

my life at e-kraal innovation hub



June 11, 2021

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26th February year 2021. Few minutes past 9.00 in the morning, alighting from Toyota hiace van. New location, new “friends”, I have quoted the word friends because of my 19 colleagues, I knew none of them in person, just names I have been seeing on virtual meetings. Back to the story, looking around to find clues or hints where I am. No label anywhere, no name of the building am seeing. Just beautiful building with awesome parking lot and large number of ambulances parked along. Tracing back the route I have come along. No clue how to get back on my own. But, no worry, am not alone. That what I told myself. Few protocol processes done and we are welcomed to the facility. We were shown around, the training class, the computer laboratory and the secretariat office.

The nature of the class arrangement and kind of sits and tables showed me, this is where am supposed to be. The little panic I had now is fading away. The initials written on offer letters (NCSTP) are also indicated on the facilities. Its becoming a real story. I could feel the presence of knowledge and skills available around. I could see really its worth time. The program of the day was well planned and adhered to. All activities took place as programmed. Wait, could I forget about table manners we were taught? Previously, my knowledge about drinking glasses was every glass is a glass. Well, at least I had watched a few movies and observed there is a special kind of glass used to drink wine. Then, more than ten different kind of glasses and what they are used to drink are explained to me. Wow, in fact, I have already started learning. Its really character over skill as explained during the virtual meetings. Procedure of feeding different meals was explained to us.

Evening, same day. We are taken to apartments where we will be residing in. high class apartments, never been in such a house before. Beautiful floor and kitchen and beddings. This is really a living apartment with what I would need to be myself and pursue what I have for at e-kraal innovation hub. I could say that day one was full of lessons that could take so long for me to learn on my own.

Bootcamp week was the initial learning stage of the six months program. The aim of the said was to consolidate the pre-requisite courses that we had undertaken. Monday 1st march 2021, instructors introduce the activities we will be carrying out through week zero of the 6 months at e-kraal. Basically, networking activities.

I had been on networking field so it wasn’t supposed to be hard for me. Though the writeup had whole new concepts, I was so excited to learn and implement them. The activities were to carried out in groups so discussions could help to learn new concepts. Panic was still, we must do our best as these activities were to determine who will truly be adopted and enrolled onto the program. So, we tried our best with some still unsure of their progression on the innovation hub. In fact, some colleagues even had carried few wears with them because of uncertainty of enrollment.

I had never interacted physically with any physical device before. This time round during bootcamp, we were given the core networking devices, cisco devices that is a router and a switch. I was so happy actually to be able to operate one. Here came our first challenge, the devices we were given had been configured by previous cohorts and had the unknown password which we needed to get into the device and perform some configs. We were to reset the switch and router configurations to configure our own. Among our group, no one had ever done it before. But, google is a friend, we had a page with the procedure on google.

We followed step by step but every time we did the last step, the device could boot to the initial config. It took us over an hour to actually figure it out. And from it I learn so much with the device.

Another challenge as I recall was, Eric, one of our instructors told us that we should not configure the postfix email server as other groups had done. We had to run a different mail server, Zimbra. Details and tutorials about Zimbra were limited online and none among us had configured one before. It was time learn and do. The motto was, “we have to try work”. We did a number of retries without success. It was a great learning experience though it didn’t work. We switched to postfix and it worked. The week was a success with all the activities completed successfully.

The program was formally inaugurated on Monday 8th March and all the twenty trainees enrolled successfully to begin the training. This was among my best days in my life because at least, a new phase of life had officially started. A journey towards being among the best cyber warriors in our country Kenya. We had been prepared mentally that the program is tough and intensive, it was confirmed on this day, thanks to Mr. Njoga. I can’t forget the question on whom we want to be at the end of the program and mixed answers were found.

The expectation from the management was that our aim was to be one. Anyways, we are different with different aspirations. Again, cybersecurity is a wide field and people can venture in different aspects of it. We re-affirmed the management that we were up for the task and ready to turn around any obstacle on our way. We promised to bring out the best in us. The training commenced the day after and still going on the day of writing this paper.

Wow, at e-kraal innovation hub, every day is a learning day. Cybersecurity had been a whole new concept to me. Had engaged on a few online courses about cybersecurity, but all they could teach was computer attacks and how they are propagated. At e-kraal, back to the cybersecurity basics, technologies and concepts, legal frameworks and Kenyan laws revolving around data processing and cybercrimes. Naming some few benefits gathered academically:

1. Understanding of the national and international laws governing computer security and cyber security at large. The jurisdiction of these laws and how they are applied to comprehend cyber criminals
2. Understanding of cybersecurity concepts and vocabularies.
3. Critical thinking and research skills.
4. Networking concepts and hands on experience in handling networking devices and calculating network subnets
5. Preparing presentation concepts and presentation skills in general
6. Cryptography concepts and public key infrastructure.
7. Patriotism

This is just to name a few. Awkward thing is, prior to joining e-kraal I had never wore an official attire before. Thanks to e-kraal it’s on daily basis. Helping us to train to fit the official job market. Again, Mr. Charles and the curriculum requirement has made us all and me precisely to do what I have never thought of in my past life. Wearing a suit. First day, feeling bossy smart and funny at the same time. I really am becoming to a cybersecurity professional.

Taking personal responsibility and discipline are core virtues have really learnt to practice at e-kraal. Apart from the academic part, morals and virtues are instilled in e-kraal. Come to think of it, in the middle of a pandemic(covid-19), its your responsibility to take care of yourself and the team. One single infection will close down the program. With the stipend given every month, its very tempting to get one self into partying and youthful activities, but you will be risking a life changer opportunity here at e-kraal. This has always been the trend in my mind. I can’t risk losing a life changing opportunity for me and my friends because of vague “sherehe”.

On top of all the benefits acquired at e-kraal, there have been some challenges. Academically, most of the units or subjects being taught were relatively new to me and had some challenges catching up. Cybersecurity governance, frameworks and standards are some of them. Massive reading throughout the night because they were really large documents. Applying them to given case studies, that was a awesome learning experience.

Also, having to leave behind a young family for this opportunity was not easy for me. Both then and till now. A family that I love so much to miss them daily. The program is intensive and most weekends occupied with personal work or allocated assignments. I can not visit them as much as I want because still, they are far. This has been the greatest challenge for me because others are easily sorted upon positive thinking and research in case, they are academics. But it’s a gamble I had to take, I have to pursue my career in order to become a cyber warrior and secure a good job with good earnings to be able to give them the best of this life.

To conclude, I would like to appreciate the cohort 3 NCSTP secretariat for taking good care of us and the e-kraal community for giving me a chance to be trained on hands on skills. For giving me a chance to interact with real cybersecurity professionals practicing this profession in the field. For giving me a chance to become the best version of me. At the end, to become among the best cyber warriors my country Kenya has.