Ashley: My path to cybersecurity

My name is Ashley and my role at Google is CE Enablement Lead for SecOps sales. All that means is I help set up training for customer engineers that support our products. Grew up with a computer, loved the Internet. I have one of the earliest AOL screen names in history and I'm very proud of that. My dad is an engineer and I think there was always an interest in tech. But when I got out of high school, there wasn't a clear path to get there. It wasn't a linear path at all. I was a knucklehead growing up. I gave up in 10th grade and I just didn't care for a long time and I was getting in trouble a lot and I pretty much told myself if I don't join the military and get out of here, I will probably not be here in about 2-3 years if I continue down this path. I joined the army right out of high school, graduated in June, and four days later I was at bootcamp at Fort Jackson, South Carolina as a trumpet player, believe it or not, I come back and had to get a job and was not even tracking on tech jobs or anything like that. I was pulling in carts for a big hardware store, selling video games, retail, box slinger for a freight company. All of that stuff has happened before I even figured out that tech was an option. The military was kind enough to retrain me in IT, and that's kind of how I actually got the official first wave of schooling to be able to actually say, hey, I have the skills to at least be a PC technician. I went back to community college and I actually did find a cybersecurity associates degree program, worked on some certifications. I went to my first DEFCON, which is a big hacking conference, and that set off a light bulb, I think to actually get that clarity on what the path could look like. I landed my first security analyst job back in 2017 and I went to a Veterans Training Program at my last company that was free for vets and ended up getting hired out of the training. I was with that company for almost five years before I came to Google. If you're new and you're just coming in, you have to know how to work with a team. I think a lot of us learned that in customer service settings. Some of the skills I learned working in retail, dealing with hard customers, learning how to even talk to people or diffuse a situation if people are upset about things, just learning how to talk to people. In IT we need that. It's no longer just the tech skills we need, the more T-shaped which they're soft skills, there's people skills, and there's technical skills. You have to have good analysis skills, and again, it doesn't even have to be technical analysis, if you can read a book and pick apart the rhetorical devices of that story, you can do analysis work. I didn't have to be a software engineer to work in this field. For many of us, there's like a math fear, programming is a big hurdle, but we work with people, we work with processes, and you don't necessarily need to have that coding knowledge to understand people or processes. There's so many ways to break in, so do not get discouraged and don't be scared to think outside of the box to get your foot in the door.

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