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IDS 493: E Portfolio Project

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Personal Narrative Essay

A Clearer Path: My Journey into Cybersecurity

Unexpectedly, it was not a moment of epiphanic clarity in which I considered pursuing a degree in cybersecurity. Rather, it was a chain of learning and life experiences that led me down this career path. Growing up with an IT dad, I was well familiar with computers and technology. It would take an attack upon myself before I truly saw the importance of cybersecurity. Today I can look back on the clear chain of causal coherence described in McAdams in which one thing led to the next to place me in an information protection career.

The Early Interest

My dad would let me sit in with him while he installed networks and resolved issues. While I never really had any idea what he was doing, I would collect loose bits and pieces here and there along the way. Early exposure to technology established earliest interests in systems and security. By the time I was in high school, I had some sense of what networks should do. It was then that I took my first ever computer science class on coding and security concepts. I was not working in cybersecurity actively but was sure that it was something to do in college.

An Unwelcome Wake-Up Call

It hit me all of a sudden the first time I saw our home network get attacked by some kind of malware. Seeing my dad, who considered himself an all-round technology wizard, struggling to return things to normal was the moment it hit me: everyone has weaknesses despite their best preparations. Some of our essential files were all lost; all the effort to clean out the system went to

waste in days. It was not that significant an attack in the big scheme of things; however, it was some kind of wake-up call to me. As would be outlined by McAdams, it was such an instance of causal coherence in which one thing leads to a cascade of decisions and this was one such instance in my life. I started to read even more on malware, phishing, as well as other cyber-attacks. This incident thus provided me with the basis upon which to take the Cybersecurity degree seriously on finally starting my studies in ODU.

College: The Foundation

I was hooked right out of the gate with the cybersecurity classes here at ODU. My initial class was actually quite literally "Cybersecurity, Technology, and Society," and man, did I feel like it was this overwhelming expanse of new information. We covered everything from cryptography to system vulnerabilities, and I kept thinking it was information overload. Cybersecurity isn't learning to solve a problem so much as learning to anticipate them before their occurring and their psychology so one can be ahead of developing technology. My interest was there but my first year was a struggle. There were several points in time in which I found myself questioning whether or not that was really the right field to be in, specifically because during that time period there were a lot of technical subject matter such as network security and penetration testing. Midway through was when I was working on a group assignment to secure a mock network and could not get my mind wrapped around all the new encryption methods we were learning. For it was hours and hours worth of extra study sessions as well as working with my peers on an intimate level to get my mind wrapped around the concepts. But this was an adversity which was turned into a learning experience: as Smith (2017) writes in her narrative of redemption, "Adversity can very well result in success." My adversity led to perseverance and ultimately to better knowledge of the subject matter; by the end of the class I was comfortable with my performance.

Practical Application: Internship

Later, after my junior year, and my first semester at ODU, I was able to intern at a local real estate firm called D&B Properties. This is where everything finally began to come together. I worked as a sort of cybersecurity consultant, addressing real-world problems, such as analyzing network vulnerabilities and running penetration tests for the small business. One of the major projects I was involved in included performing a vulnerability assessment for the company's database whose systems were outdated and highly at risk for exploitation. The assignment required hands-on practice, whereby directly I had to work with the senior team to identify weak points and recommend mitigation strategies.

The internship experience really brought a great deal into perspective with what I had learned in class. Terms and concepts that once seemed so abstract—risk management, intrusion detection systems, multifactor authentication—all had practical, real-world applications. I got to sit in on various meetings among professionals in cybersecurity and business alike about ongoing threats and solutions, showing me how the industry truly collaborates. This experience crystallized my choice of major and showed me what kind of work awaited me after graduation.

A Clearer Future

The closer I get to the end of my degree program, the more defined my sense of direction is. According to Nguyen, reflection "narrates a story that shapes future identity" (2013); certainly, this has been the case for me. As I reflect upon my academic experiences, I can realize just how each class, each project, each challenge has worked together to build a foundation leading into my future career.

I perceive cybersecurity not as a purely technical challenge but as part of what is called protection, safety, and security—as understood in the digital world today—of all persons and businesses. It

has not been a cakewalk, indeed, but every problem faced has formed a learning curve in its own right—from dealing with intricate concepts in the classrooms to actually trying to solve those real-world problems during my internship. McAdams' concept theorizes about causal coherence, through which every experience in my narrative logically led to the other, building up a narrative of growth, learning, and determination. Further ahead in my career, I hope to build on the foundations laid in cybersecurity to newer opportunities that may include certifications and further roles in the discipline.

Conclusion

My cybersecurity journey is a tale of gradual discovery, with lessons well learned. From very early exposure via my father to this current student position, poised for entry into the industry, each step reinforced an almost preordained decision. There were challenges along this route; instead of deterring me, they further strengthened my resolve. I am glad to take on new challenges as I get ready to move into the next stage of my career, knowing very well that my story is far from over and that my experiences have equipped me to meet whatever the future may throw my way with confidence.

Works Cited

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