

# Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership - Paul Malcomb

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[00:00:23] **Christophe Foulon:** Welcome to another episode of Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership, where we talk to individuals that are cybersecurity leaders. They have that experience from coming up in their career and they wanna give back to the future generation of leaders. Today we have Paul that has a broad experience from many different fields, and he'll share his background on that.

[00:00:47] **Christophe Foulon:** Paul, give us a little bit of background about.

[00:00:49] **Palm Malcomb:** Chris, I appreciate the invite in the introduction. I don't know if I can say that I qualify as a senior leader yet, but I'm definitely on, on the journey. But I started life doing logistics, then [00:01:00] did domestic crisis operations infrastructure protection all before I got my feet wet into cyber.

[00:01:07] **Palm Malcomb:** And I guess I would say all of that to put it out there to folks that your background doesn't necessarily have to start in the cyber arena to end up successfully there. We can definitely go more into it, but Chris really look forward to the conversation.

[00:01:20] **Christophe Foulon:** Since you mentioned the transition from another field, oh, why don't you give us a little bit of background as to how you accomplished that transit.

[00:01:28] **Palm Malcomb:** So I actually started as doing regular incident management, like it, your servers broken. And it was leading, crisis calls or incident management calls on that side. That ended up. Network of friends, if you will. Somebody that I worked with ended up going into another role at another employer, and they were specifically on the cyber side as opposed to the IT side.

[00:01:50] **Palm Malcomb:** And he reached out and basically said, It really isn't that much different. What you don't know. If you ask the right questions to the technical folks, they can help you through it. Like they [00:02:00] could

they're willing to help you learn, if you will. And what we just, we really need is somebody that can help us with decision support on the fly.

[00:02:06] **Palm Malcomb:** Like they can come in to an unknown situation. The playbook's already broke, if the playbook was working, we wouldn't be here in the first place type thing. , it was that phone call that ultimately I, I was like, Hey, what? Sure I can give it a shot. So went over to the the new gig focused a hundred percent on cyber crisis management, and that kind of came in two forms.

[00:02:25] **Palm Malcomb:** There was the immediate situation that we had to deal with, and there was like the longer term technical project management, if you will, that had to handle the recommendations that were the output, like post-event, once we got to a state of business as usual, if you.

[00:02:38] **Christophe Foulon:** We we talked a little bit before this recording, but what are some of the things that you took on to become a leader or a manager of others or the situation like you're a crisis manager, so you're the manager of the process, the leader of the process.

[00:02:56] **Christophe Foulon:** How did you develop your career to get there?

[00:02:58] **Palm Malcomb:** So I would say [00:03:00] model, trying to model after people that are already doing those type of activities well seek them out as a mentor and try and figure out how they were able to do their job in that capacity and maybe identify some things that you can pick up as gold nuggets to add to your repertoire along the way, if that makes sense.

[00:03:19] **Christophe Foulon:** And as you think. Some of the critical skills required for crisis management leadership in that space, what would you say they are?

[00:03:28] **Palm Malcomb:** So absolute paramount effective communication before anything else. That's the absolute, like if you can't get that you're, you'll definitely have a broken operation.

[00:03:38] **Palm Malcomb:** And when I say that, two different things like feedback loop. Absolutely. Making sure there's no noise in your signal, so to say, et cetera. But I also mean like the tech versus non-tech. So you have to be able to talk to technical folks. be able to interpret, there's gonna be a lot of data points.

[00:03:55] **Palm Malcomb:** And out of those data points, maybe only one out of 50 [00:04:00] actually really matter for the decision at hand. And everybody is in the heat of the moment. Everybody that's their first emergency or a lot of times so they're going, 75% of their mental capacity that they would typically have at that point.

[00:04:12] **Palm Malcomb:** And they're literally gonna be throwing as much information out as they can because they don't know. , which one is that gold nugget. So hard part is teasing out or parsing a little bit. But once you're able to identify I guess the critical data points then I would say it's being able to translate those because it makes me think back to when Fukushima dichi happened in Japan and we had this guy from Ditcher, God bless his heart, he was telling me about the plume models and they were like, rainbow color chart.

[00:04:39] **Palm Malcomb:** And you're basically saying, Stoplight. Red is bad, green is good. And it's how bad is red? And the answer that I got back was like, the average human being actually let me do it, try and do it justice. The average human being breathes 24 cubic liters of air per however many seconds.

[00:04:56] **Palm Malcomb:** That was the answer that started into, and I was like, oh my gosh, man, [00:05:00] I've gotta be able to tell somebody 15 minutes hard work, an hour hard work. Try and put it into a parameter that I can, To somebody that's not I guess a nuclear scientist type deal. And those type of the ability to translate.

[00:05:14] **Palm Malcomb:** So effective communication, active listening skills, the ability to take it in and identify the gold nuggets. Then the ability to summarize those in a non-technical fashion to an audience so that they can make the decision they need to make. And that's part of it too Think about the downstream audience.

[00:05:30] **Palm Malcomb:** There may be points that you think are cool that you wanna stress, but at the end of the day, try to think about whatever the decision or need is that the audience that you're delivering have and focus the information that they need to hear. Gi give them that type deal. Cuz they're probably hectic as hell too, and they don't have enough time to cycle on x-ray information that's superfluous.

[00:05:48] **Palm Malcomb:** So hopefully that's a good.

[00:05:50] **Christophe Foulon:** And for individuals that have never been in like crisis management, how do you adapt to that [00:06:00] constant rush of potential adrenaline that's happening and be able to work in that situation?

[00:06:08] **Palm Malcomb:** Two things I would say become really important. I'm gonna call it emotional awareness. lot of people would say emotional intelligence in terms of like their thinking about their interaction with others around them.

[00:06:19] **Palm Malcomb:** I'd almost say it's more important to also be aware of your own emotional stability. Because even if everything is about to fly apart, i e like we're building the plane, it's on fire as we're going down and there's no parachutes on board type thing. , we have to stay calm, cool, and collected because everyone else.

[00:06:37] **Palm Malcomb:** Is that's the glue that's holding it together. So there was a guy that I had the pleasure working for, and that was one of his defining traits that I tried to model after I really admired. Because no matter what happened, it didn't matter, F five tornado or it's just a breeze.

[00:06:53] **Palm Malcomb:** Anything in between, he'd come in and it was just the same. Same thing. Even keel, and the stability that [00:07:00] brought to the wider organization where it was almost as soon as the person showed up, everything's gonna be okay. It's all gonna be all right. It'll be worked out.

[00:07:07] **Palm Malcomb:** Cheers.

[00:07:08] **Christophe Foulon:** Perfect. A, as you think about your journey, what are, so the top three recommended skills if you had that, you would give like bullet point, right?

[00:07:17] **Palm Malcomb:** Okay. I would say get probably the most important outside of the effective communication piece. I'd say get really good at being wrong or Get good at accepting that we don't get it right more often than we get it right.

[00:07:30] **Palm Malcomb:** And the faster that you can take input from somebody else that, and adjust your view to improve the stance of the organization, that's a huge benefit for the team. So I'd say check the ego at the door is kind of part of that. But a bigger part of that is like almost change your perspective.

[00:07:48] **Palm Malcomb:** On it's not my baby, and it's not an ugly baby. It's our baby, and we're trying to make it the most beautiful baby in the world. So like the F, the faster I can accept, input and refactor. The [00:08:00] better output is and the less time we have to waste to get there. So I guess as a general thing don't, it's okay to be wrong.

[00:08:06] **Palm Malcomb:** It's not just okay to be wrong. It's great to be wrong if you're smart enough to understand that you got a person, an employee standing in front of you that's trying to tell you how to be right. You know what I'm saying? And I guess the ability to identify that and to adjust very quickly.

[00:08:23] **Palm Malcomb:** That is a talent that will, and it'll gain the respect of the team too. That will end up paving so many benefits, like ancillary wise. Because you're the underlings or the people the stakeholders you interact with will realize that your view is moldable. And when they realize that, it's man, the negotiations begin and it's amazing what can happen on both sides of the fence when we get to that point.

[00:08:45] **Palm Malcomb:** So anyway.

[00:08:46] **Christophe Foulon:** A lot have mentioned that the ability to influence as a leader is critical. What's your perspective on influence?

[00:08:54] **Palm Malcomb:** I , unless you're in a situation where you can dictate the outcome, which is extremely rare, at least for most [00:09:00] of us, maybe there are a few that actually are living in the ivory tower on an everyday basis.

[00:09:04] **Palm Malcomb:** Influence is , it is beyond a necessary evil. You've got to be able to, that I'd say it's a means of survival. You've gotta be able to put things in perspective where it's mutual gain or find other reasons that folks can be motivated to align, et cetera. But influence is paramount. The ability to, The group aligned towards a clear vision what that can yield in terms of productivity, at least I think of like extreme ownership, almost like tipping the hat to Jocko saying If somebody already knows what the expectation is, then they're going.

[00:09:38] **Palm Malcomb:** You don't have to tell them to grab the moth when the floor is dirty. They're gonna see the floor is dirty, they're gonna see the mop, and they're gonna go grab it, and they're gonna fix the problem without anybody ever having to say that. And it's if you have every member of the team operating like that it's pretty spectacular what can be accomplished.

[00:09:52] **Christophe Foulon:** Nice. You mentioned earlier that a lot of the growth in your career came from people that you knew for future [00:10:00] leaders. How would you describe networking to them and why it's such a critical skill?

[00:10:04] **Palm Malcomb:** Rome isn't built in a day, and InfoSec is an incredibly small world. And I guess the path that your career takes, you don't go that alone.

[00:10:14] **Palm Malcomb:** You go that with, all of the people that you meet along the way. And I guess it, it isn't any, it doesn't do any good to get to the finish line. If you waste all the relationships on the way there and. I actually, I guess this actually hits home for me more probably than a lot of others.

[00:10:31] **Palm Malcomb:** But I'd say that due to the nature of a lot of my jobs, it puts us in higher stress positions where sometimes, like in my younger career, I was probably shorter than I needed to be. and it took me a while to realize that you don't have to be a complete ass or a jerk to forgive my French to still get the stuff done.

[00:10:49] **Palm Malcomb:** And there's probably apologies I owe, like even to this day that if I could go back in time, I could handle it of different and it's like it takes you a little bit to realize that. And in the heat of [00:11:00] the moment sometimes you don't have the ability to explain why something has to happen, but it goes miles and miles to go back after the fact and unpack that with somebody that you care about.

[00:11:10] **Palm Malcomb:** And then I guess something else that I've realized as time goes on is People take all different trajectories in life and it's like somebody that maybe either you worked for at one point comes to you asking if they comply under you or vice versa, where you had somebody working as a coordinate at one point and then fast forward a couple years and they're like an executive VP somewhere and is like, Hey man, what's happening?

[00:11:34] **Palm Malcomb:** So anyway, it's a small.

[00:11:36] **Christophe Foulon:** Definitely a small world also sounds like you, you want to ensure that you don't burn those bridges. You keep those good relationships. And if you give good karma. Welcome. If I could summarize you, cheers. So we're approaching the end.

[00:11:50] **Christophe Foulon:** So I always like to ask what advice would you give to future cybersecurity leaders?

[00:11:55] **Palm Malcomb:** So there's the way that technology is divergent and going in a thousand different [00:12:00] directions, there's a million different certifications. There's all kinds of college courses, there's all kinds of the, just overwhelming information.

[00:12:07] **Palm Malcomb:** Jump in and try something. I've been blessed by being surrounded with some brilliant minds in their respective spaces where I can just sit on their shoulder and I get to, suck up like a Hoover vacuum, a ton of knowledge just because I'm in their presence. Like it, some of it rubs off.

[00:12:23] **Palm Malcomb:** That would be something else I'd say if you can seek out a mentor or find somebody you know that, that is more squared away than you are, they don't have to be the best in the industry. But find somebody that knows more than you and learn a little bit more than you know now. And try to discern.

[00:12:37] **Palm Malcomb:** If the stuff checks out in terms of lookout from other sources and, try to do your due diligence, that's another part. But in general, I would just say try to get started. Start somewhere, go chase anything that interests you. If offensive securities your jam and you wanna learn how to break into something, Try to break into something that you have at your house, like without any, without spending any money, just go [00:13:00] play with the toys that you already have.

[00:13:01] **Palm Malcomb:** Or Raspberry PR pie isn't too much. I guess a flipper zero is probably pretty expensive at this point because of the you know how everybody demand is, but they're. Things available where you can start simple. And if you're on the other side of the fence, if you're trying to get into risk understanding risk right now.

[00:13:17] **Palm Malcomb:** Not to say, if you asked me today what the two areas that I think are gonna absolutely go outta control in the next couple years, I think insider threaten g r are about to be a significantly bigger conversation than they are now. The insider threat in terms of most situations start. Human born attack vector, whether it was knowing full, like malicious or it was unknown, oblivious, like compromised type deal.

[00:13:39] **Palm Malcomb:** Either way it starts with either a so I guess insider threat I think is gonna be a way more significant topic as everybody not to go to

marketing cliches, but everybody's moving towards the zero trust. Principles and I think the insider threat's gonna be a bigger component of that in the near future.

[00:13:56] **Palm Malcomb:** I said G R C not to throw the Hail Mary to the insurance [00:14:00] industry right now, but there's a lot of news on both sides where some insurance providers are saying we will no longer ensure X, Y, and Z related to cyber for because the risk is unquantifiable, is the way that they're saying it.

[00:14:12] **Palm Malcomb:** Like they don't know how to stack that up. , risk quantification is gonna be much more serious cuz it's not. It's not a problem. We can just look away from. We're gonna have to figure it out. So the other side of that is I also saw an article from a different insurance company that offered a complete cyber coverage, like absolutely no holds bar.

[00:14:31] **Palm Malcomb:** There's no limit to the coverage. Exactly. Your eyebrows went up, man, my eyebrows went up too because I was like, Okay. Either, that's one of two things. That's either an executive that doesn't understand cyber risk, that just wants to issue, they're trying to make their bonus and that's the campaign that they're gonna launch.

[00:14:46] **Palm Malcomb:** But they're not gonna be there to have to pick up the pieces when everybody starts putting in claims. Or they have already figured out how to quantify cyber risk really freaking well, and they have some kind of proprietary system. Come in and actually tell [00:15:00] somebody at a high confidence level, you know how squared away here they are.

[00:15:03] **Palm Malcomb:** And even then, it's just a snapshot. So do they continuously test? I have so many questions. That could be a whole nother call, Chris .

[00:15:09] **Christophe Foulon:** Yeah, a absolutely. You're right. Paul, thank you so much for joining us on another episode of Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership, where we help develop future cyber security leaders.

[00:15:19] **Christophe Foulon:** Thank you all. It was a pleasure.