

The Right Stuff - Essential Skills as a CISO

[00:00:00] Hello, and welcome to another episode of CISO Tradecraft, the podcast that provides you with the information, knowledge, and wisdom to be a more effective cybersecurity leader. My name is G Mark Hardy, and today I want to ask you, do you think you've got the right stuff? Do you have the skills it takes to succeed as a CISO?

And if your answer is yes, how do you know? And then what happens if you get blindsided by something you could have anticipated? I've asked a number of sources for recommendations and insight onto what it would take to be successful. And I also have a surprise guest a little bit later on that I'm sure you heard of.

So make sure you stick around and see what we've got to say here. But before we get going, let me share with you a message from our sponsor.

[00:01:00] Welcome back to the show. Now, as CISOs or security leaders, whatever your role happens to be, for the most part, when we applied for a job or we got promoted into it, there was a job description and that job description tends to enumerate experience sets. It doesn't enumerate skill sets, and these are different things.

That is to say it's very difficult to [00:02:00] recruit somebody by saying, do you have excellent problem solving skills? Are you able to go ahead and manage? Now? They'll ask you, "do you have a degree? Do you have the certification? Do you have this many years of experience?" And that's typically what gets you in the door.

What we want to make sure though, is that as a cybersecurity professional it's aspiring to or serving in a leadership role that you understand. Of course, there's a lot more than technical expertise involved in being successful. As we said throughout a number of our shows, as you progress through your career, you're going to master technical and management leadership and political skills, and these are orthogonal, meaning that.

Expertise in one doesn't necessarily guarantee you success in another, and that's sometimes how you end up topping out. Now the nature of the Peter principle, people get promoted to their own level of incompetence. Well, sometimes you

might find yourself in a situation where the capabilities that got you into that situation are not the same ones that you need to have to get you out.

And so my goal today is to get you [00:03:00] thinking of where you might find gaps in your own set of personal skills and take some action to fill them in before you actually need them. There's plenty of reference materials out there that talk about CISO success, and I'm not going to talk about really any of them.

What I've done is I've looked at a number of references and have come up with a few outside the box sets worth considering. So bear with me a little bit. I think you'll find this is going to be interesting. If you did a Google search for “top business skills,” and I'm not sure how they did the software engine optimization, your first hit is going to be from the [Government of Western Australia](#) down in Perth, and they offer essential business skills.

Essential business skills. Hmm. Well that's interesting. And you say, okay, fine. But yeah, this is for small business founders and the like and entrepreneurs, but I submit that it's going to apply to you as a CISO as well. Now I've been involved in small business for most of my career.

I have started up [00:04:00] a number of companies and I'm used to that. However, what I find out is that when I've worked in larger organizations, some of the same types of expertise are valuable there as well, and these are enumerated here from this Western Australia government site. Things such as financial management, marketing, sales, customer service, communication and negotiation, leadership, project management and planning, delegation, time management, problem solving, and networking. All of those things I submit are important for us as a CISO or a security leader to master. So let me dive into them a little bit and I want you to start thinking about, as I talk about these things, do you feel comfortable being able to act at or above a competency level for each one of these things?

Now, there's some things I admit I am not going to be competent at. I can't walk out onto a football field and go out and play in the NFL. This is not going to happen. Love the game [00:05:00] of football. Love to watch it, love to root for my team, but I'm not going to be a player.

And I understand that I've got a weakness and a limitation there. I'm not saying it's a bad thing, but as Clint Eastwood would say, “A man's got to know his limitations.” So the first thing I want to take a look at is financial management, and do you have what you would consider to be sound financial management skills?

Well, if you think about it, the basis of financial planning is the budget. And we just covered that literally in our last episode, number 108, called [Show Me the Money](#). And if you haven't listened to it yet, I highly recommend it as Nick Vigier offers some really great insights. And I thought that was one of the better episodes I've had the privilege to record.

Now writing a budget is only part of the requirement. Executing the spend is also key, and one of the dangers I think we make if we don't understand how the organizational behavior works. And of course it could be different for every organization. Is it better trying to husband your resources and hold onto it toward late in the [00:06:00] fiscal year and make sure that you've got money there in case things go boom, or you need something big?

Well, the danger there is, if you get too far below a straight line expenditure, senior management might reallocate your unspent money to a more prolific spender. Now, I found that out years ago as a department head in the Navy. On my ship, I was the operations officer, so I was in charge of ops, navigation, combat center, radar signal, et cetera, and I had a budget for my department, just like any other department, engineering deck supply, et cetera.

Well, About halfway through the year, I'm probably only at about 20, 25% spent because I'm saving it up. I don't believe in wasting stuff, even the small stuff, and I knew that I kept getting all these requisitions for boxes of pens. Now, back then, everything was paper, and I kind of opined that, gee whiz, if the Soviet Union had ever invented a paper seeking missile, we'd have lost the Cold War.

But nonetheless, I can remember one time saying, look, guys, just go into your [00:07:00] lockers and look for all the pens you have. We don't need to buy another box. Now, maybe I'm harassing my communications officer, an Ensign, but we came out with like 350 pens because at the end of a shift or a watch, what happened? You got a pen or two in your pocket, you go back to your locker, you change, and then you leave the pen there.

So what did that mean? It means I'm below the glide slope. Well, what happened about the halfway point? The engineer who was older than I, a former enlisted guy, was the same rank, he knew the ropes, and he was spending, well, as they say, like a drunken sailor. Of course, there's no booze on navy ships, but in any case, the point was that at that mid-year review, I got a bunch of my money yanked away from me, and I was told, you don't need it, he does. I say, but, but, but I've been saving my money. I've been a good steward of the money. Why wouldn't you give me more to take care of and not waste? Hmm, son,

that's not the way it works around here. So I learned firsthand that trying to go ahead and conserve your funds doesn't work.

Now, anybody who's ever worked with the federal government understands how things work at the end of the fiscal year. For about ten or eleven months, you're [00:08:00] told, "Don't spend. Don't spend. Don't spend." Come the first of September, "Spend!" We've got to execute because any money you don't spend by the 30th of September, which is the end of the federal fiscal year, is lost forever. You don't get it back the first of October.

But wait, it gets worse starting the first of October when you get your new budget. If you didn't spend last year's, they're going to reduce the next year's budget to what you spent last. And if you overspend, you're in legal trouble. So it's really an incentive to come in right on the numbers.

Defense contractors know that; they'll send you a big package. and said, Hey, buy something, whether it's buy a training course or buy a truck, there's a huge amount of stuff in sales that take place in September, and people in federal sales know that. Okay, so we're talking about being able to do the budgeting and things such as that, but also you need to be able to forecast your cash flows and your sales.

Now, you don't have to worry about sales in our profession unless you're a consultant, but you certainly do need to think about cash [00:09:00] flow. You could go bankrupt with a million dollars in receivables and no cash on hand. So you have to have money on hand. Now, typically that's done for you at a larger level in the organization, but you need to operate within that overall framework of the organization.

Now, a lot of us think we're facing a recession in 2023, and we might see some reductions in spend. So as a result, you do need to start thinking about it. What could I do if things don't go according to plan? Now, federal government agencies are unfortunately kind of used to this with chronic continuing resolutions.

The second continuing resolution for fiscal year '23 was just signed by the President on the 16th of December, and I think the record was in 2001 where they did 19 continuing resolutions. Now you need to decide. Are you going to be a team player and plan for future reductions? Or are you going to spend early and spend often and then try to go ahead and get that money before somebody else spends it?

Well, again, that's cultural and also how you want to be perceived by your peers. [00:10:00] Another thing that comes into play when it comes to financial management is managing your vendor portfolio. Do you know when each license will renew? And how much do you track year over year changes and plan for that? If I came in and did a surprise inspection, could you pull up a spreadsheet or some other document and say, here's everything I've got on my inventory for cybersecurity. Here's what it costs. Here's when it renews. If not, it's a homework assignment, go do that. Also, do you keep track of the relative importance of each of those tools?

So if you did have a budget cut, you'd know what to cut first if required. You shouldn't have to be agonizing and thinking about it. You should be able to have a way to shed off those requirements. And then you get to a point where below that number, we can't function anymore. And so if your organization says, "We need a 10% cutback across the board," and all the department heads and all the VPs come back and say, here it is. And you go, well, I can't afford to cut anything, then you know what? If that's an imperative, they'll find somebody else to [00:11:00] take over your job who can make that 10% cut. So be prepared in advance, but you also want to have a pushback number. And that pushback number says below a certain point things break and I can cut my budget 25% for security, but here's the additional risk the organization will incur.

If you help management understand that, then say, Hey, you want to cut the budget go, but now you know what's happening. They might go back and say, yeah, well you might get a little bit more. So you need to be able to articulate the importance of your security tools relative to not other security tools as well, but other organizational expenses that are non-IT security related, because you may have to compete for a piece of a bigger budget.

Another skill mentioned is marketing, sales, and customer service. Well, we want to promote products and services effectively, and that's typically what we do as a small business, but as security professionals, we need to convince management for funding [00:12:00] sources. And users can acquire and implement and then utilize their tools.

Security, awareness and education is, well, let's face it, it's part of marketing and sales. We have to convince people to change their behavior and the hallmark of effective security awareness training is a change in behavior. In addition, we need to stand out. We need to differentiate. Now, my marketing professor in my MBA program said, "the purpose of marketing is differentiation."

And if you think about it, our users and our executives, they hear a lot of noise during the week. How do you make your security message stand out? You might think perhaps you take a message idea from spammers, they come up with headlines, things that get you interested, have a marketing strategy. So your strategy should really be more than your schedule of monthly security awareness exercises. That's not an IT cybersecurity marketing strategy. By marketing strategy, I [00:13:00] mean, how do we go ahead and expand our message to get it into the hands of everybody who needs it and help them use it? If your company or your organization has all hands meetings, ask to give a little presentation, maybe two or three minutes each time.

I do that every other week at our All Hands at one of my client sites, and that cybersecurity message is short to the point, but it's meaningful and it's interesting. People don't tune you out if you can get the message across clearly and succinctly. Short emails – don't send big, giant long ones If you want to get people's attention and want them to read it, particularly busy executives. Get right to the point.

And if your organization holds town halls or get-togethers for people, take advantage of that. Now. Security posters have always been great, and I've always loved some of the artwork and the creative ideas that come out of it, and I've had a chance to work on a couple teams that we've actually gotten some awards. That's really cool. But they haven't been as useful during the lockdown when people weren't coming in. But that's ending for most. A great resource I like to [00:14:00] recommend is a company called [Native Intelligence](#). It's a Native American woman-owned small business, and K has been a friend of mine for a long, long time.

Brilliant artist. Amazingly creative, creates fantastic stuff and I think you'll find things there that you're not going to find pretty much anywhere else, just in terms of the creativity, the quality artwork, and the ability to influence people. So take a look at that and do something for your organization and also something for her. I think you'll find out it's a win-win.

Another skill to master is communication and negotiation. You want to be able to interact favorably with your customers, with your employees, and your suppliers. And if you have investors, both current and potential, you need to be able to understand how to communicate with them as well.

Some small organizations are always on the hunt for more money, and if cybersecurity becomes a big deal based upon what's in the press, investors might want to. Are you vulnerable to this? Have you done something [00:15:00]

about this? Have you had a breach? What is our risk? We don't want our money going up in smoke because you're not protecting it effectively. So you might find yourself as part of a roadshow at some point.

If you're interacting favorably, know when to speak up, but also for how long, Don't keep talking. There's a saying in sales: Don't sell past the close. Once you've convinced the person of your way of thinking, be quiet. Also you've heard of KISS, right? Keep it simple, stupid.

Don't get into details. And the idea of KISS and not selling past the close is once you've got somebody thinking the way you want them to, if you keep on talking, you might bring up something that, wow, I didn't think about that. That's a problem. I need to look into that. And you just blew it. Don't do that.

If you get a choice, and you get brought into a board meeting or a higher level thing, when you speak, be profound. Don't be redundant. Don't be an echo chamber. When you say something, people should lean over and listen because [00:16:00] wow, that's important. Effective verbal and written skills are hugely important, and they do contribute to your ability to lead and influence, and it'll offer you some details on that.

Well, a little bit later. We want to maintain a consistent image across all media, whether we're presenting to email at our all hands, at our presentations, at our posters, at our communications with our people. Remember the advice of Egon Spengler: "Don't cross the streams!" I submit that clarity and repetition are your friends.

This is saying in the business that says, A confused customer never buys. Your security message should be compact enough to be tweetable and repeatable so that people could understand it, digest it, and know what it is. Don't confuse your people with details. Make sure that if you're trying to convince them to change your behavior or do some security action, or fund some project that they know very cleanly and crisply what you want, and that means practice your [00:17:00] presentation.

Get your intro, get your outro, make sure you have a call to action. All that stuff you can learn. Another important skill, which is no surprise, is leadership. In fact, we've done [19 episodes so far in business management and leadership](#), and if you check our show notes for this week, you'll find a link to that set.

And I'm not going to repeat all that advice now, but I do want to point out three important CISO leadership skills. The first is to create a vision and motivate

others to embrace it. There's a saying in the Bible. It's actually Proverbs 29 18, and King James version says, quote, "where there is no vision the people perish."

Think about it. If people don't know where they're going to go, if you have a group of people, that's how you organize them. That's how you direct them. That's how you motivate and lead. Think about some of the stuff that Elon Musk has done, whether you like the guy or not, that's not the question I'm asking, but being able to inspire people towards some great vision.

[00:18:00] To create reusable spacecraft, electric cars, the battery program, the boring company, whatever happens to be, extend mankind to multi-planetary species, whatever you look at it, it's that vision that motivates people to want to do that. And in my opinion, the biggest differentiator between a manager and a leader is the ability to create a vision and motivate others to get behind it.

Another leadership skill. The second one I think is really, really important is to provide mentoring, counseling, and coaching. See, leadership is no longer about personal achievement, that is to say your personal achievement. The best leaders develop their people, and the measure of your success should be the success of your team. As a commanding officer in the military, I used to tell people that my standard of excellence is how many of my team get promoted.

If you come work for me and you're well qualified, I will do the write-ups. I will put the time and energy and effort and give you an assignment to stretch your [00:19:00] abilities and then document your success to help you with promotion. And year after year, my Sailors had well above average promotion rates, and the secret wasn't me.

I didn't promote them. I don't get to do that. I got to sit on 12 promotion boards. But one person can't push the button and push them over the edge. But rather by developing your people, by creating opportunities for them to succeed, by giving them the responsibilities and then rewarding them with well-written documentation.

The reports you write could last a long time. I had an officer who worked for me back in 2005. And at the time he was thinking of getting out of the Navy, I convinced him to stay in. He was my only Medical Service Corps officer in the leadership program. I had commanded the Center for Naval Leadership and I got a LinkedIn message within the past year, you know, just recently saying, "Hey, G Mark, I just wanted to say thank you. I just got promoted to rear Admiral."

Now here's a guy who was ready to walk out the [00:20:00] door years ago, but I set him up for success. He was able to achieve it. So he gets the credit for it, but years later he said, "you are the guy who kind of turned me around." That's the difference where effective leadership, when you do mentoring and counseling and coaching can do that. So think about your success as being valued by how well the people who work for you do.

And the third one is to manage and maintain morale and productivity. You see, not all tasks that we get are easy. Well, that's why we get paid, right? You want to lead by example, show that you as a leader are willing to pull your weight.

There's a saying in the military, says, don't ride in the Jeep while your troops walk. Now there is a Jeep, and sometimes you need to ride in it, perhaps, but if you're always taking care of yourself all the time and not taking care of your people, you're missing the perks of command.

Command is a responsibility, it's not a bonus. And as a result, your people will be watching you and seeing if you [00:21:00] take advantage of that. And if you think about it, using the military as an example, soldiers will risk their lives on the battlefield, not for their country, but for their companions. And that's an important part to understand about human behavior.

You want to create a sense of camaraderie. People will stick around they'll work late. They'll work insane, crazy hours if they feel like they're part of a team that's going out to accomplish something and you're all working together on it. And if you, the leader, are rolling up your sleeves as well, and you come in on a Saturday instead of going out and playing golf or come in on Sunday instead of going to a football game, then what you're doing is you're creating the environment where people say, "yeah, the boss is someone I'm willing to follow." There's some people that you work for that you wouldn't – I've seen people that I wouldn't call them leaders. You call them bosses, right? These are folks you wouldn't even follow out of a burning building. They're there for some other reason. They get to issue orders, but they're not inspiring. I'm trying to make you [00:22:00] an inspirational leader.

Also be careful. Look for signs of dissatisfaction. You might find an underperformer just being overwhelmed by the amount of work. Man, it might be okay to let that person go at some point. It could have just been a bad hire, but don't let dissatisfaction spread.

If there's somebody who's grumbling and grouching or whatever, call them in. If they're a positive performer, if they've been delivering well and all of a sudden

they seem to be going over to the dark side, something might have happened in their personal life. Don't just immediately judge them and say, okay, you boom out.

But try to go ahead and do that counseling, do that understanding so that you can get what's going on in their life. So be careful about that. But if there is dissatisfaction that's spreading, quash it. And one of the things you will be able to do is make sure that if you take action early, you don't let the rumor mill get going. And that's where a lot of problems occur.

The next skillset is [00:23:00] project management and planning. Here you have to manage resources of time, people, money, and technology. Now you can use money to buy more people, right? You hire more. I can get technology to help me get things done faster, and with more people I can go ahead and do more things.

But the one thing you can't get more of is time. Time is your constrained resource. And so as a result, When you're a project manager, you need to protect your critical path, which is the linked set of deliverables and activities that one creates the next, creates the next, creates the next. And so for example, if you do a simple thing such as, okay, I'm getting dressed in the morning, I have to put my socks on before I put on my shoes, and it really helps if I put on my trousers before I put on my shoes. It doesn't matter whether socks go on or trousers first, but both have to go on before the shoes. I could put my watch on in the car. That doesn't matter, but I had better be fully dressed otherwise heading out the door. And so the idea of putting [00:24:00] things in order and knowing what that order is and being able to communicate to that team ensures that you don't inadvertently find yourself stuck in a corner: man, oh, I got to back up and redo all these things.

Because achieving a goal may require a significant coordination of a lot of resources. Now, fortunately, there's a professional body of knowledge for that. It's called the Project Management Body of Knowledge, or PMBOK[®], and it offers ten knowledge areas across five process groups of initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing. There is a certificate for that, it's called the Project Management Professional or PMP, and there's about half a million certified people out there. So one thing you might consider for your own career if you're going to be running projects is to get your PMP cert. And if you are at a point in your career where you don't think you're going to be needing to do that, why don't you use that as a carrot to help motivate some of the people that work for you saying, Hey, I'll get you the education and the

course, and also the cert, so you could go ahead and add that to [00:25:00] your resume, and that's one way you could help lead your people.

Another important skill set is delegation and time management. You need to learn to let go of control and delegate, and this is sometimes hard when you start out as a technical expert as many of us have, you're really good at the details. Then as you move your way up through the organization, you have more and more responsibility. You can't keep doing all the details you need to learn to let go and delegate. "But, but, but, but I'm the most experienced person here. That's why I got the promotion." Granted, I'll give you that, but now you have an additional job responsibility – develop your people, and you don't develop your people by doing all the stuff yourself.

Sure, that junior person may only be able to do it at the 85% level that you could do as a master. But if the organization isn't going to crash and burn at 85%, let that person do it and then learn from the mistakes. The next time there'll be a 95 and there'll be a 99, and then they're right up there. [00:26:00] And what you've been able to do is do delegate effectively.

What that also helps you is to manage your time. We all get the same 24 hours in a day. Some people manage to run large organizations. The President of the United States gets the same 24 hours as an unemployed person. They do different things with it. And so find or create a system for time management.

A course I used to teach many years ago was the Reserve Officer Leadership Course, and we had our first module called responsibility, accountability, and authority. I'm going to dig all that stuff out. I may put together an episode on it, but for now, do you understand the difference of the terms? Responsibility is a requirement to complete a task, and that can be delegated. I can say, Hey, I know that I've got to go ahead and take the dishes out. Or take the dishes out, take the garbage out.

But if I have a teenager, I can say, Hey, take that out. I've kind of delegated that responsibility, but the [00:27:00] accountability - I've got to answer for completion or non-completion. If the garbage doesn't get taken out, who gets yelled at? I do. And so it's not necessarily the person doing the work. Accountability can not be delegated.

As a CISO, you're going to be accountable for an awful lot of things, and you can't go ahead and report to an auditor, or law enforcement, or your boss, or the board, "Well, don't blame me because one of my subordinates wasn't really

smart and pushed the wrong button.” Nope. You're accountable, you signed for it.

And the third one, authority is the capacity to direct people or resources. And that can be delegated as well. So you can delegate the authority and responsibility. “You go there, you say you're acting on my behalf and make this thing happen,” but at the end of the day, you're accountable for it.

Another important skill set is problem solving. Can you make good decisions under pressure? Now, not to decide is to decide, and I remember, I think it was Excel, [00:28:00] 1997, the old, old stuff, it used to have hints you could turn on – tip of the day, and I pulled out the database one time and I don't know how many there were 50 of them or whatever, but the last one in the set, instead of being something technical, it said, “things that go away by themselves sometimes come back by themselves.” So just because you haven't made a decision on something or something goes away doesn't mean that you've gotten off the hook.

Decision making is a muscle and you should exercise it if you have problems making decisions. What's the best way to practice? A restaurant menu. Unless you have some food allergy or something that's going to cause you to collapse into a big puff ball heap, and they're going to have to take you away in an ambulance, give yourself 30 seconds, find something on the menu. Nothing's toxic, nothing's going to kill you. And if you get something that, okay, fine, that wasn't great, fine. But you made a decision. Some people agonize over and over again. If you get good at decision making in little things, you get good at decision making in big things.

And when we do that, we can follow Colin Powell's 40-70 rule. [00:29:00] Of that 40-70 rule that he published he said that that's what he used as a military commander and later as Secretary of State, is that's percent of total information available. You should have between 40% and 70% to make a decision. If you have less than 40%, you could tend to make a bad decision because you've got too many unknowns.

And if you wait till you have more than 70%, you've taken too long and sometimes that decision gets made for you. Now, how do we do it correctly without a hundred percent? Well, if you wait till a hundred percent, you can be replaced by an algorithm. So you're not really doing much. But filling in that blank sometimes comes through intuition.

And experience intuition is essentially the immediate apprehension without reasoning. Karl von Clausewitz defined that as *coup d'oeil*, which is basically the eye for the battle for a battlefield commander who just jumps right to this: “I see. I get it.” And sometimes you have intuitive flashes and you don't have to go through step by step reasoning, you just know it. and that's valuable as a [00:30:00] leader. Experience is important because wisdom is often the result of past experience, you know, past activities. I think Tony Robbins had said success in life is a result of good judgment. Good judgment is usually a result of experience and experience is usually the result of bad judgment. So let's try to avoid bad judgment and things like that.

And the last skill that was offered there by the Australian government for startups is networking. Build good relationships. I attended seminars many years ago with Mark Victor Hansen, and Mark would say, “your network is your net worth.” With whom you speak, the people that you connect to, look at your LinkedIn connections, look at the other folks that you communicate with on a regular basis. That's going to be the sign of your success. So build a successful set of contacts.

Now the next reference that I looked for was from a group called the [EF Academy](#), and they were skills to succeed, but EF Academy runs international boarding schools, and this was advice to teenagers.

Now it's [00:31:00] like, really? Come on, I'm not a teenager. I'm a CISO. Or I'm a CISO on track. But don't ignore advice targeted to this age group. You know, the joke goes, hire a teenager while they still know everything, but they're tuned observations and I've tuned them to our working environment so they're not just specifically here the way they came on their website, but as skills for us.

These skills are critical thinking, adaptability, excellent communication skills, cultural understanding, and initiative and drive. Some of them we heard before. A couple of them are new. Let's take a quick look.

For critical thinking requires self-direction and self-discipline because it involves objective analysis and evaluation of some subject to form your judgment. Now [The Foundation for Critical Thinking](#), (it's an entity) enumerates the basis for critical thinking on these universal intellectual values: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, [00:32:00] relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth, and fairness. Now, I'm not going to give you a review on that, but think about it.

If you're going to do critical thinking, and we say that critical thinking skills seem to be lacking in an awful lot of people. It's why spammers work. Well, scammers work, their trolls work well view as even the political. I don't think any politician lost an election underestimating the ability of people to do critical thinking skills.

But we as humans do develop our own habits of how we ingest and process information. It might be related to how we're brought up. If you're from an urban environment, you might be a little bit less trusting than a rural environment based upon your childhood, but it's difficult to change our conditioning.

So if you tend to be too trusting or tend to be too suspicious, at any extreme that could be dangerous. You need to build your intuition to understand from a critical thinking perspective, what should you accept and what should you drill down on to make sure that it's really true.

From adaptability, adaptability means what? Rapid adjustment to [00:33:00] change in new circumstances, and [Yale University offers some examples](#) of adaptability. A new manager, a coworker with different workplace ideas. Hmm. How do you settle that out? What if you add or change responsibilities? What happens in some organizations, for example, as a naval officer, we would promote based upon someone being fully qualified for the next pay grade, rather than just having the potential.

So you had to demonstrate and then document, which would be your boss documenting it. Remember I said how important it was to write these things down, that you are fully qualified at the next level. And that way we avoided the Peter principle in general because most people wouldn't promote and go, oh, now what do I do? They had already been doing it.

The third thing that Yale identified is a shift in work priorities based upon changing business requirements. Let's see what happens in 2023. You might have new priorities based upon changing environmental conditions. Covid work from home was a changing environmental condition, and from a [00:34:00] security perspective, that created an awful lot of rapid challenges for us to be able to protect everything that was widespread.

Also, managing and monitoring the workloads of your people to maintain the product. Somebody working at home and their bunny slippers could still get a lot of work done, but you need to create a success environment for them. You may want to change communication requirements. That's another adaptable

requirement because the work from home said we had to do virtual communications.

And also if companies had a reduced travel expenses in the covid lockdown, that may impact future interactions because they're saying, "Hey, we like this savings. We don't like flying you cross country to go meet with somebody. Just go ahead and get on a Zoom call." And so that's going to change your communications requirements.

The last one that you have for an adaptability challenge, that is listed by Yale, is to increase the efficiency of your work process. You might change your tools, your methodologies, your reporting relationships, but notice that the common term for a lot of these adaptability items was "change" and the recommended [00:35:00] strategies to champion change are to be responsive to new information.

Be open to consider new roles and responsibilities. As an individual, you should set stretch goals to improve your skill set. Go after something you don't know how to do, and set yourself as a way to go ahead and learn that. It's a constant requirement to be learning. Remember G Mark's law, half of what you know about cybersecurity will be obsolete in 18 months.

Commit to personal development. One way to do that is listen to your CISO Tradecraft podcast every week without fail. There we go, and then also be realistic. Remember the Serenity Prayer. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

It's important not to go tilting off at windmills. Don't waste your time and energy and effort trying to do things that can't get done. And then stay current in your industry. Don't be blindsided with management asking about some event or product relating to cybersecurity when some news release hits. Get ahead [00:36:00] early.

Get ahead of it. If something you get in your news feeds on Sunday night and you know it's going to be on the news Monday morning, on the Today Show, then that evening, get a message out to your executives saying, "Hey, this is happening. We are not or are vulnerable to it. Here's what we're doing about it." And then when it hits the press, your executive team says, "Hey, I've already been informed about that. I feel good about it."

Another skill is excellent communication skills. Reading, writing and arithmetic are still important. I mean, we've got calculators to help us with arithmetic, and we've got spell checkers to help us with writing and, and now there's grammar checkers and and there's even generative AI tools like a ChatGPT, we're going to get into that in a little bit.

But chat, SMS, emojis, it really changed our vocabulary in our syntax. And there may be a generational expectation. I remember when I called my son a while ago. He said, "Dad, don't call me. That's rude." I said, what [00:37:00] do you mean calling you is rude? I'm your dad. He says, text me so I can get back to you when it's convenient for me. Okay. Well in any case, we've worked that out. But the idea is that there's a different expectation. Make sure you remember or learn if you haven't had it, the experience, proper writing style and grammar. It's not necessarily that use the Oxford, by the way, I do. But there are a lot of tools that are out there, but they're only going to help you so much if you can't organize your thinking effectively and adapt your writing style to your target audience.

Busy executives need short, actionable communications. Learn the term bluff: BLUF. Bottom line up front. Don't write mystery novels into your messaging. Go ahead and get right to the point. And if you do that, your emails will get read.

Also be culturally sensitive. See, our workplace is probably the most diverse in history, particularly in our Gen Z. And a lot of triggers that are out there could be race, like for example, anti-Asian behavior during early covid, or gender anti LGBT, or [00:38:00] anti-Semitism religion. I mean, someone will always find a way to be offended. Don't take it personally. What you want to do is you want to ensure that you respect other people.

Don't place demands on them and really don't accept demands from them on you. But if you go ahead and show mutual respect, I think you go a long way. See, culture is also more than interpersonal. There's also corporate culture. You need to pick up on these things quickly. If you're new there, which comes first?

Revenue? Family? How about honesty and integrity in everything we do? Is that important? Is it profit *über alles*? What is it that really drives that organization and what is rewarded? And as a leader, you get to help set the culture, especially in a new organization. So take a little bit of time and think about what you want to have for that initial statement to create that culture.

Then lastly, the idea of initiative and drive for business success. It's not the same as academic success. Remember? Targeted for students, for teenagers. But think about it, you might have done extraordinarily well [00:39:00] in an academic environment and not so well in the real world, and that also happens in the military.

Somebody could be on paper, a fantastically successful person, and doesn't do well in combat or in battle. Then you look at someone like, the late Senator John McCain. He graduated in the bottom 5% of his class. I mean, he just barely got out, but he was a guy hopping the fence at night and doing all kinds of other stuff that he probably shouldn't.

But he wasn't in the job of pleasing his professors. He was out doing his own thing. And when he was captured and held prisoner of war for years, well, he was able to go ahead and withstand that pressure because he was pretty much at the point of being his own person. And this initiative in Drive, it can be applied externally.

Think of it like a boot camp where everything is being ordered and you do this and you do that. But success ultimately is dependent, not upon having somebody create demands on you all the time, but internalizing that sense of initiative. And as I tell people, if you can't get excited about your job, well [00:40:00] maybe you're in the wrong line of work.

I mean, cybersecurity careers require constant learning, and the money's great. It's good for those who are competent, but it can be great for those who can make things. Okay. I promised you I'd have a special guest and that special guest is [ChatGPT](#). Let me say that again. Chat-G-P-T. We've got to find a way to pronounce that and we'll come up maybe with a little bit better pronounceable acronym, but it's been a sensation since it was released by OpenAI in November, 2022, and it's currently free to use during the research preview.

It might not always be that way. It's got a companion called [DALL-e-2](#). See that I can pronounce: Dali two. It's pretty cool. It can create images based on natural language descriptions, but as you look at the ChatGPT, as information is generated and feedback is applied, this model can be expected to get much better over time.

Now, I kind of wonder what Ray Kurzweil would say about the timing of the singularity, which is when the ability of a computer [00:41:00] overtakes the abilities of a human brain. He initially predicted about 2045, but some of us think we might get there a little bit earlier.

Now, my first experience with AI was Eliza, it was a natural language processing program. Created in the 1960s by Joseph Weizenbaum at M I T in their artificial intelligence labs, it was a psychotherapist chatbot. And I can remember several students in my high school being convinced they were talking to a real counselor about their teenage problems. Our chatbots have come a long way since then.

Now what I did is I created a ChatGPT account. Right now you can do so for free. And I asked the question, “what are the essential business skills for a cybersecurity professional?” And here's what I got:

There are several essential business skills that are important for a cybersecurity professional to possess:

- 1. Technical expertise:** It is important for a cybersecurity professional to have a strong understanding of computer systems and networks, as well as the ability to analyze and troubleshoot technical [00:42:00] issues.
- 2. Communication skills:** Cybersecurity professionals need to be able to clearly explain complex technical concepts to non-technical stakeholders, such as executives and clients.
- 3. Risk management:** Cybersecurity professionals need to be able to identify and assess risks to an organization's systems and data, and develop strategies to mitigate those risks.
- 4. Project management:** Cybersecurity professionals may be responsible for managing projects related to the implementation of security measures, so it is important to have strong project management skills.
- 5. Problem-solving:** Cybersecurity professionals need to be able to identify and solve problems quickly and effectively in order to protect an organization's systems and data.
- 6. Attention to detail:** Cybersecurity professionals need to be detail-oriented in order to identify and address potential vulnerabilities and threats.
- 7. Adaptability:** The field of cybersecurity is constantly evolving, so it [00:43:00] is important for cybersecurity

professionals to be able to adapt and learn new technologies and techniques as needed.

Now do some of those items sound familiar? The AI tools need something to train on, and if you use the internet as a source for input, you'll start to see familiar material.

Now, this creates an interesting opportunity and a challenge with the amount of misinformation and disinformation available. How do you keep your AI system from ingesting that when reflecting it back to the human. And there is a precedent because in the 1980s when many databases were computerized or when new fields were added. For example, when I was living in California, they said, Hey, we need to add a social security number to your license. Please send us your social security number. There was no validation, no check. But whatever was given went in there and that became official.

I was G Mark Hardy in the military on my ID card. I remember when I was promoted to lieutenant many years ago, I just got off the midwatch and had to get a new ID card and they always put down first name and middle initial, I said, put down G Mark, that's an order. And the petty officer [00:44:00] said, yes, sir. Well, every time I had to get a new ID card, they said we have to put what was on the ID card before. So I'm one of the few people in the military who ever had a first initial middle name, and I kept that all the way to retirement.

So we've looked into the question of CISO skillsets. We've consulted several non-obvious sources. We looked at the Australian government's advice to entrepreneurs, boarding school advice to teenagers, and even artificial intelligence.

And you might take issue with some of those items, and that's okay because only you can decide what you're going to incorporate into your personal leadership toolbox. But I wanted to help expand your thinking a bit because, well, sometimes the best answer is outside the box. So let me leave you with some concluding thoughts.

Be a leader. Manage money and resources. Differentiate yourself and your message. Communicate with clarity and emphasis. Delegate and hold subordinates accountable. Build a personal network. Mentor your team. Be adaptable. Be [00:45:00] sensitive to cultural and political issues. Watch the details and ensure your management makes informed risk-based decisions. And know your limitations.

Thank you for listening. This is your host, G Mark Hardy for CISO Tradecraft. If you've enjoyed our show, we ask you to please give us a "like" on the platform on which you're following us; share it with other people so they know where you're getting your stuff. Our show is going to take off next week for Christmas, so please spend the time you would've spent listening to our podcast with people who are important to you. The world will keep your work waiting for you.

Until then, stay safe.