Leadership Series - Ira Winkler

[00:00:00] **Christophe Foulon:** Welcome everyone. To another episode of breaking into cybersecurity, the leadership series today, we have IRA who will be sharing his experiences with us. IRA. Why did you decide to become a cybersecurity leader versus an individual contributor?

[00:00:15] **Ira Winkler:** It's an interesting question because I never really wanted to be a cyber security leader.

[00:00:21] It just kind of worked out that way. I was always an individual contributor. I love doing actual work, you know, you'd lead project teams, but that just cuz you lead a project team doesn't mean you can can't necessarily stay technical and then. You know, a fluke. I ended up starting my own company. And from that point, it's hard to go back almost because it's, it's too much where you're, if well, assuming you're actually successful at it.

[00:00:47] When you're your own boss, you hate to sometimes go back to an individual, contribute a role. And even if you do, it's probably gonna be in such a way where you have influence and leadership, [00:01:00] otherwise.

[00:01:00] **Christophe Foulon:** And speaking of those, what would you say are the critical skills in cybersecurity leadership?

[00:01:05] **Ira Winkler:** We phrase it so poorly, but the soft skills are pretty much what really matters most. I mean, fundamentally ,If you're gonna be in leadership, you have to understand the business context of what you're doing. You have to understand the functionality. You have to understand that security isn't necessarily the top priority security should be an enabler.

[00:01:28] And that's probably the most critical. Then when you're talking about leadership, the implication is that you are. Able to lead people and leading people. I was, you know, every, so often I ask people, why do you wanna work for me? And it's like, you're inspiring. You know, you have a vision and stuff like that.

[00:01:46] And not every leader has to lead with vision. You know, there, people who lead with encouragement, there are people who, frankly, I, I love the people who. For lack of a better term lead from behind. And what I [00:02:00] mean by that is not push people, but they let people do what they need to do and they trust the people and let them work.

[00:02:07] And those are the people that kind of just. You know, nudge people in the right directions. Assuming of course they have a good team, you know, other people are, you know, I mean, I say my success is basically due to the fact that I hired people who I just let them be themselves. And then I look good cuz they look good and that's the best way to lead if you have the opportunity.

[00:02:30] **Christophe Foulon:** Okay. I'm guessing that would make you very good in the skill of delegation. How do you rate yourself on, on one to five in the skill of delegation?

[00:02:38] **Ira Winkler:** I, I mean, on a scale of one to five in delegation, part of me wants to answer like a negative 10 I'm. So when you think about it, excuse me, as an individual contributor, you are looking at things like, okay, you have to do it and everything.

[00:02:53] And at some point there's a difference between, and, and, and there's a fine point between [00:03:00] delegating, letting people do what they do best, cuz you hire them for that. And then taking lack of ownership, cuz one part of being a leader I think is you have to have extreme ownership and that means that you.

[00:03:14] No matter what happens, you're ultimately responsible. And you know, it doesn't mean yes, you program the system or you configured a system that hacked, and therefore you did that, but you have to take responsibility for all the efforts of your team and essentially say, You know what I, if something goes wrong, it's on my watch.

[00:03:35] If something goes wrong, I'm ultimately responsible for it. And I'm responsible for making sure that the situation is fixed. That leads to this little bit of ANGs that if you don't have complete trust in the people, you're really. You know, like micromanaging and going down into it, you know, the other extreme as well.

[00:03:54] You're just gonna delegate everything away without taking ultimate responsibility. And that [00:04:00] means that you're not really, you know, you're not really engaged as you should be. And there's a very fine line in when you say. Delegation, what do you mean delegation of responsibility or delegation of roles and you know, and, and when you look at delegation of, you're never delegating responsibility, you're delegating tasks, you're delegating functions, but you're never delegating responsibility.

[00:04:26] And given. The non delegation of responsibility. In my opinion, it just makes me real, have a lot of angst when I do delegate. If that makes any sense at all,

[00:04:35] **Christophe Foulon:** a absolutely. To me, it makes sense. And hopefully to the listeners as well. When you think about collaboration, how would you rate yourself on a scale of one to five and why.

[00:04:45] **Ira Winkler:** I mean that's, I mean, that's a, that's a thing that varies greatly. You know, one of my things is when I trust people, I could collaborate. I could do my function and let it go. You know, if I don't trust the people I'm working with that could. You know, that could be a disaster. I [00:05:00] must admit, you know, I like to collaborate with other people because I do think that the more people you bring together, you know, it's like the, you know, it's a cliche, but one plus one makes three, when you have a good collaboration.

[00:05:12] And in that case, when you do, you can really go ahead and have something great. If you have people where the collaboration is unfairly implemented. Unequally implemented that leads to a different story. Now I'm sounding like a lawyer. I guess my answer is it depends.

[00:05:30] **Christophe Foulon:** oh, we love using that term. It depends in cybersecurity.

[00:05:34] **Ira Winkler:** Yeah. I mean, you can't, it's hard to collaborate. Well, when things are not working well, I'll phrase it that way. That

[00:05:42] **Christophe Foulon:** makes sense. And as you think about the term communication, how would you rate yourself on a scale of one to five and.

[00:05:48] **Ira Winkler:** So generally, I mean, I have to say I'm a great communicator. That is one thing I've been told.

[00:05:53] And that would be like, where I say I'm a minus 10 in delegation, perhaps I'm probably a [00:06:00] plus 10 on a scale of one to five in communication. You know, again, it's like the vision I can create. I can generate excitement. And so on. That's not to say I don't have some major times where I communicate the wrong message.

[00:06:15] I have a lot of what they call dry sense of humor. So sometimes I make a joke and. Just is taken the wrong way. And I don't even realize it. I actually was meeting with a CEO of a company last week and you know, in my

current position there theoretically a vendor and like I met him at a party the night before, and then I probably said some joke.

[00:06:37] It's like, ah, I can't believe he just walked away like that to talk to other people. And somebody went back and told him you offended IRA. And then the first thing he did was when I met with him the next day in a formal meeting, he's like, oh, I heard, I offended you. I'm I'm I'm like, you offended me. I go.

[00:06:53] I go in my wildest dreams. You didn't offend me. I'm honestly, you know, you're a public company, [00:07:00] CEO, I'm honored. You took any time. And he is like, no, I thought I was told, I go, no, seriously, if you offended me, I would've told you to your face, but it was probably just a bad joke. So when I look at things like that, it's like, yeah, I have some improvement to do in my communication skills or at least find people who get my sense of humor a lot better.

[00:07:20] **Christophe Foulon:** That makes sense. When you think about influence, how would you consider your skills of influence and why?

[00:07:26] **Ira Winkler:** It, it varies. And it depends on who I'm trying to influence. And you have to be aware of that because you know, in some people where, you know, you have a good relationship with, you know, people where I'm, I'm great friends with and everything, and, you know, we understand each other.

[00:07:42] We can be blunt with each other. I have great influence. If I understand going in that I have. I, you know, I can give people a vision and that vision can be influencing in a lot of cases. You know, you also have to understand if you can talk business language to business people [00:08:00] that also is invaluable.

[00:08:02] And I have a good way of, you know, translating that, you know, business, or like for example, cybersecurity concerns and how they relate to business value. And that's critical at the same time though. There's other, you know, like, depending on. One on one situations I probably need definitely need improvement with regard to, for example, people who are more interpersonal where you, I mean, there's an expression where you have to show people, you, you, you care before I forgot the there's something that rhymes, but I forgot, you know, you have to show people you care, you know, before you, you know, show them and influence them.

[00:08:39] But to me, You know, I'm more for like a direct, straightforward person, like I mentioned, and those like the people who wanna get to know you as a person, I probably have a little bit more problem influencing, cuz you have to take more time to get to them and show them that you care. And so that's one of the things I definitely need to work on, but you know, [00:09:00] again, being, yeah, God, I should have went into law today, but yeah, again, the answer is, it depends.

[00:09:05] **Christophe Foulon:** Well, thank you for sharing that and being vulnerable about where your strengths and weaknesses are, as you think about networking, how important is networking with people versus technology to your, your success and why?

[00:09:20] **Ira Winkler:** So I would say probably if I were to look back at my career, Give or take 95% of my career was networking in one way or another.

[00:09:30] you know, when I look at the jobs, when I look at how I sold my companies and things like that, most of that was networking. There was a little bit of frankly outreach where people knew me because of my writings or speaking, or, you know, I mean, it's great when somebody's interviewing you for a potential job and they have your book on the shelf behind them during the interview, you.

[00:09:51] It's one thing great about zoom, but so that makes it a really, really good thing. But at the end of the day, networking is what tend to open [00:10:00] up the doors. Networking is what really makes or breaks a person's career. I mean, I shouldn't, for many people, if you're gonna have a career where it's, you know, you just have career progression within a company or within your group of friends, that's one thing.

[00:10:15] But if you're really gonna have a. You know, a good profession where you're gonna move around, where you're gonna explore new things. Networking is probably the way to go. And that's one of the things the pandemic hasn't helped with. And for many people, I must admit.

[00:10:29] **Christophe Foulon:** Those make networking a

[00:10:30] **Ira Winkler:** little bit harder.

[00:10:31] Yeah. I mean, I'm, I'm lucky in that because when you look at it and, and, you know, thinking back a little bit more detail, my writing and speaking is what really helps me network. So maybe I should adjust that percentage of 95 5

because you know, some of my better friends are people I met because of writing or speaking at events and things like that.

[00:10:53] And. You know, a little bit of that take is your technical special specialty that gets [00:11:00] you into those environments. It gets you people reaching out to you. So there's a combination of give and take attending professional meetings is another thing. So anyway, I think I over answered that question, so I'll leave it at that.

[00:11:14] No

[00:11:14] **Christophe Foulon:** problem. As you think back, and someone is looking at this wanting to become a cybersecurity leader, what one piece of Sage advice would you give them?

[00:11:24] **Ira Winkler:** Sorry, this I'll I'll quote, bill and Ted. Just be excellent to people. You know, that's number one. And really at the end of the day, if you really wanna go into leadership and be effective, you can underwrite, underestimate the business acumen that you need, you know, and this, and then what I mean by that is like, there are probably some leadership positions, if you're gonna be like technical roles and stuff like that, that's one thing.

[00:11:47] But if you're actually gonna lead people, if you're actually gonna communicate and, and really leading. You know, I mean, it's trying to get the best out of people. The ideal leader, in my opinion, is one who [00:12:00] can easily be replaced. If you can't be replaced, there's something fundamentally wrong with your leadership.

[00:12:06] And that takes a little bit of guidance, mentorship, finding the right people to work for you, you know, and other sorts of things like that. People who can make you better. So, but at the same time, sorry, I guess there is no one thing I could attribute after going through that answer. but knowing the business skills, because at the end of the day, your whole group, your team is gonna be measured upon how well they serve others.

[00:12:33] And maybe that's in a technology to technology role, maybe it's into business, but you really need to understand who you serve, how you serve them. And. Your end customer, whoever that happens to be

[00:12:47] **Christophe Foulon:** degree business enablement is at the top of my list of recommendations as well. Well, IRA, thank you very much for joining us

today. Really appreciate the time and the advice that [00:13:00] you've given us today.

[00:13:00] **Ira Winkler:** Yeah, no, thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.