Chris: My path to cybersecurity

My name is Chris and I'm the Chief Information Security Officer at Google Fiber. We provide high speed Internet to customers across the United States. As the chief information security officer, I'm responsible for making sure that the network stays safe, our customers' data stays safe and that we are supporting law enforcement and others as required. The career path was a long and winding one. My actual first job was working as a butcher at the family grocery store. I eventually ended up with a job in the computer center at college, which is where I learned a lot of my initial computer skills. Then when I graduated from college, I started off as a software developer, designing accounting software for a consulting company supporting the Department of Agriculture. Then I moved on from that to other roles, eventually ending up in one of the first Internet over cable companies. I ran several of their services, email, web services, etc. My stuff kept getting attacked. I fell into cybersecurity because I had to defend the things that I was building. I realized it was fun. I realized that it was a great career opportunity. I've just stuck with that ever since then. When I got into this field, other than a couple of books, there wasn't a lot of training material out there. There were some other people out there that I could ask questions of, and I could get some mentoring from. But as a general rule of thumb, I was on my own. Despite this being a fairly technical field, the most important thing you're going to learn are the connections you're going to make to other people. I made a conscious decision to become actively involved in some of the outside work organizations, the trade associations, the non profits, the meet ups, and other cybersecurity organizations. This enabled me to build the reputation and the relationships so that as my career moved along, people were reaching out to me saying, hey Chris, we have this opportunity, are you interested? Because the cybersecurity industry is so varied, it can seem like there is a tremendous amount you have to learn that there is this huge step that you have to take in order to get into the industry. That can be daunting. But the thing to remember is, once you have that fundamental level of skills and fundamental level of background, there are so many different directions you can go and there's so much opportunity out there. There's this continuous education and curiosity aspect of the job that is so much fun. It means that you are always having the opportunity to learn something new, to change directions and go in new ways because cybersecurity is going to be constantly changing. And that's part of the fun.

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