<meta name="IntroSec Talk" content="Meta/nontechnical tips for an infosec career. >

Intro Sec Con 2020

Collin / @initinfosec

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whoami

- Collin (@initinfosec)

- Professional

  - Current
    - Security Analyst – Vulnerability Assessment/Penetration Test (VAPT) focus
  - Prior
    - Cyber Security Engineer (generalist), IAM Security Engineer, System Engineer, J.r Sysadmin/helpdesk

- Hobbies / Interests outside of IT/infosec:
  - Outdoors/hiking, music, gaming, etc.

- Social / contact
  - Twitter - @initinfosec
  - Blog – https://initinfosec.com

whiskers, script kitty =^_^= {amidst PWK}
@initinfosec

script kitty | keybase.io/initinfosec/ | not l337 | opinions my own or from /dev/random | he/him/=^_^=

meatspace   initinfosec.com   Joined August 2011

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# Introduction / Rationale – What is this talk?

- Discussion on the importance of cultivating skills & a mindset to enhance your infosec experience

  - Approach work with a beneficial mindset, develop good habits early on
  - Want to encourage awareness going into the field & mindfulness/intentionality in approach

- Observations from a career in infosec so far:

  - Perspective looking back - "Had I known then what I know now…"
  - What's most important might not be what you think / is focused on often

- Suite of nontechnical tips & advice to be more effective in infosec (regardless of focus)

  - Brief thoughts on soft skills, mindset, workflow, and work/life balance

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Intro (cont.) – What is it not?
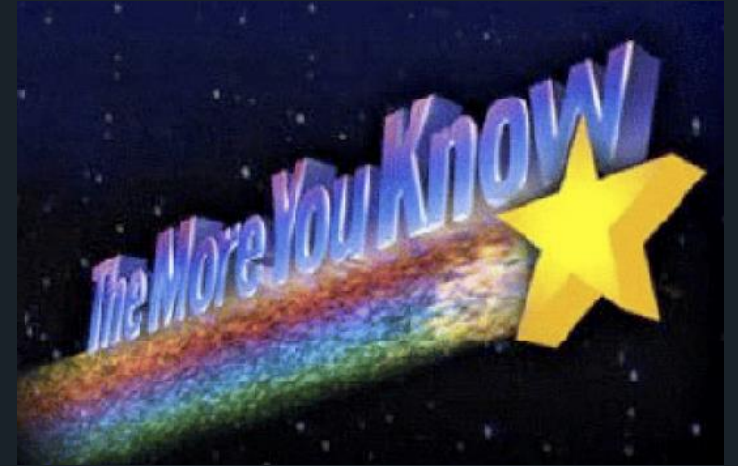
- This talk is not :

  - An expert opinion or from someone who's "got it all figured out"
  - A prescriptive or 'one-size-fits-all' approach
  - A roadmap for focus in a particular area
  - A comprehensive list of skills guaranteeing success or landing a job

- Bottom Line - take from this what works for you

  - Just providing perspective that's not always talked about

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Soft Skills are Paramount

- Soft skills matter in a technical field [esp. infosec] just as much as technical skills. Why?

- Security is a people-focused field first, technical field second

  - What is information security?
  - Who creates information? Who uses information? Who will be impacted if information insecurity causes an incident/event?
  - All comes down to people interacting with data – without the people we wouldn't have a job

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Soft Skills & the Nature of the Job

- Implication of Infosec being a people-centric field – communication is key

- What kind of communication happens in infosec? How often?

  - Meetings (and more meetings), reports, tickets, client briefings, internal team or org discussions

- Communication is "the nature of the beast" in infosec - here to stay, regardless of field/focal area

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But Why?

- Why are communication & soft skills one of the most important traits in infosec?

- A key part regardless of role is explaining importance & value to others. For Example:

  - Fundamental things – increasing security, potential items to track/focus on, budget, consideration on new initiatives, training, products, changes/change control, etc.

  - More infosec-specific – security findings (SOC, IR, VAPT, forensics), Regulations/Policy (need buy-in), et al

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But Why (is this slide continued?)

- Regardless of role, our job is not just to be technical practitioners, but evangelize the importance of data & security

- Want to show others why they should care – security is a two way street

  - Others need us to help secure – build & harden things, set policies, check & enforce requirements, etc.

  - We need others to care & work with us – otherwise fighting an uphill battle
    - A lot of implementation is done outside security, so making things secure is a partnership

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Communication in Infosec – Internals

- Effective internal communication leads to better work & more progress. A lot goes on in infosec, so:

- Touch base as often as necessary, set expectations clearly

  - E.g. who's doing what when, task priorities

- Make an effort to separate work & casual conversation *if/as needed*

  - Sometimes you need to be "heads-down" – if so, politely communicate that to team/others

- Get to know your coworkers [if you want]

  - Can better understand how they think/interact, which can help professionally
  - Establishes comradery and caring on the team, making work more fulfilling

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Communication in Infosec – Externals

- External communication outside of team is a staple in any infosec role. Encourage discussion & dialogue.

- Other parties need to hear from us in an ***approachable*** manner

  - Goes back to the 2-way street – need to talk in a context they understand/will care about
    - Unless asked, external parties don't often care about heavy technical details – keep it relevant and straightforward as possible

  - Constantly will be explaining what you are doing/have done. Highlight:
    - Why it's important to/involves them
    - any actions/needs from them

InfoSec Survival Skills – Docs & Meetings

- Documentation/reports, and meetings/presentations are not uncommon

  - High ROI for 'getting good' at these aspects – will follow you the entire infosec career

- Practice makes perfect (well…more comfortable)

  - Be open to feedback & integrate it as necessary

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InfoSec Survival Skills – MORE MEETINGS??!?

- When presenting - air on side of conciseness unless otherwise appropriate

  - People will ask follow up questions as necessary

  - Don't skimp on explaining importance/relevance of an issue

- In any meeting role – don't be afraid to ask questions!

  - Encourages dialogue – others may be wondering about similar questions, or be able to help explain things well

  - If out of scope or don't want to ask during – make a note & ask team outside of meeting

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InfoSec Survival Skills – Questions & Uncertainties

- Embrace the unknown – constant part of infosec regardless of role or time in the field

- "The only dumb question is the one left unasked." – better to ask & know than not.

- Be comfortable with "I don't know" – it's normal! Everyone doesn't know everything!

  - Is honest & establishes clearly where people are at
  - Better to make position known than to let presumptions be made

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InfoSec Survival Skills – I Don't Know [how to handle this]

- When stating "I don't know," best to follow up with "but I'll track that down"

  - Shows initiative/ownership/action vs apathy

  - Remember to actually follow up!

  - If you need to hand off the item to someone else, make known to concerned parties

  - Important to "own" the issue until you're no longer required.

  - Get help if/as needed, even if you still need to own the issue – great learning opportunity outside your comfort zone!

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State of Mind / Helpful Approaches & Traits

- Drive/enthusiasm – not always an easy field, so loving what you do and being motivated helps

  - Not always "feeling it"/burnout occasionally is fine – happens to all of us

- Constant Learning – infosec will always require learning, regardless of role

  - No one is an expert, all in the same boat

  - Again, good to approach others with questions – you don't know what you don't know!

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State of Mind / Approach to Learning

- Embrace the unknown – infosec is full of it

- Dig in & research yourself first – "work the problem

  - If still stuck, ask, but be specific on what you've tried!
  - "You must try, and then you must ask." – be mindful of time – both not wasting yours or others'

- Learn to love hard problems & failures

  - Those are some of the best learning opportunities
  - It's only failure if you give up

- Know when to take a step back – sometimes a fresh perspective is needed!

  - Applies personally, as well as handing off tasks to others, if needed.

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Finding a Workflow that Works for You

- A good workflow will make both learning & work better

    - Spend some time figuring this out – "frontload" this if possible

    - Everyone is different – *find what works for you!*

- Take notes, even if not a fan

    - Will be referenced later for docs, meetings, by team members, etc.

    - The more organized, the better

    - Tool suggestions – Microsoft OneNote, Joplin, EverNote, physical notebook, etc

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Finding a Workflow that Works for You – pt 2

- Organization is crucial

  - Again, a lot going on in infosec, regardless of role!

  - Task tracking & to-dos can help!

  - Tools/methods may depend on team – follow constraints but optimize for you!

    - Suggestions - Kanban, planner/to-do list, Calendar (e.g. Outlook), WorkFlowy

- Find a time management sweet spot

  - Suggestions – pomodoro, calendar, etc.

  - Use tools to increase efficiency if needed (aliases, autohotkey, copy-pastes, doc templates, etc.)

  - Minimize distractions if/when needed.

  - Reminders can be a lifesaver

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Work / Life Balance in Infosec

- Yes, you need it. It's healthy – no one can go 24/7.

  - Infosec can be challenging & mentally exhausting, making this important

- Balance level may fluctuate – that's OK & normal!

- Set healthy routines – working well != more time working

  - Leave work at work when appropriate

  - Make time for sleep, family

- Don't pressure yourself – the work will always be there!

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More Work / Life Balance in Infosec

- Personal Recommendation – find other hobbies

  - Bonus points if some are away from a screen ☺

- The mind needs rest/diversions, work isn't the only thing

  - Focus on work is better when time on work is finite

- "Work to live, not live to work" – infosec is still just a job.

  - What's important to you? Make time for that.

  - Family, personal wellness, hobbies, etc. are just as important as work

Conclusion / In Summary

- Infosec is people-focused, making soft skills & communication important

- Soft Skills & mindset will follow you throughout your career. Use what works for you

- Mindset/approach is one of the biggest factors for success in the field

- Spend time figuring out a good workflow for you.

- Maintain a healthy work/life balance to keep your sanity – find what else you enjoy too!

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Questions?

- Q & A – any questions?

- Feel free to contact

- Thanks for listening!

- Thanks to the Intro Sec Con staff!

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