

Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership - Brad Voris

[00:00:00] **Christophe Foulon:** Welcome to another episode of Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership. Today we have Brad Forest, who will be joining us. This podcast is focused on cybersecurity leaders and sharing their experiences with others so that they can get their own cybersecurity leadership career. Brad, why don't you share a little bit about your background and what got you to this point in your career..

[00:00:25] **Brad Voris:** My name's Brad Voris. I've been in IT security about 22, 23 years. I started out in help desk, like a lot of us did, and worked my way up into network engineering system architecture, network architecture. Then eventually decided to do a migration into purely cybersecurity in about 2000.

[00:00:45] **Christophe Foulon:** What made you decide to shift from being an individual contributor to leading a team or leading people?

[00:00:52] **Brad Voris:** I'll say I'm still an individual contributor to an extent. I do lead teams. My, my focus is [00:01:00] primarily in a leadership slash consultant consultancy role, but I'd say I like the lead.

[00:01:07] **Brad Voris:** Focus on teamwork building out discussions, promoting ideas to challenge viewpoints, to challenge people and security and technology. It's how I like to develop my spare time as well is, al also focus on some technical proficiencies to try and keep myself sharp. That a way, I'm just not one of those leaders that doesn't have that technical skillset.

[00:01:29] **Christophe Foulon:** When it comes to those critical skills for being a cybersecurity leader, in your point of view, which ones do you focus on as your critical skills?

[00:01:38] **Brad Voris:** I would definitely say that as a leader having empathy for my employees, for my staff members, having a capability to listen to what they.

[00:01:46] **Brad Voris:** What, what troubles them, what resources that they need to be able to function to be able to do their job. So it really helps as a tenured professional to be able to sit and talk with individuals, to find out where

we have shortfalls [00:02:00] in our security program, where we have shortfalls in our technology, where we have shortfalls in our resources in general.

[00:02:07] **Brad Voris:** It helps to go back to stakeholders and talk with them about what they have concerns. Where there are problems, I'd say one of the biggest critical skills that any leader can have, and really any person can have, is the ability to listen and understand. Yeah.

[00:02:21] **Christophe Foulon:** Empathy is one of, one of the most important skills in my point of view as well.

[00:02:26] **Christophe Foulon:** What other skills would you say are a critical?

[00:02:28] **Brad Voris:** No, I'm not. Hark too, hardly on listening to my employees because that's the number one thing. But I'll say as cybersecurity professionals, we do a great job, or at least a much better job than we did four or five years ago. Being able to that board level translation of what.

[00:02:45] **Brad Voris:** Risk is in the organization from a technology, from a security control standpoint to the board and having them understand what those risks are. And that's helping to really develop, the tools, the budgets for everything that [00:03:00] security programs need and security professionals need to be able to move forward.

[00:03:04] **Brad Voris:** What I'm starting to see is a, Coming back. And that falls squarely on US leaders when we come back to our staff and say, we were provided this budget, we were provided this capability from the budget or from the board of directors. This is what we need to do moving forward. Now there's this translation that seems to be, we seem to be losing as professionals going back to our staff, going back to our employee base and.

[00:03:29] **Brad Voris:** This is what we have, this is where we like to go, present us with new ideas. We have challenges ahead, let's move forward. That seems to be a continuing theme. I'm seeing, from a senior leadership, really across the board and a lot of different industries.

[00:03:43] **Christophe Foulon:** So it sounds like empathy, communication, and vision setting are some of your top skills.

[00:03:50] **Brad Voris:** Oh yeah. Let's say one other would be consistency. A lack of consistency between the actions that we have, what we commit and what we do on paper translates a [00:04:00] lot to, your staff members if they see us

acting or behaving in a certain way. And then, not adhering to what we would consider professionalism.

[00:04:08] **Brad Voris:** That's a big.

[00:04:09] **Christophe Foulon:** And when it comes to a skill, like influence, what's your point of view on that?

[00:04:14] **Brad Voris:** It really depends on the the level of influence, professional influence, I'll say it it's great to be able to go out and provide, oversight, some guidance, some consultancy on, best practices on things.

[00:04:26] **Brad Voris:** but when it comes down to the core of, Hey, I'm just trying to be flashy, or I'm just trying to be showy and I'm not truly representing who I am or who my branding is, or how I'm trying to be, that's not setting a very good example. It, it's not something that you are, what you wanna do is you wanna provide guidance, you wanna promote teamwork, you wanna lead by.

[00:04:46] **Brad Voris:** And when it comes to that level of influence, that's what you want to portray yourself as. Not a rockstar, not a purple squirrel, not a ninja. None of that bs we wanna focus on who we are, we're problem [00:05:00] solvers, and we're people, let's focus on that. So would you also

[00:05:04] **Christophe Foulon:** say that influence allows you to communicate, say to the board, or back to your stakeholders as to what the vision is and help them get buy-in on that?

[00:05:17] **Brad Voris:** I would definitely say that, when it comes to influence internally to an organization, when you have that level of influence, you have that capability. It. one of those. You have to build that level of human with stakeholders, with the board of directors, with your own staff. That's like the old saying of trust and verify.

[00:05:38] **Brad Voris:** But when it comes down to it, you build that rapport with, your organization. You build that rapport with all the stakeholders and the programs that you have and the programs that you support. You build that rapport with your C Level suite, and that level of influence. Requires dedication, time, understanding, listening, empathy, and that's not only empathy for your staff members, but [00:06:00] it's empathy for board of directors and empathy for other people within the organization.

[00:06:05] **Brad Voris:** Even third party that you have to work with on a fairly routine basis, like your vendors, you gotta have respect for them, just the same as you would for anybody else that works within your organization.

[00:06:13] **Christophe Foulon:** And what are some of the ways that you reach out and. Connect with them. Would you say networking is another critical skill to be able to do that?

[00:06:24] **Brad Voris:** Most definitely. I'll say that scheduling, depending upon availability, scheduling one-on-ones or group meetings, really breaking the ice, getting to know individuals, getting to know what people's concerns are, especially when it comes down to like strictly focusing around business. You really want to know as a security professional, my job is to reduce risk across the organization.

[00:06:45] **Brad Voris:** My job is sit there, provide a level of consultancy to review, to document, but at the end of the day, I'm just reducing risk. Finding out what people's chief concerns are, what those stakeholders fear when it comes to their people, [00:07:00] process, data, and technology, because ultimately that's what they care.

[00:07:02] **Brad Voris:** How can we reduce risk around that? It's listening, it's understanding, finding out what it is that they have concerns about, how you can address those from a risk-based perspective. How you can pro, how you can provide guidance, guiderails blueprints, designs, architect a solution and deploy that solution.

[00:07:21] **Brad Voris:** Keeping them in mind and meeting their needs. And that also helps to build that rapport, that build that level of influence throughout the organiz. Networking in itself. I'm sorry. No, go ahead. I was gonna say networking in itself, I believe it's a very important skill. I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for networking.

[00:07:38] **Brad Voris:** Oh, I talk. Quite a bit to a lot of entry level professionals that are trying to get into the business. They're looking at, analyst roles. They're looking at engineering roles. They've got degrees, they've got all kinds of certifications. They struggle and it's sitting down and finding out where they have issues between resumes and LinkedIn [00:08:00] profiles and getting that level of visibility for them.

[00:08:02] **Brad Voris:** That's really that whole baseline for networking. It's not just about C-Suite, it's not just about, internal. In my organization it's me as a

human being. Also focusing on other human beings trying to, become successful to accomplish something.

[00:08:14] **Christophe Foulon:** And I would say for individuals that are, Coming into the job market or coming into a large organization, a multinational organization, how would you recommend that they network internally in order to progress their careers?

[00:08:31] **Brad Voris:** You know it, that's a great question and that's really gonna be dependent upon the organization. My first recommendation of, when you get your foot in the door for any organization is her talking with leader. , anybody, you can go to your manager first say, Hey, I wanna set up some one-on-ones. Even if it's a 10, 15 minute meeting.

[00:08:50] **Brad Voris:** Let them do introductions. Get your foot in the door with other stakeholders throughout the organization, even if they're not rel specifically relevant to your particular [00:09:00] role. Say you're a security analyst and you're coming in and you wanna talk to somebody that's in some other facet of the business.

[00:09:06] **Brad Voris:** You know what? It's a great idea to sit down and find out more about. That unit of the business does, and how you can better serve the business overall to help them, even if you're not directly helping them. So these are the little things that we typically don't think about, getting into a role, at the end of the day, it's really vital for us to understand what a business does as a member of that business to try and help that business be successful and reduce.

[00:09:33] **Christophe Foulon:** Any other tips you would give along those lines?

[00:09:36] **Brad Voris:** Sure. It comes down to communication. Look at, org charts, find out, who's, in some of these roles and reach out to them, shoot them an email, connect with them on LinkedIn. I can't emphasize enough about the importance of LinkedIn and networking and providing visibility to yourself, visibility to others Develop your own personal brand, that, that kind of ties in with that level of influence that ties in with that level of, [00:10:00] visibility that ties into help boosting your career, continuing education, tying that back into those facets of the organization, because at the end of the day, you are also focusing on trying to build yourself as a better, professional, whether it's a security professional or a technology professional, and getting that level of vis visibility, getting that level of focus and.

[00:10:19] **Christophe Foulon:** And what are some of the things that you do to build up brand?

[00:10:23] **Brad Voris:** Sure. So for me, I do a a mentorship program that I've got through cyber Mentor Dojo. I like to. I'll do at least a dozen to two dozen posts, I'd say a year, sometimes more on LinkedIn. That way there's a little bit more visibility, programs like this, where people get to see me, they get to see what it is that I do, how I work going out and doing conferences, that's a big thing.

[00:10:49] **Brad Voris:** I love going to conferences. I love getting that opportunity to go meet people and see what it is that they. and how they can help me. I can help them. How we can [00:11:00] build each other, how we can build up our careers, how we can do things, how we can all be successful in what we do, how we can minimize risk, and how we can, prevent threat hackers from gaining access to organizations, by working together.

[00:11:13] **Brad Voris:** And that's a lot of what I try and emphasize. It's the little things like that where we work together, we look at, where things are, how things work throughout organizations, throughout industries. We look at how what the impacts are from threat actors. What solutions work around those industries.

[00:11:32] **Brad Voris:** And we talk about that. We discuss that we, we build rapports around that. And that also goes back to that level of influence and seeing, what solutions work for other people and what worked for me or my organization or so forth.

[00:11:44] **Christophe Foulon:** And what regards to any final advice that you would give to an individual looking to get into leadership? What would that be?

[00:11:53] **Brad Voris:** Take your time, this really all comes down to don't be in a hurry. We get into a hurry so much with everything we [00:12:00] do. Everything is instant gratification in our society. And it, it does have its own merits, but at the same same time, it has a lot of faults.

[00:12:07] **Brad Voris:** We need to spend time building relationships. We need to spend time building our network. We need to, understand what it is that our stakeholders need in an organization. We need to make sure we've got a proper education, that we've got a prop, a proper focus on who it is, and building ourselves up and building up confidence.

[00:12:25] **Brad Voris:** A lot of times what I see is we come into a role, we don't have a lot of confidence. We can't. Speaking is very critical. It ties back in with listening. Listening by far is probably the most critical skillset anyone can ever have. Listening, followed by understanding, by being able to speak upon that topic for me.

[00:12:43] **Brad Voris:** Take your time, build up your apart. Getting a good, fundamental understanding of how things work, understanding the fundamentals, and then being able to apply yourself. Take your.

[00:12:54] **Christophe Foulon:** Brad, thank you for joining us for another episode of Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership, where [00:13:00] we have quick bites of what you need so that you could deliver on impact for your career.

[00:13:06] **Christophe Foulon:** Brad, thank you very much for taking this time out today.

[00:13:09] **Brad Voris:** Thank you very much, Chris. I really do appreciate it.