

2023-02-10 Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership - Jamie Williams

[00:00:00] **Christophe Foulon:** Welcome to another episode of Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership, where we have Jamie Williams from the Mire Corporation, and it's on his shirt, so it's a dead giveaway. going to talk to us about his journey into cybersecurity leadership, and tips and tricks along the way. Jamie, would you like to introduce yourself to our audience?

[00:00:20] **Jamie Williams:** Yeah, absolutely. I just wanna start off by saying thanks for having me. Looking forward to chatting, but my name is Jamie Williams. I've been at Mire for. Oh, the math is hard at this point, about five and a half years at this point. So it's been a long fun journey. Started off as an individual contributor, so really, I had a big appetite for getting my hands on things, hands on keyboard, showing me the hardest, most technical things.

[00:00:41] **Jamie Williams:** Really loved that kind of space, but over time, developed into, a little bit of a lead. I try not to think of myself as a manager. So I think this like leadership threshold is probably about the safest landings place. So more than happy to share my experience. But, especially in the last five years, I've also had the opportunity to bounce around different roles, doing, attack work attack [00:01:00] evaluations.

[00:01:00] **Jamie Williams:** I have the simulation. So a little bit of everything and

[00:01:03] **Christophe Foulon:** As you think about your experience, what made you want to leave being an individual contributor and starting to lead people?

[00:01:11] **Jamie Williams:** I think it's and people always ask this cuz I think everyone, planning out your career, you obviously want to keep, have goals and keep progressing. I, for me it came naturally not saying, I know everyone's a little bit different personality.

[00:01:22] **Jamie Williams:** But in terms of that evolution in term particularly I started off working on attack. I was writing techniques. It felt like it, I might have just been me at the time focusing on that. And we started hiring more people and more people started joining the team and there became a need

where, hey, that thing that I've been doing, I needed to share it with more people.

[00:01:39] **Jamie Williams:** And, oh, I can help them, mentor them. And before long it matured into something that was a little more formal, where I'm reviewing, I'm do helping, scoping, doing training. A little bit of, you can never, in leadership, you can never really fully avoid management. So I'm helping them with kind of the managerial kind of stuff.

[00:01:55] **Jamie Williams:** I think to your point, at least from my perspective, I've seen the best kind of progressions into that [00:02:00] leadership role as that natural, hey you start as an individual contributor, individual contributor. I understand what folks are doing. I can help coach. But also you as that leader need that in terms of, you're, in my case, I'm working on this thing.

[00:02:13] **Jamie Williams:** More hands, more diversity, more perspectives, all better. The more people I can get know, working on the same task, the better we're all gonna be for it. I think it's a little bit of that, kind of progression of both understanding your trade, being you. In the weeds and opening up that aperture and saying, let's get more people involved here.

[00:02:28] **Jamie Williams:** Let's let more people present themselves and contributed to this. But then you still being there and being, everyone's not gonna just dive in day one and they're, people have questions and oh, even over time you question each other. Where, there's people that join the team and I got them set up and they were doing their thing, and then six months later they're like, Hey, I noticed you always do this.

[00:02:47] **Jamie Williams:** That, that doesn't make sense. You should probably stop doing that. Or, Hey I tried what you told me and it didn't really work out a hundred percent. I found a better way. And, that learning goes back and forth. So I think that natural progression is really, at least in my experience, and [00:03:00] not even just attacking other aspects like adversary, ululation and, and threat intelligence.

[00:03:04] **Jamie Williams:** We all have that mentor up, mentor down perspective that really, helps you as long as you're still staying true to, your kind of passion and your. I think it just happens. Like I said, I think, everyone's a little bit different, so there might be opportunities where you can leap and take a jump ahead and maybe fast forward a little bit.

[00:03:20] **Jamie Williams:** But I'm a big fan of just keep doing your thing, keep doing what you love, and you, the world may surprise you.

[00:03:25] **Christophe Foulon:** You sound like that servant leader profile as you look at the critical skills that leaders need as you developed, what do you instill in those that you grow?

[00:03:37] **Jamie Williams:** That's tough.

[00:03:37] **Jamie Williams:** I think it's two twofold, at least in my experience is empathy, understanding. It's so hard and I think I've seen this across the industries. Once you get really good at something, it's so hard to remember that when you weren't and looking back and saying oh, it's frustrating to explain the same thing over and over again.

[00:03:53] **Jamie Williams:** And some people you need that second and third reminder of, Hey, don't forget to do this. Don't forget to do that. But we've all been there and I think that's one [00:04:00] of the things that I've tried to keep myself honest of. Thinking back to the people who did that for me, and oh, like they were probably annoyed.

[00:04:06] **Jamie Williams:** They were frustrated. They sent me the same email five times. I need to pay that forward because that's just part of the development. But in that same respect, also transparency for better or worse especially with that I don't know if the servant leader model is. That sounds awesome.

[00:04:18] **Jamie Williams:** I'm gonna check that out later. But exactly as you said, like for better or worse, Helping whoever you're leading, telling them, putting it straight on Hey, you're doing great. This is fantastic. And, and that also gets to that information sharing of. This is what I think of it.

[00:04:31] **Jamie Williams:** I'm not just gonna give you a thumbs up or saying good job, like this is why I think this is good. I'm gonna give you very very surgical feedback. But then again, I think one of the tougher things with leadership is the inverse of that, where, Hey, I think you could do this a little better.

[00:04:43] **Jamie Williams:** I think I, I'm not gonna tell you exactly what to do, but I've done this before and I think you're heading on a path that kind of ends in, maybe suboptimal performance or, hey, like maybe we need to reconsider x Y. But that just I think all of that comes from that trust you develop as a leader

in terms [00:05:00] of, once you be transparent with them, show, hey, like this is our, we have shared goals, we are all on this team together.

[00:05:06] **Jamie Williams:** This is what we're trying to achieve. I'm not doing this. I'm, I don't have any personal influence. I'm not, trying to steer you in some misdirected way. I'm gonna let you know. Why I think the things that I do, why I say the things I do, that you understand them, course correct me if I say something and you think I'm wrong, I want you to feel that you are unable to say, Nope, I think you're wrong here.

[00:05:24] **Jamie Williams:** We need to not do that. And it needs to be a constructive conversation. And I think all of, I think that, and also I think maybe those two play each other cuz a little bit of that empathy kind of showing, hey not just, again, not that top down, but also bottom up of I sometimes tough things need to happen.

[00:05:37] **Jamie Williams:** If you expose, people to that they understand, hey, maybe he didn't want to do that, or maybe that wasn't his first choice, but it's just the way it is. So I think those two really play on each other and build that kind of culture. At least for me, that works out really well.

[00:05:51] **Christophe Foulon:** And as you think about. Delegation, collaboration and communication. How important are those competencies to leaders and why?

[00:05:59] **Jamie Williams:** [00:06:00] Oh geez. Delegation is like a, such a tough one for me cuz you know, especially coming from that individual contributor where, it's fun, it's exciting, it's you feel accountable for your work and you're proud of it.

[00:06:10] **Jamie Williams:** It's so hard to hand that off and, trust someone else. But I think that's necessary and that's one of the things I think. Good leaders do naturally. But growing into that leadership role, it's a release. For me, it was a huge like learning curve in terms of, taking that step back saying, I'd really love to do this, but I also need to get outta the way because it's really important for other people to do it and have that learning experience for themselves.

[00:06:33] **Jamie Williams:** Have that passion and that enjoyment for themselves. But also, if you're too hands, Your, I think it's good to your point about communication, if you're too hands on, you're gonna, bias their, you're gonna bias, you're gonna micromanage. But if you're too hands off, you just throw it over the fence and hope they figure it out.

[00:06:47] **Jamie Williams:** They might not be in a situation where they can handle it. So I think it's, it all comes down to that. And I don't think, to my knowledge I'm not an expert in leadership, but I don't think there's a perfect formula for balancing those things. It's one, but it is, I think the formula is just [00:07:00] being, in terms of do they balancing too much, too little delegation, too much, too little communication.

[00:07:05] **Jamie Williams:** And I think that's something that different leaders kinda have profiles of. Like to your point about Like being a servant leader. I think that's, there's different profiles from the leader, but I also, it's like a responsibility of a leader to understand your, the different people in your team and how they respond.

[00:07:20] **Jamie Williams:** Where some folks are, there's some people that I work with, I know I can just throw them anything. You get it. You understand how, I think you probably understand the problem, but I also understand you will ask a question if you need. I don't, there's gonna, , limited C, there's gonna be as much communication as needed to get the job done.

[00:07:35] **Jamie Williams:** Where some folks I recognize, hey, maybe they need a little bit of scoping, I need to check in. It's not necessarily one's better than the other, it's just people operate differently. So you of have to, you're never really gonna map that out perfectly, but the more you're aware of that and you can course correct and learn as you grow together as a.

[00:07:51] **Jamie Williams:** I think you eventually again, start to work closer and closer to that culture where everyone feels, complete. They're contributing to the mission and they have [00:08:00] everything they need where they're comfortable and they're able to focus in on whatever the task at hand is.

[00:08:04] **Jamie Williams:** Another.

[00:08:05] **Christophe Foulon:** Critical skill that I've seen a lot of people mention is influence. What are your views on influence , positively or negatively? Yeah, when it comes to leadership and how it's used,

[00:08:14] **Jamie Williams:** whether, influence can obviously can sometimes get a little icky cuz like I said, you think, you always think of show offs and marketing, or at least in my brain do.

[00:08:22] **Jamie Williams:** But it, it's a, it's definitely a required skill. Even. Obviously externally, if fo, if your folks are doing awesome work, you want to,

get them attention. You don't want them to feel like they're just doing this stuff and it's just going nowhere. Obviously getting people recognition that they deserve.

[00:08:35] **Jamie Williams:** But also even internally with like within corporate culture you have to advocate for your people. You have to advocate for their work, whether it's, promotions and rec, internal recognition or. Hey, this person, has some life matter and there's something personal coming up.

[00:08:49] **Jamie Williams:** You kinda have to be there. And that only really happens if you're able to exactly, to your point, not only ex influence those external parties, even within, I think influence with internally [00:09:00] to a team. I haven't really thought too much about that. I don't really, like I said I'm more big on that kind.

[00:09:04] **Jamie Williams:** Empathy, trust, let's work together. But I think, everything outside of that team, I think to a degree, comes down to like influence exactly as you said. So whether or not it's something that, you're, you see yourself being good at or something that you really want to do, I think at some point as a leader, it's, it just becomes a requirement.

[00:09:22] **Jamie Williams:** So the better you are at it, but also, Managing it and scaling it where, you don't want to go off and oversell yourself. You don't want to go off and make these promises that you can't keep up. But you need to, that's definitely gonna be a tool that you can use to make sure your team has what they need.

[00:09:38] **Jamie Williams:** So it's one of those kind of, tricky things. But situationally, I wouldn't discard it as something that, you just can ignore and pretend like it's not really something that might hit you in the face at some.

[00:09:48] **Christophe Foulon:** So we initially met Through a friend of a friend that connected us and then we met at a conference.

[00:09:55] **Christophe Foulon:** That, that's a form of networking. Yes. How important is that as a leader and how [00:10:00] do you use it as a leader and pass it to your team.

[00:10:02] **Jamie Williams:** Yeah, exactly. And I think that kind of almost plays hand in hand with influence of that network is it's really, like you said, it's a system and things, systems share resources.

[00:10:12] **Jamie Williams:** And like I said it's almost like a self-preservation. Hey, I think exactly to your point, a lot of this network that we build is, hey, I have a resource that might be helpful to other people. I'm gonna, contribute it to the network. Or I have a need, someone's looking for a new job, someone's looking for information.

[00:10:27] **Jamie Williams:** I have a project, maybe we're stuck on something. You contribute, it's like a community of sorts. You contribute and it's like a push pull. You add things in, you pull things out. But, and I think that as a leader, it's, I think it exists at both a leader and individual contributor level, but obviously there's levels to all of this.

[00:10:44] **Jamie Williams:** As a leader, it's really important because you can, again, advocate on behalf of not only your individuals. But also at your team where, hey you know, I very often, I think the way we met was, the things my team's doing is, relevant to these folks and these folks, but also there's things that they can [00:11:00] do for us.

[00:11:00] **Jamie Williams:** And whether that's holistic to our team of, Hey, I, I got this new information that's gonna help us all out. Or Hey, I'm summarizing what we've been working on for the last three months and providing it over here. Not, nothing to make it transactional. You can really make, you can only really communicate and participate in these communities if you are willing to both kind of share as well as receive.

[00:11:21] **Jamie Williams:** So I think it's a little nebulous, but I do think it's something again similar to influence where. It's not something you can necessarily just disregard. So if you just put yourself in a, an office somewhere, turn all lights off and work by yourself, you might do some awesome things, but it's just not gonna have, especially with the way our like, like cyber and infras information security operates as an industry, it's just not gonna have as much impact if you're not sharing it and you're not showing it and you're getting more perspective from the outside.

[00:11:49] **Jamie Williams:** So again, one of those things where, Whether or not you like it, you have to. And I personally, I love it, but whether or not you like it or not, you have to, at least be aware and, do at least your due [00:12:00] diligence in that respect.

[00:12:00] **Christophe Foulon:** I love that approach. Now we're towards the end and I always like to ask what advice would you give to future leaders?

[00:12:07] **Jamie Williams:** Oh, that's a tough one. I, we covered a lot of it, but just to foot stomp it to let it happen. Don't, I know people that I actually, even thinking back to my internship days, people were like, I want to be like, executive of this or manager of that.

[00:12:19] **Jamie Williams:** And I think, those courses and those paths are possible. And like I said, if that's your goal, that's your goal. At least from my perspective I was one of those, I'll never be a manager. I'll never be a leader. I just wanna do my thing. Just. Let it happen.

[00:12:30] **Jamie Williams:** Like I said, if you had told me five years ago, Hey, this is where you'd be in your current job, I would've said, oh, I don't wanna do that. Versus like even there was certain points where I was like, Hey, I was presented opportunities and they were like, Hey, do you wanna lead this? Or do you wanna be in of a more senior role in this?

[00:12:44] **Jamie Williams:** And I wasn't sure and I was like, oh, that sounds, I could of say no and go off and do this. Like more hands-on keyboard, more direct thing and I'd probably be happier. But that looks interest. And I'm really happy that I was able to say yes to a lot of those because again, it's something that I didn't expect, but it ended up being, [00:13:00] beneficial for me as a person.

[00:13:01] **Jamie Williams:** Like learning different skills and rounding out. But also there's that, that big win of, there's nothing more exciting if you're not sure about leadership. There's nothing more exciting than watching someone develop. And like you, you met them, Dave Zero, you they didn't know what was going on.

[00:13:15] **Jamie Williams:** You taught 'em some stuff. Not only did they catch up to you, they surpassed you because, they came with this huge background. They knew a bunch of things. They learned things, they saw things. And just watching that like kind of seed grow to me that's like the best feeling in leadership.

[00:13:29] **Jamie Williams:** So I think, just to summarize that, my, my advice would just be like, Play it natural, see where things go. But when those opportunities present themselves even if it's a little bit maybe outside of your comfort zone, consider it nec you necessarily don't have to say yes to everything, but especially where it's like, Hey, this is something you're really passionate about.

[00:13:46] **Jamie Williams:** You think you can contribute, you're just not sure. Those are those leaps of faith that I think really pay off cuz it's just, I don't. I don't think anyone is like a hundred percent sure about a leadership role until again months and months later and you see the result and you're like, wow, I'm [00:14:00] so glad I did that.

[00:14:00] **Christophe Foulon:** Wow. Thank you. Thank you so much for coming on. Jamie where can people find you and On the internet.

[00:14:06] **Jamie Williams:** Yeah, on the internet. So I technically have a LinkedIn page. I don't really check it, but if people want to, connect there, happy to do but Twitter's probably the best place Jamie antisocial.

[00:14:15] **Jamie Williams:** It's yep, no underscores or anything. One giant blob of characters. That's probably where I'm the most active. But again, anywhere you can find me, just feel free to shoot out a message. Happy to chat. Yeah, Twitter's probably best. Honestly I checked LinkedIn when I get like the, automated like notification, I'm like, oh, cool.

[00:14:30] **Jamie Williams:** So and so did something or tag me or sent me a message. I'll go look then. But moment to moment jam antisocial on Twitter.

[00:14:36] **Christophe Foulon:** And are you working on any exciting projects right now or coming up that you

[00:14:40] **Jamie Williams:** Oh yeah. Big stuff. So we're always growing attack. I think 2023 will be a big year for attack in terms.

[00:14:45] **Jamie Williams:** Us not necessarily, attack doesn't really, it's a common language, so we're not gonna reinvent the wheel, but inter, diving into some interesting spaces that are developing in terms of adversary tradecraft, and then with adversary emulation one of our biggest goals has always been to make it more [00:15:00] accessible.

[00:15:00] **Jamie Williams:** So we'll be putting out, continually putting out things that just open it up and make, offensive assessments more. Something that not only, anyone can execute, but more organizations can actually use and provide value in. So that's not necessarily gonna point to something specific, but just stay tuned.

[00:15:15] **Jamie Williams:** Cause we're always just trying to make in generally security operations just more like attainable for anyone. Like I said I

love my job. Super excited, so I can probably talk all day as I know we gotta wrap. I see that.

[00:15:28] **Christophe Foulon:** Jamie, thank you so much for joining us. Really appreciate your time and others.

[00:15:33] **Christophe Foulon:** Have a great rest of your day. Cheers. Thank you.