Alexander Cannell

CSIA 6010

Guest Speaker Melissa Ventrone

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to Melissa’s presentation. Melissa is an Equity partner at Thomas Coburns. Also a former United States Marine Major and Logistics officer for 21 years. I would like to thank her for her service, my grandpa served during World War 2 fighting up the boot of Italy. He made it all the way up to the border of Switzerland and Germany when the war ended and had to return home. His regiment was the 222nd from Cedar City, Utah. He told me that he had always wanted to make it to Berlin.

Her presentation was based on some experiences in her past where the need to choose between two equally bad scenarios. This correlates our assignment this week; where we relate an experience we had in our past to decide between two bad situations? This presentation helped me start to get an idea of what you want for that assignment. Professor Pogue stated at the end of the presentation you told us that you would like us to learn how to perform tasks without the full knowledge of how to perform the task. I totally agree with Professor Pogue; I have learned this in my current position at ancestry. My manager expects excellence without being overbearing, that being said he also helps us if we truly need additional support or explanation.

Melissa’s first experience that she told us was while she was an Marine on Rock Island in 2008. She was an officer and a lower ranked Company Gunny told her that his business/civilian work took precedence over the military as a reservist and would be missing Drill the next day in front of new Marines. Melissa gave us her three possible decisions that she had to make as the senior officer. She could tell the company gunny that it was ok, he has to stay because it is his first drill, or reprimand him in front of all the new or junior Marines. I would have told him privately that he had to be at the drill tomorrow because it was his first day of drill, and let him know that it wasn't cool to dictate orders to a senior officer. Continuing on with Melissa’s story; Melissa told the gunny he was to be at drill the next morning. The next morning the gunny didn't show up, and didn't let Melissa know he wasn't showing up. Her options were Non Judicial punishment(NJP) which could ruin a career, Letter of Reprimand which is a letter between the two parties that doesn't follow with him throughout his career but is still on record, or Adverse Fitness Report. The gunny was a good solder, and Melissa didn't want to ruin his career. She choose a letter of reprimand and the gunny wasn't too pleased about it. I honestly think she made the correct decision, she didn't say she had any further issues with the gunny afterwards, and she did meet him a couple of years later after the fact and he was very nice.

Melissa relates another experience where she was a helping a company during a ransomware attack where the company was trying to decide whether or not to disclose a breach or not. Whether or not they decided to disclose to the public would have negative effects on the company. The company Melissa worked for recommended that the company disclose, and all the evidence showed that they should disclose, but the company decided not to disclose. They lost some clients in the end but was able to save their business. This brings me to a question to ask Professor Pogue what do you do when that happens? I mean what do you as a Security Professional recommend that the company do something and they don't? How do you handle situations like that?

Melissa ends with one more scenario from back when she was a Marine. She was a logistics officer for the camp Lemonier in africa. She was over Morale and welfare for the camp. There tents in the camp had lost their fire retardant so that the tents were unsafe at the time. So the general in the camp liked to smoke in his tent after lunch. There was a smoking area next to the tents. The fire marshall insisted that the smoking area be moved away from the lunch area and the tents. But there was a counter order from the general of the camp. The problems are moving the smoking area is going against a direct order, and not moving the smoking area could cause harm to people and property. Either way she is in a bad situation, both ways you can see her getting reprimanded. She made the decided to move the smoking area to a different area, adding additional protections between the smoking area and the tents. Melissa stated that the new area because of all the barriers was a lot hotter than the old area, which made people not use the smoking area. Now I don't know if that means that they stopped smoking, or if they just smoked somewhere else. I mean if they stopped smoking that is a win in my book. All parties were unhappy, but Melissa kept her job. I think she made a good call, I think following the fire marshal was the right call. What if something happened and the tents caught fire or even worse someone died because of a fire? Melissa would be responsible, if I was Melissa I couldn't live with myself if that happened and it could have been prevented. My grandpa who i mentioned earlier would say the tents being so close to a smoking area is a safety violation. If we did anything he didn't like he would yell, “Safety Violation!!” To this day my conscience still yells safety violation whenever i am about to do something unsafe or wrong. I really enjoyed Melissa’s presentation, and I’m glad she took the time to tell us about her life experiences. She taught me the importance of making the best out of two bad decisions.