

Matt: Learning from mistakes

My name is Matt.

I'm a software engineer working in cybersecurity.

When I was in high school, what I really want to do is music, I was a musician.

I went to music school for jazz trombone.

Partway through that process, I realized, no, bandleader in their right mind, looks at a group and thinks, we need a trombone player.

This is what makes us better.

I grew up watching movies like The Matrix, and it's not very realistic to what cybersecurity work actually is, but it is inspiring.

If you dig through the work at specifics of what you do and take the broad step back like you are that cool guy with sunglasses, you're a hacker.

When I first started writing code, I would look at coding errors as a sign that I have done bad.

But as I grew older, a little bit more mature, I realized everyone has coding errors.

Literally the very best software engineer I know writes code and it has errors.

Errors represent a moment where you can take a step back and say, what did I do wrong?

It's a learning opportunity.

Now, I see these like moments where I can look at some problems that I don't understand and be like, why?

Dive into it and expand my knowledge of computer science, which is my whole job.

I see this as a learning process and it's a little bit fun.

One of the really messy coding areas that I've run into in my time here at Google involved fingerprinting when we find a vulnerability.

If we find the same vulnerability later, we don't want to have two vulnerabilities, we don't want to poke someone twice and be like, fix this thing if it's the exact same thing.

We do this thing called fingerprinting where we say this vulnerability has a specific fingerprint and if we find another vulnerability that has the same fingerprint, we're not going to store them separately or treat them separately.

They're effectively the same.

I was running into these errors where things would not fingerprint in the way that I expected them to.

I was literally grinding my gears for weeks, trying to figure out what is going on with this thing?

But when I found it was very satisfying like, that's it.

When you're in the middle of this mess, all of that self-doubt creeps into your brain.

You're like, maybe I'm not as good at this thing as I thought I was.

What I would go back and tell myself: A), it's not endless - it gets better.

Once you figure it out, that feeling of reward is incredible.

But B), also, it's okay to rope people in if you are struggling with something, I always advocate for asking for help.

Most people are really excited to go help you out with this thing, especially when it's a convoluted problem.

I am so thrilled I ended up in cybersecurity.

Cybersecurity is having its moment.

People are realizing, waking up to the amount of data that they're putting out into the world and they're starting to care about it.

Every day there's something new.

Every day there's something exciting for me to do and yeah, get into it.

Cybersecurity is the way.

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