportunity to do that and instill it."

As you're building this and you bring in the coach and the GM, are there things that you're planning to do differently to make sure we're not back here next year at this time, firing the fourth coach in four years?

"I need to make sure that we have the right communication between the general manager and the head coach and the head coach and his staff. And that's why those two guys need to be on the same page and you need to have the right people on the staff and know that we're going to continue to do everything that we can to get better. They're going to have a very, very long leash in terms of making decisions. There are no sacred cows here, whether that's in the personnel department, on the coaching staff, in the locker room. They need to be able to reestablish a championship culture and that's going to take time to reestablish a championship culture. Again, I'm not doing this so we can get to 8-8, to get to 9-7 and say, 'See, we turned it around. We're good.' My ultimate goal is to win a championship, win multiple championships, and that's the foundation that we need to lay and that's what we need to build for."

Since you're the guy that's going to make this call, I'm interested in what you think went wrong here since you have to make, you know, obviously, you analyzed it and now you're the guy that's going to fix it. What do you think went wrong here?

"So, in my vision of Chip and Trent working together, I think it's clear that Trent probably has more of a defensive mind. You know, pairing him with an offensive minded guy, having those guys be partners and working together and being able to scout players that fit Chip's system and being able to do things that build a defense and have a championship-caliber defense which Trent has been a part of from building a roster since, I think, he started in 2005, wasn't in that draft, but really 2005 until now, that's sort of the vision that I saw. But, the marriage didn't work and, you know, I should have probably seen it. It's easy to play revisionist history, but we are where we are and that's why we're cleaning the slate and we're reestablishing that culture."

You just mentioned 2005. That year, you hired former San Francisco 49ers head coach Mike Nolan and then he, in turn, hired former San Francisco 49ers and current Washington Redskins general manager Scot McCloughan. Is that a possibility for this go-around where you have a strong head coach who hires a personnel guy?

"We need to be open to the right structure with the right people. We need to get the right people. And, it can't be, you know, 'I have the 53-man roster and you need to go back to your office.' We can't have that. It's got to be these two guys on the same page and when we disagree on a player we need to know what to do when we disagree on a player and know how to move forward and move beyond it. That's very important to me. So, whether the head coach is in control or the general manager is in control, they need to be accountable to each other. That's the most important relationship in the building."

You seem to be suggesting that those communication issues were not occurring this year. Is that the right read?

"We were 2-14. I think that speaks for itself. We didn't do a lot of things right this year, but if we're going to reset and reestablish, that's where it starts is with the head coach and the general manager."

Given what's gone on since December 2014 and all the losses since 2014 and all the firings since December 2014, in retrospect, was it a mistake to fire former 49ers and current University of Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh?

"I can't look backwards. We need to make sure that we're looking forward and doing everything that we can to get this team back. It's very easy to play revisionist history. I'm just not going to play that game."

Couldn't you just look back and say there was one place where you went wrong and you've learned from that? Can you even say that?

"Look, again, I think the most important thing is having the head coach and the general manager working together, battling for each other and being on the same page. I think that's paramount. And I've certainly seen that in my time, and that's my focus and that's my goal is to make sure that those two are together, they're working on the same page and they know that they have the opportunity to build this thing the right way, together."

What's the search at right now? Have you started doing it? What do the candidates look like for you and how deep of a pool do you think you have?

"I mean, obviously, for better or for worse, I know some of the candidates. I've certainly interviewed some of the candidates in previous years. We've got an opportunity to, you know, the rules of the NFL, the how you can interview people, we obviously can't interview anybody that is in the playoffs until the second week, you can interview teams with a BYE the first week, but you have to go to them, and then anybody that's out of the playoffs you can interview essentially whenever. So, it would be nice to be able to have a methodical way to go through and build the way you want, but some of this is these are the curveballs that exist in the NFL, so we need to make sure that we sit down and talk to the right people at the right times when they're available."

Last year, many fans were hoping that you would get rid of Trent before the season. Obviously, that didn't happen. Was there a particular game this season, if you can date it backwards, where you thought to yourself, 'This is not working. I've got to move forward?'

"I sat down with those guys at the midway point and told them that I wasn't happy with where we were and I wanted to know what we were going to do to get better, what was the plan and ultimately I didn't think that we had a good enough plan and a good enough structure. I was very clear last year about where Trent stood. I think Trent had done a lot of great things for this organization in the past. But, it was time to make a change."

You said you own this football team. A lot of owners don't make football decisions. What's your response to those who say you should remove yourself from football decisions and hire a president to run the show?

"We have a president. His name is [49ers President] Al Guido, and I don't make football decisions."

What is the single most important thing that you're looking for in your next GM?

“I think with a GM, again, first and foremost it’s going to be a relationship between the head coach and the general manager. That’s paramount. I think I’ve said that and I’ll continue to say that. Characteristics that you’re looking for in a general manager, you need somebody that can evaluate talent. You need somebody that understands culture and can be accountable and can hold people accountable. You need somebody that can communicate well. And with a head coach, we need somebody that can set a culture. We need somebody that can communicate upstairs, downstairs, sideways, backwards, forwards. Make sure that you get to the first player on the roster and the 53rd player on the roster and figure out how we can continue to build and know that no roster in this league is perfect. You look at all 32 teams and the teams that we can all pick that we say that are going to be in Houston, there are deficiencies in those. How do we make sure that we identify our deficiencies and we can hide them as much as we can. How do we identify our strengths and make sure that we can do as much with those as we can. And again, that comes from having the right discussions with the head coach and the general manager and putting the right people together.”

How involved is chief strategy officer & executive vice president, football operations Paraag Marathe going to be in this search with you to find the coach and the general manager? Is assistant general manager Tom Gamble a candidate in-house for general manager and you talked about not sparing any expense, will you roll over your complete salary cap surplus from this year to next year?

“We’ve always rolled over the salary cap. So, that’s easy to say. And our general manager and head coach will have the opportunity to spend it however they wish to make sure that we can rebuild this roster. Paraag will be with me in the interviews. We’ve certainly done research together and will be moving forward. Tom is a very loyal employee. I think he’s one of the unsung heroes in sort of the scouting world and the professional world in the NFL. I have a ton of respect for Tom Gamble. But again, I think it’s time that we have two new people at the helm from the general manager and the head coach perspective.”

Why did Chip have to call you about his job Saturday night?

“I called Chip.”

Yeah. What was that all about?

“There was a report that said that he was going to be let go and I let him know, ‘Coach, I haven’t made up my mind yet. I’d like to sit down with you at the end of the game on Sunday. But, we are where we are with a two-win team. We’ve had those conversations. So, now I’d like to make sure that we sit down and give you an opportunity to discuss what you see with the team and what you see with our future.’ And we did that for about an hour and a half last night after the game.”

A lot of people think this is what’s wrong with this organization, the leaks coming out the night before. Do you understand and identify that as a problem?

“You have a two-win team that people have been speculating that there were going to be decisions that were made for the last month. I wish that it would have been cleaner, but I think it was evident that we were considering making changes. I wanted to give Chip every opportunity. And again, we sat down at the end of the game after Seattle. We had had conversations previously and we made a decision at the end of the game and I wish that Chip had a better opportunity and I think he’s going to have an opportunity to be a great head coach going forward wherever he decides to go. But, I’m not going to sit and say anything bad about him.”

Two questions; one, other than Paraag, specifically who will be advising you in this process? I think people are very interested in that. And two, a year ago at this time we

asked you what you had learned from all this and you kind of just said, 'Well, I basically want to stay of social media,' is what you said. Is there anything more substantive that you've learned in this ensuing year?

"I stayed off of KNBR too. Again, I think the biggest thing is the relationship between the head coach and general manager. It is so hard to win football games in the National Football League. If you're not completely on the same page within your organization, you give yourself no chance to win. I think it's no secret that I've known Trent for a long time. Not an easy decision to get rid of somebody that I know, that I trust, that I respect, that I consider a friend. Had to be done. Chip, he's a damn good football coach. You can say whatever you want about having one year. I didn't see the future going the right way and I didn't see us being able to reestablish that championship culture. You have to be willing to make those tough decisions. You have to make sure that everything that we do is to make sure that we communicate and collaborate internally and that's what the focus is for us moving forward."

Any advisor other than Paraag? Anybody specific?

"Obviously, my uncle is somebody that I talk to on a very regular basis. There are several other very well respected people, people that have been a part of this organization in the past, that have hired head coaches in that past, certainly coaches that I know that aren't getting back into the game that have been Super Bowl winning coaches and Hall-of-Fame-caliber coaches and some of them are in the Hall of Fame. I'm not going to name people by names, but there are certainly enough people that I know and trust and respect that I think the world would trust and respect their opinion. I just want to give them the respect of their privacy and their anonymity."

It would give people more confidence in you if you name a few names. It would because I think what Santa Rosa Press Democrat columnist Grant Cohn and KNBR host Bryan Murphy is getting at is that you have good intentions, but in the last three years, your intentions haven't come to fruition and the feeling is among people who follow the team that maybe you're not quite well enough connected and don't have a former 49ers head coach Bill Walsh with you? Former 49ers owner Eddie DeBartolo Jr. had Bill. Eddie was not the expert. Bill was the expert.

"And I'm not the expert either, [Santa Rosa Press Democrat columnist] Lowell [Cohn]."

I understand--?

"And this isn't a debate. If you want to sit down and have a conversation, we can."

Who are the people that you can go to to help you to make your vision come true?

"I just addressed that question and out of respect to them, I'm not going to throw peoples' names out there to use those peoples' names. You talk about a Bill Walsh. There's only one Bill Walsh. I wish that there was a Bill Walsh. There's not. We need to find the right person and reestablish a championship culture. Not Bill's culture. Not Jim Harbaugh's culture and Trent Baalke's culture. Not anybody else's culture, but we need to make sure that we start fresh and start with a new culture between a general manager and a head coach and do everything that we can to get us back to that winning way."

I have two questions and one is along those same lines. You have within a stone's throw some of the greatest players that ever played in the NFL, who are 49ers. Many of them are successful businessmen, Raiders owner Mark Davis reached out to great people from the Raiders' past and got advice from them. Are you doing the same thing?

"Absolutely."

I mean, former 49ers TE Brent Jones, former 49ers QB Steve Young, former OL Harris Barton, former 49ers S Ronnie Lott. Are you talking to them?

“There’s another four-time Super Bowl Champion you missed, but yes.”

Whose wife you used to sit on lap?

“She didn’t sit on my lap. I sat on her lap. Let’s make sure that that is clear.”

The other question is; are you embarrassed about the image of the 49ers?

“Absolutely. I am. I mean, this isn’t acceptable to me. It’s not. Our fans deserve better than this. I watched yesterday, I have the utmost respect for a guy like [T] Joe Staley who career-wise, whatever, had no business playing in that game. He wasn’t going to let his players down. He wasn’t going to let his teammates down. You look at our fans. There were 59,000 fans here yesterday for a game that certainly didn’t matter in the win-loss column. There were obviously a lot of reports before the game about people being here, not being here, but you still had 59,000 fans here yesterday because they cared about beating the Seahawks. I owe them so much more than what we’ve given them. And we will give it to them. People have questioned us in the past. I think we’ve tried to answer a lot of the questions. We certainly got close for a period of time, but we didn’t get to our ultimate goal. I’m embarrassed where we are now and I’m going to do everything that we can to get us back.”

You mentioned championship culture a fair amount. I guess, one, what was missing from this year’s team that made it not a championship culture and do you look out there as an example of, ‘That’s championship culture and we need that.’ How do you define it because it is a bit of a vague term?

“I think it’s different when you look at the teams that have had continued success. They’ve done it in different ways. So, you’re not going to just take a carbon copy of what New England has done or what Seattle has done or where the Dallas Cowboys are right now, a team that’s home field advantage throughout the playoffs. You can’t just take a carbon copy and say, ‘Well, it worked over there and that’s exactly what’s going to work here.’ You need to make sure that the right personalities are there. We go back to Bill Walsh. Bill Walsh hired [former 49ers vice president/director of football operations] John McVay and they worked together and they were a team. Whoever hires the other, whether it’s the general manager hiring the head coach, the head coach hiring the general manager, they need to be accountable to each other. They need to have a shared vision. They need to have a shared philosophy and they need to know that I’m going to do everything that I can to give them the resources to execute on that vision, execute on that philosophy. That’s what we’re trying to do. That’s what we’re trying to establish.”

So, Trent Baalke confirmed that he was fired on Friday and yet last night in the locker room the players hadn’t even heard that he had been fired yet. It seems somewhat dysfunctional. Can you explain the order of that happening?

“Yeah, I mean, I let Trent know and Trent went out and said something after the game. I think the game had started or was about to start. I gave him the heads up before the game that we were going to let him go and he knew that I was going to sit down and talk to Chip at the end of the game. And with the players, I sat down with the players today, gave them the opportunity to ask any questions that they had and anything that we address with the players, I’m certainly not going to share. If they want to share their opinions they are more than welcome to.”

Has anybody else been let go of their duties?

“No.”

What is the status of the coaching staff?

“Nobody else has been let go. I talked to the coaches. I talked to as many of the scouts, certainly, that are internal. Obviously, we have some scouts that are on the road that aren’t in the building. I talked to football operations staff and I let them know that the new general manager and the new head coach are going to make the final decisions on who’s here and who’s not. Those folks are all under contract. They are going to have the ability to go somewhere else and there’s no tampering charges, they are free to talk to anybody else. There’s not going to be any concern of that. I want to make sure that their families are taken care of and whether they are here or whether they are somewhere else I wish them the best and I respect everything that they’ve done. It’s not an easy time. Those are the people that on a day like this are forgotten. We talk about the general manager, we talk about the head coach, but we don’t talk about the guys that are really in the trenches and I want to make sure that we do everything that we can to take care of them whether they are here or whether they’re not going forward.”

Just to clarify, everybody in the organization is free to get a job elsewhere at this point?

“Correct.”

The timing, with the amount of jobs that are open, how fast do you want them in?

“We need to make sure that we get it right. So, I don’t expect it to happen tomorrow. But, when we find the right people and when we find the right connection and combination of people we’re going to make sure that they get hired.”