Cyber Unlocked: The Ultimate Guide to Breaking into Cybersecurity

A Practical 10-Step Action Plan to Break Into Cyber

By: Gerald Auger, PhD

About the Author

Gerald Auger, PhD

Dr. Auger is a 20+ year cybersecurity professional, academic, and author. He has been the cybersecurity architect at MUSC, a multi-billion dollar academic medical center. He currently delivers Cybersecurity program development and maturity consulting services, educates as Adjunct Faculty in The Citadel Military College Cyber Sciences department, advises on all cybersecurity content at Haiku, and fulfills the role of Chief Content Creator on the successful YouTube channel Simply Cyber.

Dr. Auger is passionate about cybersecurity and has educated 10's of thousands of students on the discipline. Dr. Auger holds a PhD in cyber operations and two Masters in Computer Science and Information Assurance.

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Breaking into cybersecurity can feel overwhelming.

If only you had a playbook to follow.... This is it!

Welcome to the exciting, fast-paced, and ever-evolving world of cybersecurity!

This short guide will take you through a comprehensive, yet simple, 10-step approach to starting your career in this booming industry. I'll take you from gaining initial knowledge to landing your first job, and we'll even cover how you can continue growing and leveling up in your career.

The path is not easy but it will optimize your opportunity.

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The 10 Steps to Winning!

The 10 steps below are deliberately ordered to stack on top of each other. Therefore maximizing the value of this approach is optimal if followed in sequential order. Opportunities to leverage previous steps will be explicitly called out in the process..

You're here for the goods right?
So let's get into the process!

Step 1: Getting Baseline Cybersecurity Knowledge

Every journey begins with a single step. In the realm of cybersecurity, that step is acquiring a foundational understanding of the subject. There is no way around this. You may have some prior technical experience and this will shorten the time to complete this step.

You need to understand the fundamentals of how computers talk to each other (networking), how computers work (operating system), what cybersecurity is as a discipline and as an industry, and learn what general threats there are to businesses.

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You aren't ready to work in the industry yet, but this foundational will enable you to absorb and learn the specific cybersecurity role knowledge later in the process. Here are some free resources to get you started (note there are tons out there):

Learn Basic Linux:
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLKT_MCUeiwfK18Io6kvwrrhqQyQnV5W

Learn Basic Networking:
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLKT_MCUeiyUKmYaakznsZeU4lZYwt_j

Learn Operating Systems:
http://samples.jbpub.com/9781449626341/26341_CH01_Garrido.pdf

"Success is neither magical nor mysterious. Success is the natural consequence of consistently applying the basic fundamentals." - Jim Rohn
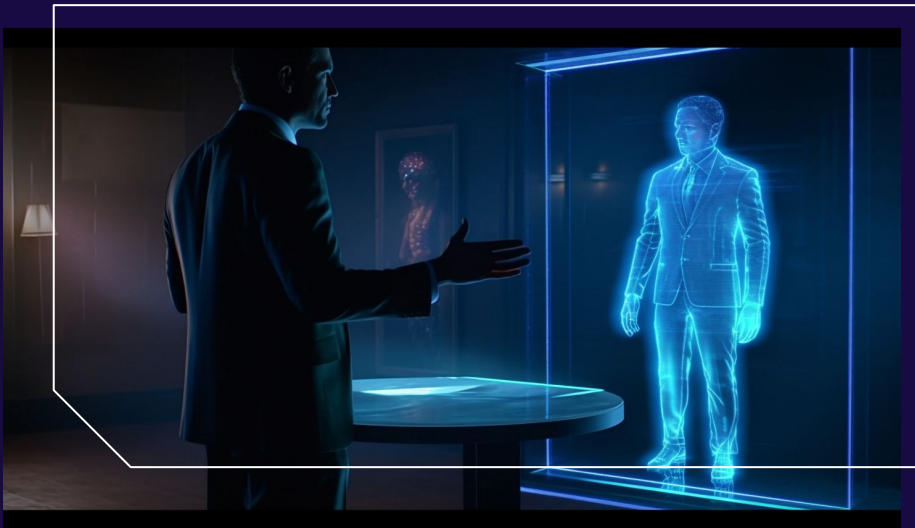
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Step 2: Building Your LinkedIn Profile

It's time to let the world know you're serious about a cybersecurity career. This step will show you how to build a compelling LinkedIn profile that highlights your skills, passion, and dedication. You'll also learn how to use LinkedIn to start connecting with other professionals and influencers in the cybersecurity industry.

You may push back on building a profile, but really at this time it's the dominant space on the Internet for professionals to engage and for employers to 'look' at you. A LinkedIn profile gives you an opportunity to have a "richer" resume and showcase your projects, initiatives, and impact you can deliver.

People and businesses will look at LinkedIn and having a professional, engaging, and cyber-branded profile will set expectations and frame you as a cyber pro.

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Step 2 (Continued): Building Your LinkedIn Profile

Quick tips to make your LinkedIn profile look professional.

1. Search for "LinkedIn Banner" on Canva.com templates (for free) and create a professional banner.

2. Use a professional photo for your bio pic. (Canva can enhance a bio pic too!)

3. Start your title with an action verb, and make the title a statement of how you will deliver value to a potential employer, (i.e. Delivering cyber risk reduction to healthcare providers).

4. Use the "Featured" section to call out the most impactful value you can deliver. For example, your blog, your GitHub repo, your website, etc.

5. Make the first 3 sentences of your "About" section a sales pitch on why you're awesome. Add more content after, but the first 3 sentences are 'above the fold' of the "...see more" link.

If you want a deeper dive on optimizing and hacking your profile, check out this video with Cybersecurity Marketing Executive, Virginia Case, giving you all the best tips.

Reviewing YOUR Personal Branding -
#Roasts & #Masterclass

4:30PM EST 15 SEPT 2022

SC SIMPLY CYBER

Virginia Case
Value Strategist & Brand Fixer

STRATAC

LIVE STREAM | #SimplyCyber #Cybersecurity

This interview is straight FIRE!

"Constructive Roasting 🔥 of YOUR Personal Branding LIVE #MasterClass"
https://youtube.com/live/dp_z9qMk3u8

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Step 3: Staying Informed

One of the keys to success in cybersecurity is staying up-to-date with the latest threats, technologies, and trends. You will be asked in any cyber job interview how you stay current in the industry, so having this checked off early will set you up for success.

As you get exposed to terminology, threat actors, vendors, and common issues, you will begin to absorb learning materials a lot better because you will understand the context of what you are learning.
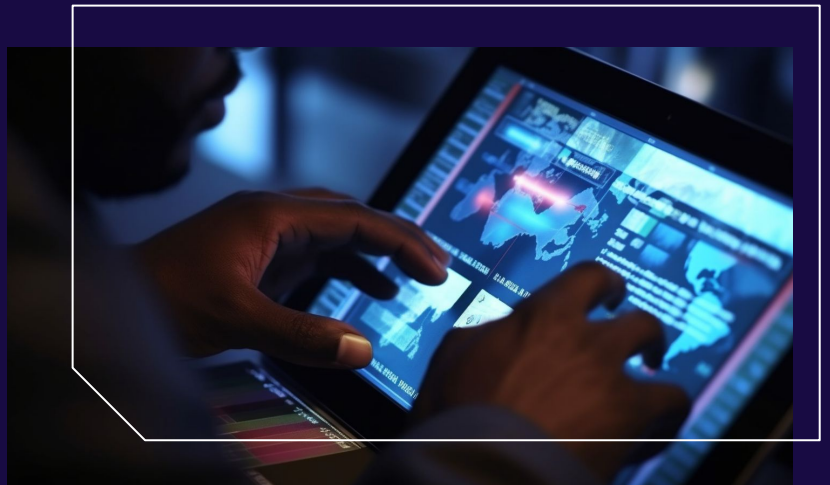
There are multiple opportunities to stay informed in the industry. You built a profile in step 2, so you can search for '#cybersecurity' and have tailored information. There are multiple industry leaders publishing blogs.

Another fantastic option, I (Gerald Auger, PhD) host a live daily threat briefing every weekday morning at 8AM EST with hundreds of professionals. This includes joining daily cyber threat briefings like Simply Cyber's weekday sessions and subscribing to leading industry newsletters and podcasts.

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Step 3: Staying Informed

Here are some great resources to get you started:

1. Simply Cyber Daily Cyber Threat Brief: https://simplycyber.io/streams
2. SANS Internet Stormcast (podcast): https://isc.sans.edu/podcast.html
3. CISCO Talos Blog: https://blog.talosintelligence.com/
4. RECON Infosec Thursday Defensive (weekly Live Zoom): https://www.reconinfosec.com/thursday-defensive/
5. Red Siege Wednesday Offensive: https://redsiege.com/wednesday-offensive/
6. Black Hills Information Security "Talkin' News": https://www.youtube.com/@BlackHillsInformationSecurity/streams
7. CISO Series Daily Cybersecurity Headlines: https://cisoseries.com/category/podcast/cyber-security-headlines/
8. The Hacker News: https://thehackernews.com/
9. Bleeping Computer: https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/
10. Simply Cyber Telegram Channel: https://t.me/SimplyCyberOfficial
11. LinkedIn Group: Information Security Network: https://www.linkedin.com/groups/80784/
12. Huntress Tradecraft Tuesday: https://www.huntress.com/resources/tradecraft-tuesday
13. Infosec.Exchange Mastodon: https://infosec.exchange/
14. ThreatPost: https://threatpost.com/
15. Wired Magazine (Security): https://www.wired.com/category/security/
16. Vice MotherBoard: https://www.vice.com/en/topic/hacking

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Step 4: Identifying Your Desired Cybersecurity Role

There is a massive amount of knowledge to acquire in the cybersecurity industry and nobody, and I mean NOBODY, knows it all. Your best bet for your sanity and to actually break into the industry is to target a specific role and focus your learning and networking within that role.

If you don't know what role you want yet you should g[...]
roles. Think of it as eating at a buffet.

> ## *"Once you find what you like, lean into it."*

Myself and Neal Bridges did a lengthy livestream where we went through 20 different roles in the industry, explained what it is, and discussed pros/cons of each. This would be a great place to start. The goal of this step is to find your passion because you're about to spend a lot of time learning THAT role.

Neal and I covering 20 different roles in industry:
https://www.youtube.com/live/WnZXOTBPYiw

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Step 5: Discovering Role-Specific Communities

Dive deeper into your chosen role by joining communities and Discord servers focused on it. You are already consuming regular industry news (I see you step 3), but now if you are getting additional tailored information and networking with professionals already in that role, you will find out more information and resources to dig in.

For example, if you want to be a SOC Analyst (great entry level role), RECON Infosec is an excellent security operations firm and they have a discord server. If you are into ethical hacking, the The Cyber Mentor (TCM) community is an excellent and supportive community. Keep your ears open because you will learn and hear more role specific resources as you begin to get in.

Simply Cyber Discord: https://discord.gg/simplycyber
RECON Infosec Discord: https://discord.gg/reconinfosec
TCM Discord: https://discord.gg/tcm
Black Hills Infosec Discord: https://discord.gg/bhis
Cyber Insecurity Discord: https://discord.gg/GQWU5G9
The Husky Pack Discord: https://discord.gg/cvrCW9v8UJ

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Step 6: Acquiring Role-Specific Training

Now, it's time to develop the specific skills for your chosen role. You are networking in the role you want (Step 5) and you're getting exposure to industry news (Step 3) so you should begin to start 'seeing' where the role you want fits into the bigger picture of everyday events.

Now lets get you trained up. You can ask within the community what resources folks suggest and get a lot of guidance. It's tough to properly cover all resources for all roles here, but I'll provide a few. The trick here is to remember you are trying to get 'hands-on-keyboard' training. Practical skills reign supreme in the cyber job market.

These are great resources as a sampler:

1. SOC Analyst: Build a SOC Analyst home lab (ridiculous value here): https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4Q-ttyNIRApvPC_QVW9gcKHzjvMrzSCy

2. Ethical Hacking: Full Course: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLKT_MCUeiwBa7d7F_vN1GUwz_2TmVQj

3. GRC Analyst Master Class (this is my course): https://simplycyber.teachable.com

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Step 7: Tailoring Your Resume

Your resume is one of your most critical tools in securing a cybersecurity job. You have to refine your existing resume to highlight the relevant skills and experience for your desired role. The good news is, you've done Step 1-6 so you're already in a great spot and have picked up a lot of experience and knowledge.

Don't fall victim to the idea that you're previous work experience doesn't apply to cybersecurity. I'll link a playlist of varied backgrounds (e.g. Pharmacist, Mechanic, Stay at home parent) that pivoted into cyber (in case you wanted inspiration). Not sure how to make your resume shine for cyber? Use ChatGPT to do the heavy lifting. Use the video below to quickly and effortlessly knock out this step.

Whatever job you've had can pivot into cybersecurity:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4Q-ttyNIRAq6 0QZI54_2LB2ezWPjv_CG
Use ChatGPT to craft YOUR cyber security resume:
https://youtu.be/_1Ud1vOvhbg
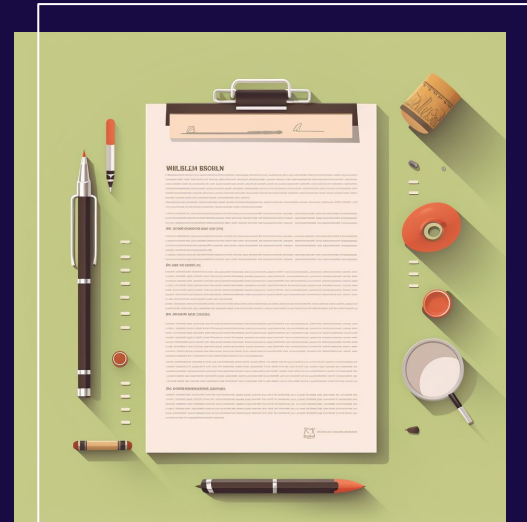
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Step 8: Earning Your Security+ Certification

Now this is NOT REQUIRED. And it will cost money, and I'm not affiliated with CompTIA (the group that provides Security+), but having said that it's important to note.

This certification is recognized in the industry as an entry level certification. It tests a broad range of industry topics and does not go very deep on any particular one.

Having a Security+ certification can significantly enhance your prospects for entry-level cybersecurity roles. It's wildly recognized in the industry as an entry level cybersecurity certification and not having it could prevent you from even being considered for some cybersecurity roles. It will also validate your progress is well underway and you're ready to work in industry!

There are great (free) resources to learn and study for the Security+. This is Professor Messer, EVERYBODY knows about this guy and his great Security+ teaching:
https://www.professormesser.com/security-plus/sy0-601/sy0-601-video/sy0-601-comptia-security-plus-course/

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Step 9: Networking and Job Hunting

As with many careers, networking can play a crucial role in finding the right opportunities in cybersecurity. You should at this point already be engaging with other cybersecurity students and professionals in the role you want and the wider industry. This was accomplished through prior steps when you were finding communities and resources to focus your effort.

Deliver value to your network. At this point you probably have learned and discovered many great resources, and new people that used to be JUST LIKE YOU, are asking where to find things, or what's a good resource. Share with them. Ask your own questions too.

Don't be afraid to think outside the box too on what would benefit you but also serve the community. One student I had started a "Learning Python" channel on the Simply Cyber Discord to learn Python, and to help others with daily challenges learn Python. Brilliant example! He did learn Python and delivered value to several people.
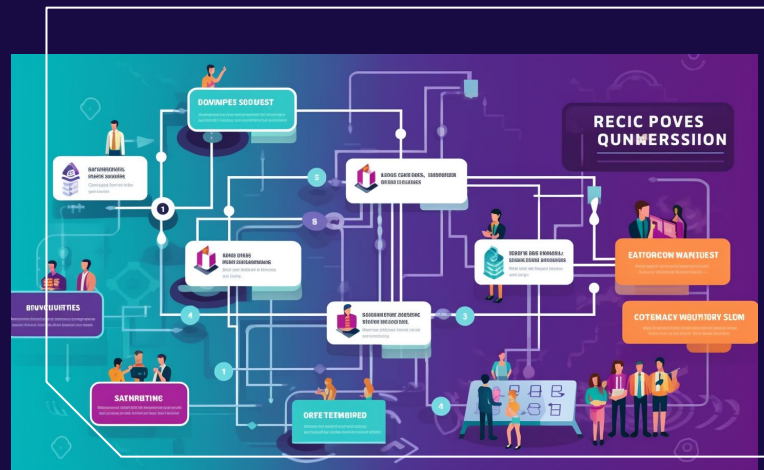
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Step 9: Networking and Job Hunting

I can't tell you when or how, but continuing to share resources, contribute, volunteer, and be part of the cybersecurity community will pay dividends. You will hear about opportunities and potentially score one. You should definitely let people know you are looking for work, and check out/apply for roles you find through online job boards.

Use ChatGPT to refine your resume based on specific job postings to maximize your chances.

Here is a link to a step-by-step tutorial on how to use ChatGPT to refine your resume.

https://youtu.be/_1Ud1vOvhbg
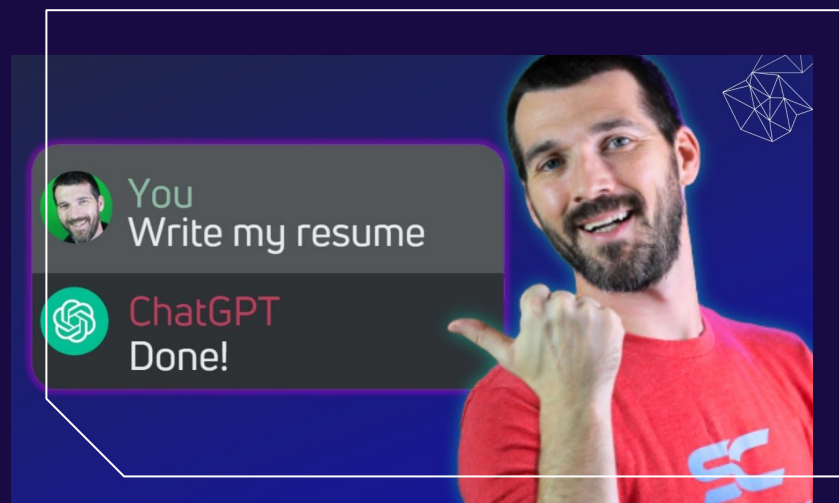
Here's another resource from my marketing expert friend, Virginia Case on how to network, market, and brand your 'cyber-self'. Make sure you have a pen and paper for this one.

https://www.youtube.com/live/6Xg
TD4SQOYM

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Step 10: Acing the Job Interview

Congratulations on securing an interview! Now, let's ensure you nail it. You may be nervous which is understandable. There are multiple ways to gain confidence, affirm your knowledge, and be ready to crush the interview.

There is an incredibly high chance you will be asked "How do you stay current in cybersecurity?". The reason you are asked is because the industry is constantly changing and the dynamic nature demands you stay up-to-date.

Now you've already been staying current because you did Step 3 (right?). This will give you a homerun answer for this question.

Be prepared for a follow-up on a recent story and what your thoughts are on it. I'd encourage you digest 1 story right before the interview and have it ready to go!

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Step 10 (Continued): Acing the Job Interview

Now generally speaking, there's a lot to crush an interview, but no worries. I've made lots of content to help you crush it and get the job! I have just what you need.

Use ChatGPT to practice interviewing and boost your confidence 10X:
https://youtu.be/MIkZua2MKJY

12 Incredible SOC Analyst Interview Questions Examples
https://www.simplycyber.io/post/12-incredible-soc-analyst-interview-questions-examples
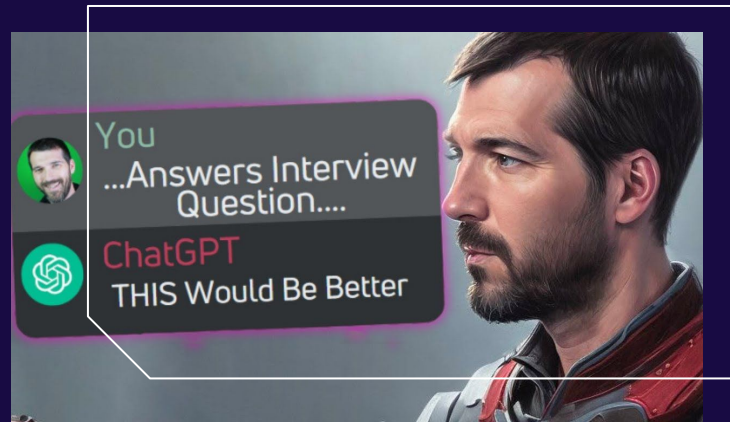
If you're new to interviewing a couple aspects you should know.
1. The interview could be one on one, a panel of people interviewing, or a series of one on ones. It's the employers choice.
2. It's perfectly fine to have pen and paper and jot down notes during interview. I do this personally if there's something I think of and want to remember to share it, but the current moment isn't good. Also if a multi-part question is asked you can keep track of what was asked. Plus it shows your organized, considerate, and prepared.

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Bonus Step 11: Continuous Growth and Contribution

Even after landing a job, the journey doesn't end. Continuous networking and community contributions can help you stay sharp, updated, and ready to level up in your cybersecurity career. The best news of all is you've been doing it the ENTIRE TIME!

One final piece of advice. The information security field is massive. Nobody knows everything, even the most senior practitioners. As you continue to grow and contribute, be mindful that 'it takes a village'. So find professionals in your network that complement your skills and that you can help with your skills.

It's hard work, but its rewarding work.
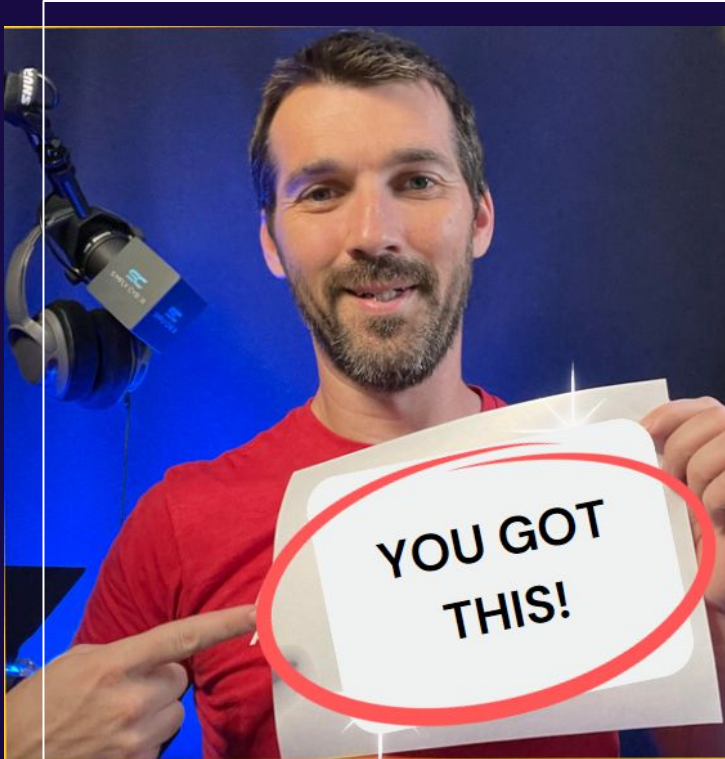Keep it up and congratulations. 🥳

Conclusion

Breaking into cybersecurity doesn't have to be an insurmountable task. By following these steps and staying dedicated to your journey, you'll be well on your way to a fulfilling career in this dynamic field.

Ready to get started?
LETS GO!

Go Forward and Crush It!

There is no easy button.

These steps are straightforward, there is no magic, but it requires YOUR time, YOUR energy, and YOUR commitment.

Best wishes on your career journey and hope to see you at Simply Cyber.

-Gerry

SiMPLY CYBER

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