

# RSA® Conference 2022

San Francisco & Digital | June 6 – 9

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## Opening the Valve on an Untapped Human Pipeline

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Distinguished Security Strategist

Leader of SURGe @ Splunk

@meansec

# TRANSFORM



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# System Owner/User Discovery (T1033)

Ryan Kovar (@meansec)

- Distinguished Security Strategist at **Splunk**
- MSc(Dist) Information Security
- Minister of OODAlooping at Splunk
- US/UK DoD/PubSec **Nation State Hunting** Roles  
most recently at DARPA
- Enough white in beard to speak authoritatively
- Co-Creator of Boss of the SOC CTF
- Hates printers and trilobites



- What?
- Who?
- How?
- Where?
- Conclusion



A photograph of a large industrial facility, likely a gas or oil processing plant. The foreground and middle ground are dominated by a network of massive, white-painted steel pipes. These pipes are arranged in a complex web, some running horizontally across the frame, others curving elegantly. The pipes are supported by a metal framework of beams and ladders. In the background, there are several large, cylindrical storage tanks and various industrial buildings under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

What are we talking  
about today?





**AKA YASVRT**

# SURGe

by Splunk





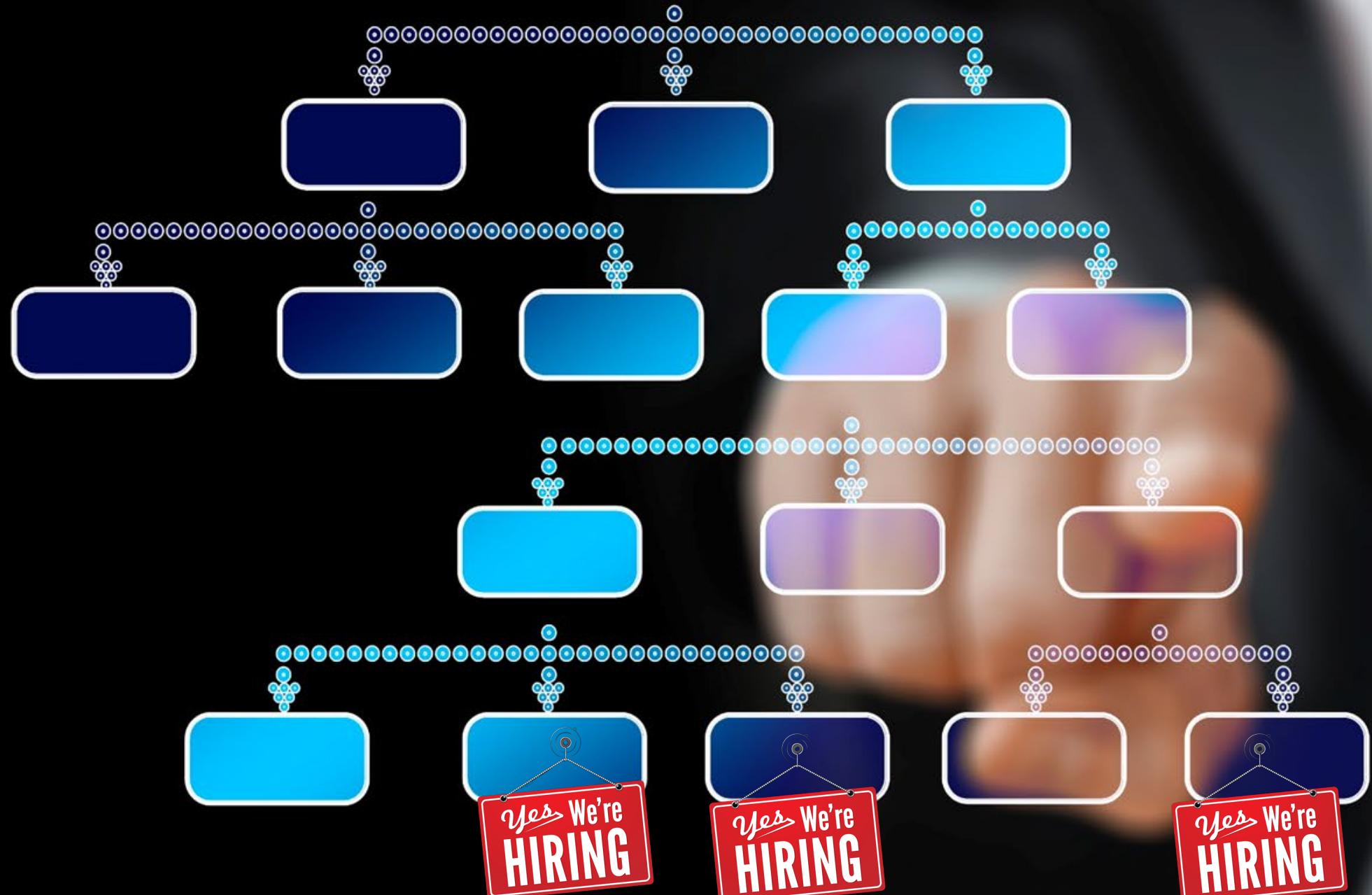


**Brittany Arsenault**  
@B\_Arsenault

...

**ENTRY-LEVEL JOB OPENING:** Minimum 3 years exp,  
must speak 4 languages, have 2 olympic medals and a  
reference letter from Barack Obama.

12:19 PM · Sep 20, 2014 · Twitter Web Client



**390+ candidates in 30 hours. 10 “move forward”  
candidates. 4 perfect candidates. 2 hires**



**So who was I trying to recruit?**





ALASKA SENATOR TED STEVENS  
(1923–2010)

“AND AGAIN,  
THE INTERNET IS  
NOT SOMETHING  
THAT YOU JUST  
DUMP SOMETHING ON.

IT'S NOT A BIG TRUCK.

IT'S, IT'S A SERIES OF TUBES!”

—28 JUNE 2006



And I am a million data points



**Early career or  
entry level,  
second  
(third/fifth/tenth)  
career, veteran,  
returning to  
workforce mum,  
just graduated, or  
whatever.**

**A wonderful  
human**



A long, white, segmented pipeline stretches across a green, hilly landscape under a blue sky. The pipeline is supported by a series of grey metal brackets. In the background, there are power poles and wires. The foreground shows a grassy field.

So how did I get them

**A very patient recruiting  
team. Thanks Heidi Smith!**



NEW TO CYBER?

SUMMIT TALK

# I Want to Work in Cybersecurity... Whatever That Means!

**Ryan Kovar**, Distinguished Security Strategist, Splunk

**FREE** Summit: April 21 | Live Online 

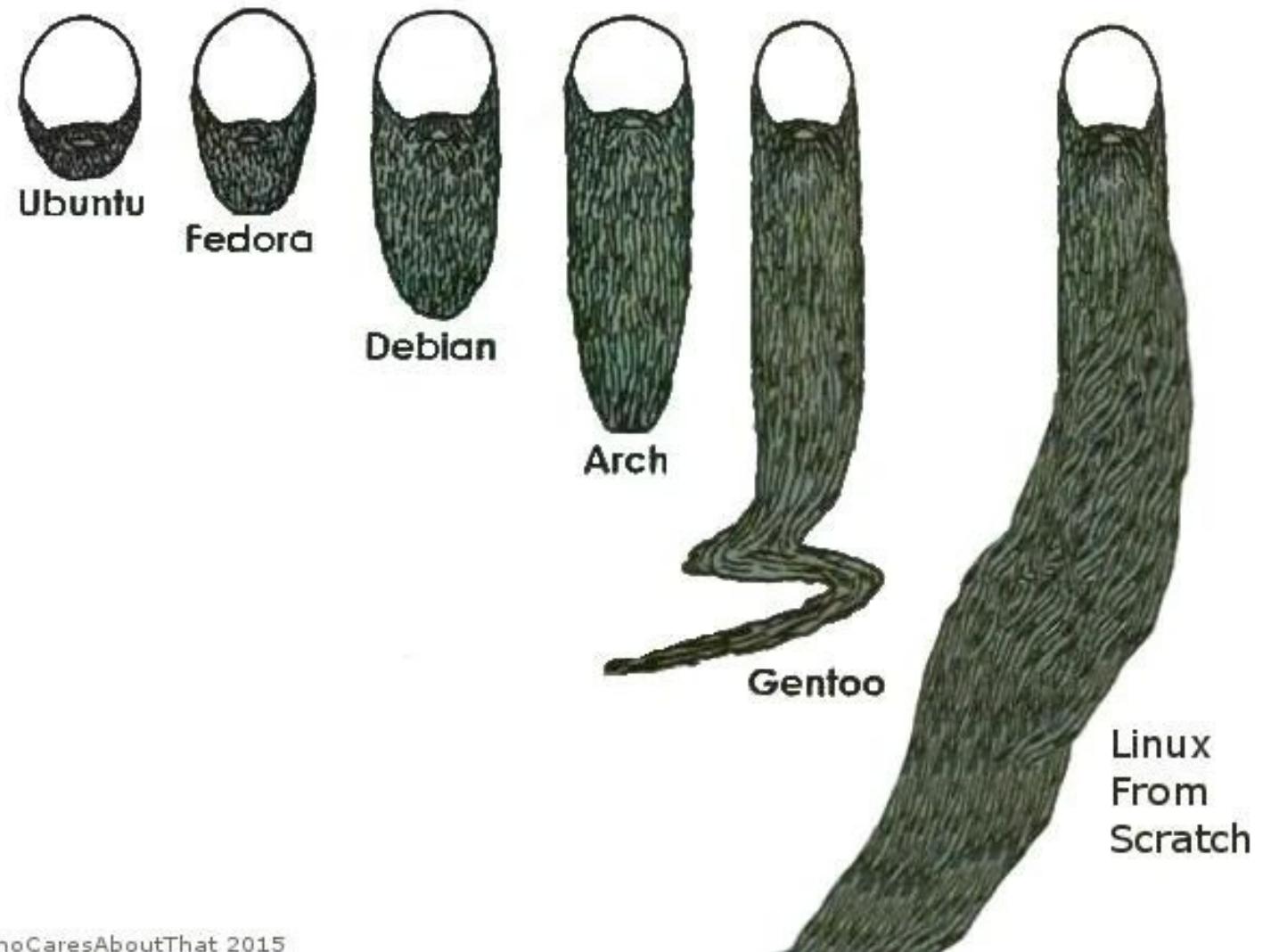


SANS

**Two years to be  
a world expert  
in “something”**

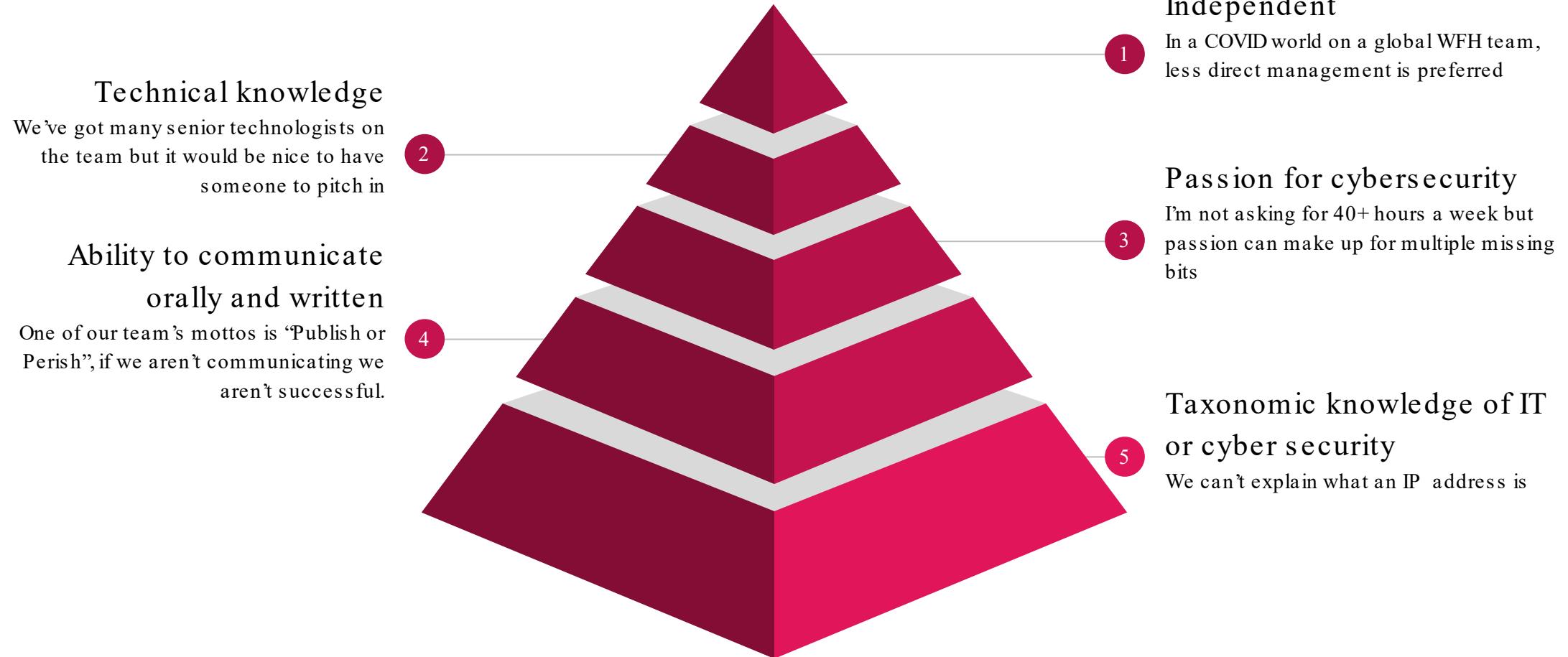


# Experience != Knowledge



WhoCaresAboutThat 2015

# SURGe's hierarchy of needs for an entry level role



# My approach to writing the job description

- Should not use exclusionary terms around “years of experience” or gender
- Be very upfront with being OK with second career
- Ask for needs not wants.
- Provide fun, engaging prose that is representative of our team culture



## Responsibilities

Your day-to-day work could be supporting senior Security Strategists' research on larger projects designed to resolve cybersecurity problems using Splunk and machine learning. You might finish your day by jumping on a LinkedIn Live panel and chatting about the most recent Ransomware outbreak. Or you could be putting the final touches on your BlackHat CFP submission and copyediting a colleague's blog post before working on the script for your YouTube video. In this role, you will become a trusted advisor and partner to Splunk customers while also being on a team that is resolving their (and everyone else's) biggest problems.

## Qualifications

We are seeking an **early-career strategist candidate** (or on their 9th career pivot) in cybersecurity. That can mean many things, and none of them may have to do with "years of experience." Perhaps you are coming home from your last deployment to Afghanistan, or you are a system admin who wants to move into cyber. Maybe you are a librarian or journalist looking for a change? Just finished university?

Let's talk! Saying that, we do have some specific areas of knowledge that we are looking for you to have when you walk in the door:

- You must be passionate about (cyber/information) security
- You have learned basic IT, cybersecurity, or Splunk concepts through education or on-the-job training.
- You are comfortable communicating (verbally or written but not dancing). You either already have that talent or are looking to learn how to do it better.
- You are proficient in at least one of these subjects: security operations, Python, Splunk, social media production, copyediting, data science/machine learning, public speaking, IT networking, "cloud," system administration, writing, or academic-style research.

# Responsibilities

- Example vignettes that give flavor of the role
  - “LinkedIn Live panels”
    - We are an outward facing team. Communication abilities are important
  - Conference CFP submissions and security research
    - Publish or perish!
  - Copyediting a script for social media
    - New media and collaborative work
  - Trusted advisor to customers
    - This is still a software sales company

# Qualifications



- No years of EXP? How do you make sure someone is qualified?
  - Refer back to my SURGe hierarchy of needs
    - Ask people to be proficient in one of a variety of skills
      - Do you really need a Python AND data science AND RE expert in one person?
    - If you have a specific need, call it out
      - People have to communicate on my team. That was a non negotiable.
    - Help people to NOT self select out.
      - "Perhaps you are coming home from your last deployment to Afghanistan, or you are a system admin who wants to move into cyber. Maybe you are a librarian or journalist looking for a change? Just finished university?"



<https://bit.ly/HumanPipeline>

## 1 ✓ Confirmatory bias

This bias leads us to actively search for information which confirms our existing ideas about people. Confirmatory bias can also lead to decision makers discounting key information which contradicts their pre-existent beliefs.



## 2 Affinity bias

This bias leads us to favour people who look like us, sounds like us or that share a similar background or interests. Affinity bias can mean that we fail to see the faults in people who are like us and are more critical of those who we perceive to be different.



## 3 Social comparison bias

In order to identify both individual and group identity we constantly compare ourselves to others. While it sounds unpalatable a central part of this belief is that we are better than others.

# UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

II

Unconscious biases are our natural people preferences. We are hard-wired to prefer people who look similar, sounds similar and have similar interests.

These preferences bypass our normal, rational and logical thinking. We use these processes very effectively (we call it intuition) but the categories we use to sort people may not be logical, modern or legal.

II

4



Want to know more  
I have written several in-depth blogs on the subject of unconscious bias. Check out [www.socialbeings.co.uk](http://www.socialbeings.co.uk) for more information.

5 ↑ Senior leaders

Senior leaders ALL need to role model inclusive behaviours to create a culture in which biases can be recognised and mitigated against.

6



Encourage your colleagues and teams to recognise their own biases. Help them to understand that these biases are normal and can have a large impact on the way we interact with others.

7



Talking about difference should not be uncomfortable. Foster an environment in which speaking about difference people's lives is encouraged and commonplace.



grammarly







# Shipit

splunk®>

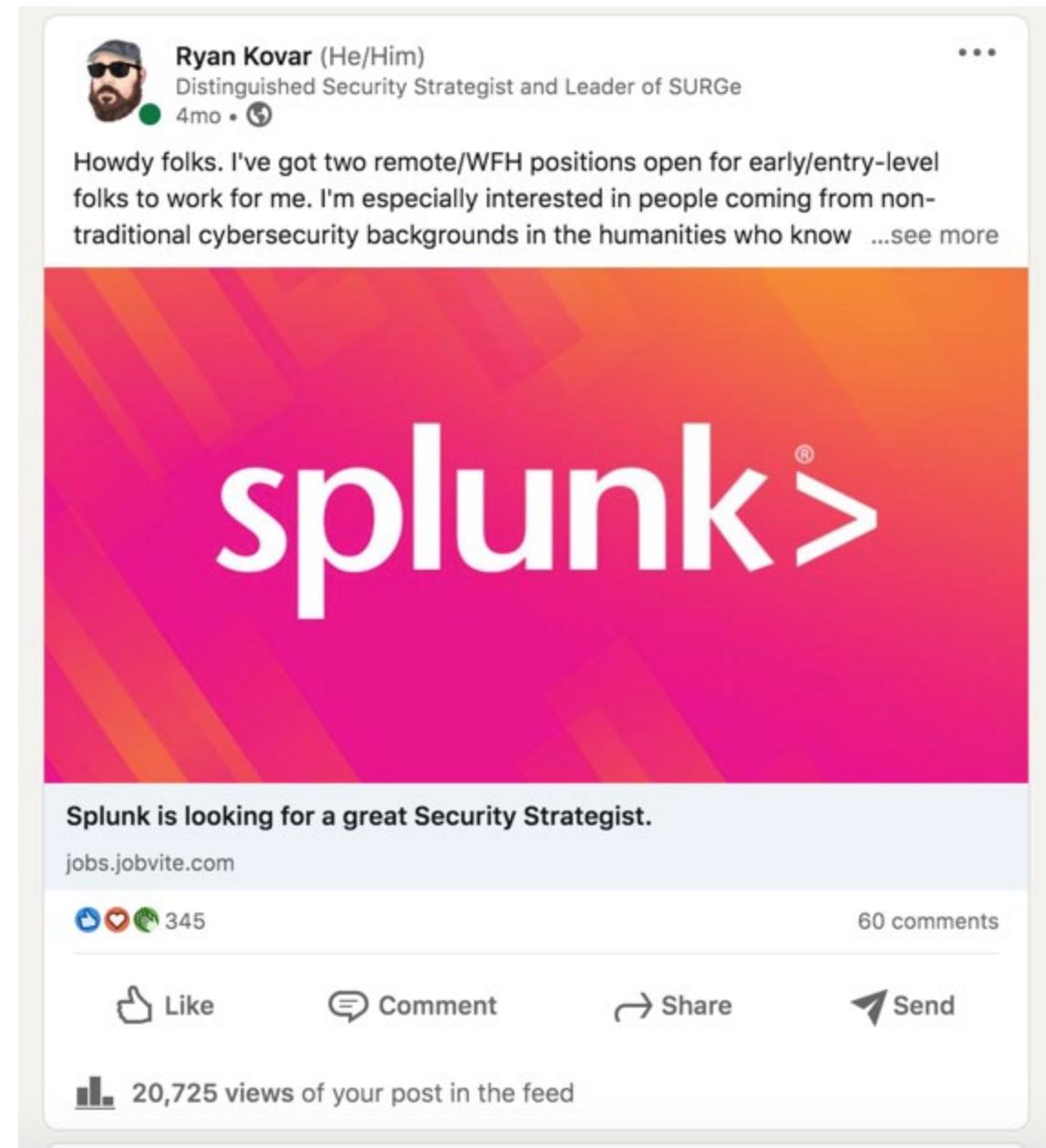
RSA Conference 2022 |

A long, dark green pipeline with vertical ribbing and metal bands runs diagonally across the frame, supported by concrete pillars. It is set against a backdrop of rugged mountains with patches of snow and green vegetation. The sky is overcast.

# Where did we look?

A close-up photograph of a person's hand, palm facing forward, pointing its index finger towards a row of white, six-sided dice. The dice are arranged horizontally and spell out the word "PROACTIVE". The background is blurred green foliage.

**PROACTIVE**



**splunk®**

**RSA**Conference2022 |

Ryan Kovar (He/Him)  
Distinguished Security Strategist and Leader of SURGe  
4mo • 1

Howdy folks. I've got two remote/WFH positions open for early/entry-level folks to work for me. I'm especially interested in people coming from non-traditional cybersecurity backgrounds in the humanities who know ...see more

20,725 views of your post in the feed

Splunk is looking for a great Security Strategist.  
[jobs.jobvite.com](https://jobs.jobvite.com)

345 60 comments

Like Comment Share Send

20,725 views of your post in the feed



**kyle.tobener** Kyle Tobener · 7-22

Reviewing entry level #infosec jobs part 10 #cybersecurity  
#entrylevel #infosecjobreviews #techtok

♬ No Type - Rae Sremmurd



Ryan Kovar  
TikTok @meansec  
@kyle.tobener

Howdy folks. I've got two positions open for early/entry-level folks to work for me. I'm especially interested in people coming from non-traditional cybersecurity backgrounds in the know.

Entry Level Infosec Job  
Reviews part 10



work for me. I'm especially interested in people coming from non-traditional cybersecurity backgrounds in th

kn  
Entry Level Infosec Job  
Reviews part 10 got

**75,000 views total on two TikToks!**

Ryan Kovar (@meansec) · Jul 22, 2021

Howdy folks. I've got two positions open for early/entry-level folks to work for me. I'm especially interested in people coming from non-traditional cybersecurity backgrounds in the humanities who know how to right gud. If you've got questions hit me up. [jobs.jobvite.com/splunk/job/oxk...](https://jobs.jobvite.com/splunk/job/oxk...)

12:02 PM · Jul 22, 2021 · Twitter Web App

View Tweet activity

191 Retweets 34 Quote Tweets 424 Likes

Reply

Ryan Kovar (@meansec) · Jul 22

Replies to @meansec

Oh, and it is 100% remote/WFH if desired.

1 2 50

## X Tweet Analytics

Ryan Kovar @meansec

Howdy folks. I've got two positions open for early/entry-level folks to work for me. I'm especially interested in people coming from non-traditional cybersecurity backgrounds in the humanities who know how to right gud. If you've got questions hit me up.  
<https://jobs.jobvite.com/splunk/job/oxkfgfw6> ...

Impressions 170,060

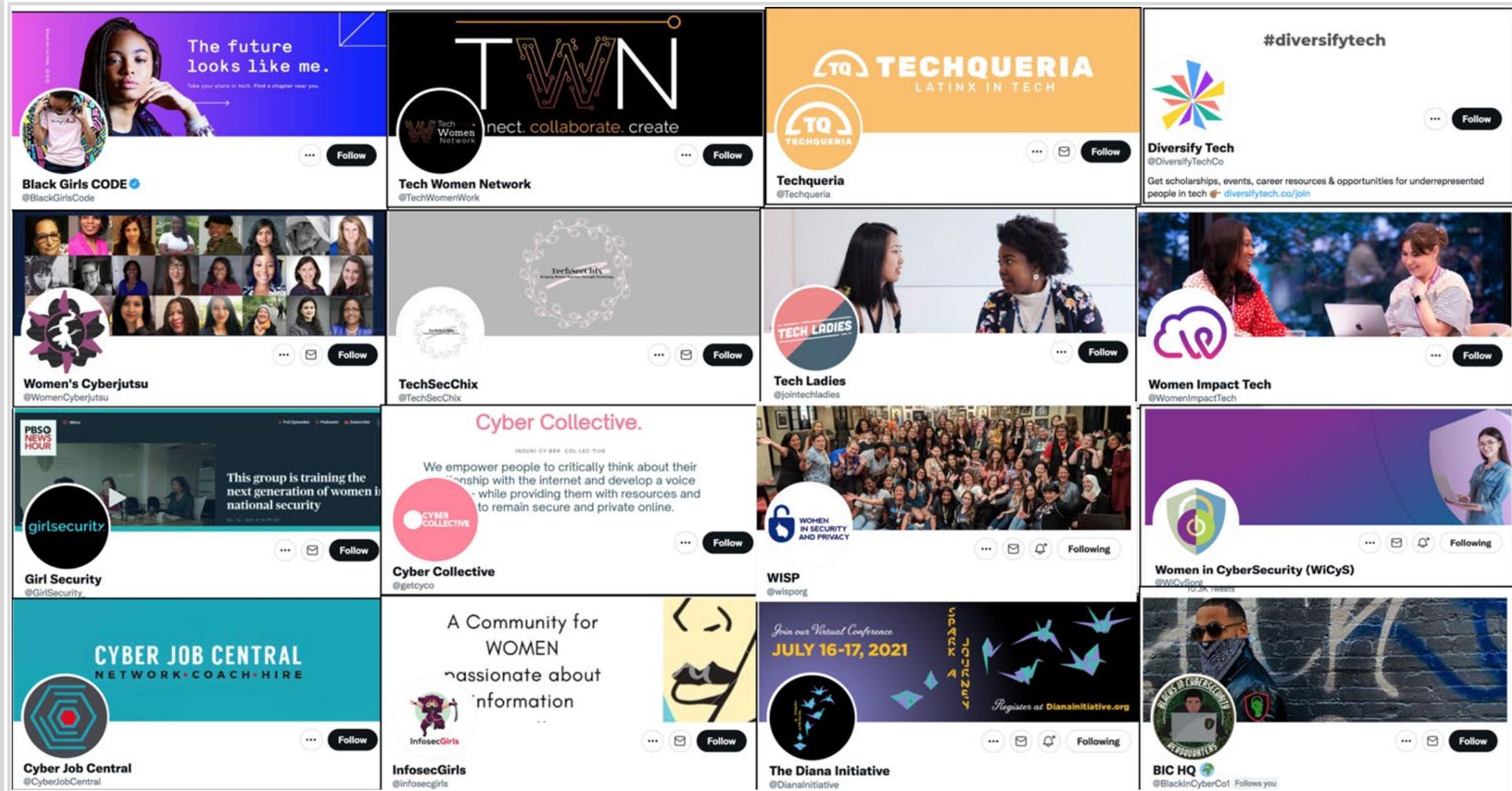
times people saw this Tweet on Twitter

Media views 1

all views (autoplay and click) of your media are counted across videos, vines, gifs, and images

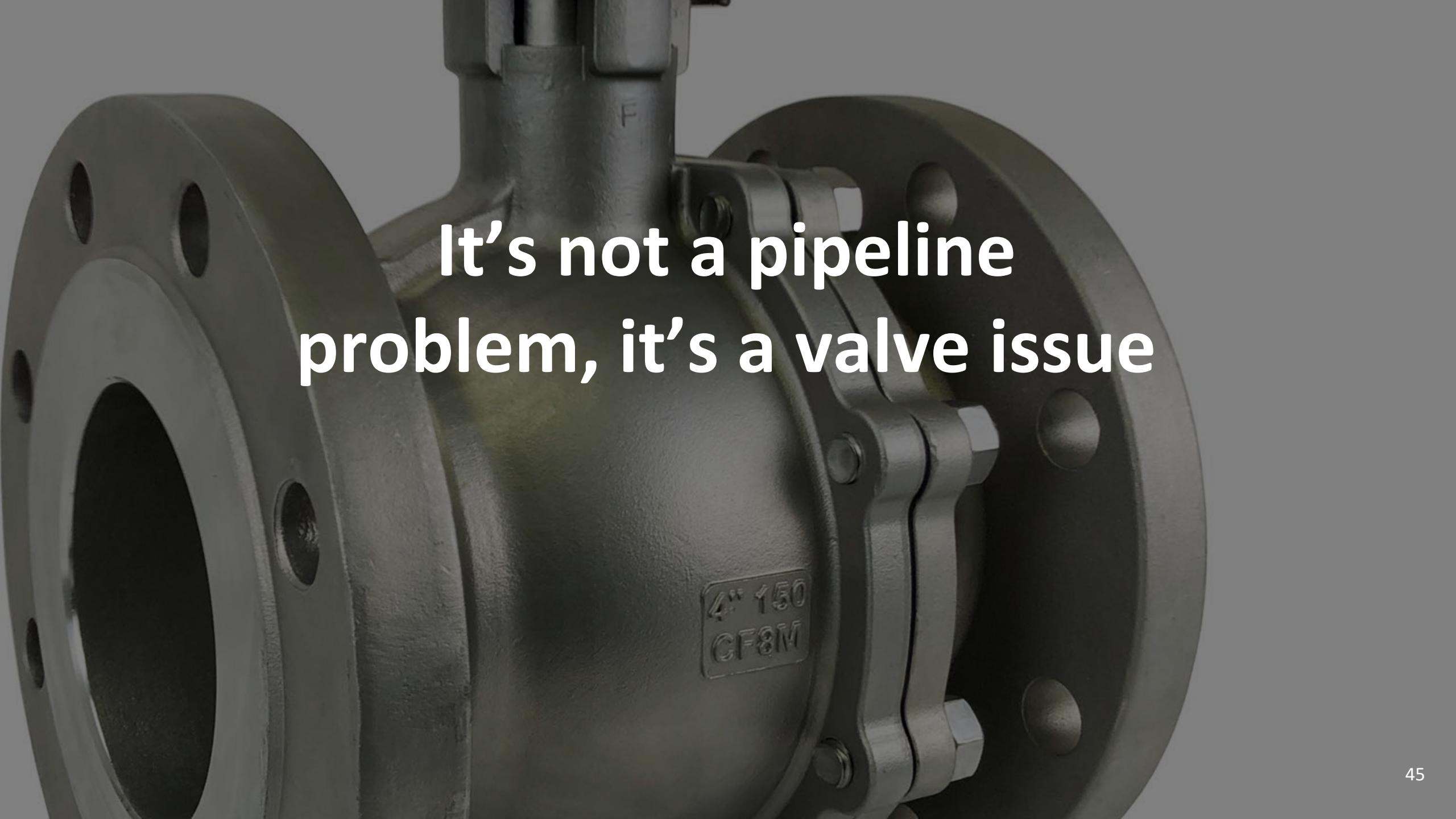
Total engagements 5,887

times people interacted with this Tweet



# Conclusions





**It's not a pipeline  
problem, it's a valve issue**

# Apply What You Have Learned Today

- Next week you should:
  - Identify what you **need** versus what you **want** in a role
- In the first three months following this presentation you should:
  - Make an intentional approach to inclusion and being open to entry level career folks
  - Open your aperture to who you are willing to hire
  - Break your own biases
- Within six months you should:
  - Establish relations with organizations and people who can help you source new, unrealized human potential.

# Contact info



Ryan Kovar

 @meansec