

Disney Suspends ESPN Host for COVID Comments

ESPN host Sage Steele has issued an apology just days after criticizing her employer, The Walt Disney Company, for mandating staffers' vaccination against COVID-19.

Last week, on former Chicago Bears quarterback Jay Cutler's podcast, Steele condemned the companywide rule as "sick" and "scary," noting she "didn't want to" take the inoculation but felt powerless against it.

Disney, for its part, required all employees to take the shots by Sept. 30.

On Tuesday, the ESPN host apologized for her remarks.

"I know my recent comments created controversy for the company, and I apologize," she said in a statement, according to *USA Today Sports*. "We are in the midst of an extremely challenging time that impacts all of us, and it's more critical than ever that we communicate constructively and thoughtfully."

An accompanying statement from ESPN noted the company "embrace[s] different points of view," but was critical of Steele for her public comments against Disney's vaccination mandate for employees.

"At ESPN, we embrace different points of view—dialogue and discussion makes this place great," the brand stated. "That said, we expect that those points of view be expressed respectfully, in a manner consistent with our values, and in line with our internal policies. We are having direct conversations with Sage and those conversations will remain private."

Front Office Sports reported Tuesday Steele would be off the air for a week both because she has tested positive for COVID-19 in recent days and for her controversial comments about Disney's vaccine rule.

"Her critical comments about Disney did not go over well in Bristol or Burbank," FOS reported. "Both ESPN and Steele thought it was appropriate for her to take some time off, said sources."

In addition to her criticism of Disney's vaccination mandate, Steele is also taking heat for calling into question how former President Barack Obama classifies himself ethnically. He argued Obama, who, like her, is biracial, shouldn't identify solely as a black man. {eo}

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