

Breaking into Cybersecurity

Leadership Clint Kehr 2022-11-18

13.02.39

[00:00:00]

[00:00:23] **Christophe Foulon:** Welcome to another episode of Breaking into Cybersecurity Leadership. We'll be talking to Clint, who is a leader, specifically in the red team side of things, and hear some of his perspectives on what it takes to become a leader. But first, Clint, would you like to introduce yourself to the audience?

[00:00:52] **Clint Kehr:** thanks Chris.

[00:00:52] **Clint Kehr:** My name is Clint Care. I am somewhat new to cybersecurity. I started my career in [00:01:00] law enforcement. I was actually a local police officer for a few years and then became a federal agent with the Department of Justice, where I was a federal agent for about. 11 years and found myself doing cyber investigations towards the end of my end of my time in Department of Justice.

[00:01:20] **Clint Kehr:** And I started to get involved in dark web cases, which were very interesting and exciting. A little bit after Silk Road got taken down is when I got started doing that. And I just really loved doing cyber investigations. And I started to go to school for it getting certifications in it and putting a lot of time and effort towards it and basically had to make the decision whether I was gonna continue to be an agent and possibly leave or give up all that knowledge and experience or if I was gonna make a complete shift into cybersecurity.

[00:01:52] **Clint Kehr:** And I decided to take a leap of faith out of the public sector into the private sector and I've been in the private sector for almost four [00:02:00] years now. I, yeah, about four years now. Having a number of roles in the private sector dealing with cyber threat intelligence and also dealing with as you said the red or offensive side of cyber security.

[00:02:13] **Christophe Foulon:** So one of the goals of this podcast is to differentiate some of the skills and competencies needed to be a leader. So what was your decision in switching to leadership from being instead of staying as an individual contributor?

[00:02:33] **Clint Kehr:** It's a great question because sometimes it's not always up to you. It's not up to you at times whether you are going to be an individual contributor or a people leader and that's really something, I.

[00:02:44] **Clint Kehr:** When I was an agent, I got technically proficient and someone actually told me like, you're Clint, you're too good technically to go into management. We don't want you to do that because we don't wanna lose that skill set. Which, I'm did I do myself a disservice by [00:03:00] getting technical?

[00:03:00] **Clint Kehr:** But luckily where I am now there, there are both career paths and you can rise in both sides, both people, leadership and as an individual contributor. And I started as an individual contributor manager, more of a technical manager. But as I was doing that, I think I've gravitated towards people leadership.

[00:03:18] **Clint Kehr:** And hopefully I don't have any depends how many bosses I have listening to this, but. I had a lot of bad bosses. I had some good bosses, but I had a lot of bad bosses, and they taught me a whole lot about how not to do things, which as I realized like I want to be there to not be a roadblock. I wanna be there to enable and empower people.

[00:03:37] **Clint Kehr:** And I'm huge on mentorship and I'm huge on teaching people how to do things. Ver from a very technical standpoint I started from the bottom in fact. I credit my dad with the fact that he ran a flexible packaging company, but he started on the floor printing the packaging. So that was the whole mentality I've had.[00:04:00]

[00:04:00] **Clint Kehr:** Growing up was you have to be able to do the most basic level things. You have to be able to roll your sleeves up and do the most, the line level things to be a great leader. And again, I think my big push was I wanted to step into people leadership because I wanted to find ways to empower people to be successful and allow them to do the work allow them to do the job.

[00:04:23] **Clint Kehr:** And be that intermediary between senior leadership and line level employees. And I also credit my time, I was in the Navy Reserve for about six years. And I learned a whole lot about leadership there, and I guess that was dipping my toe into more the people at leadership side of things.

[00:04:40] **Clint Kehr:** I am relatively new in, in the cyber space to people leadership. I think I've been a people leader for about a year and a half, but I've really enjoyed it. I do miss, I do miss. Being technical, and at times I get to stay

technical and do technical things. But oftentimes, my, my job is to enable and empower the people who work with me and for [00:05:00] me.

[00:05:02] **Clint Kehr:** And what

[00:05:04] **Christophe Foulon:** were the critical skills that you feel are important for a cybersecurity leader?

[00:05:11] **Clint Kehr:** Sure. I think it is, like I talked about, it's important to know the mission. It's important to know the job. It's important to know what your people are doing. And, people come into this career field from many different other career fields.

[00:05:22] **Clint Kehr:** I, I. I myself did not come into this really from the ground level in some ways, but, in, in kind of the first role that I got into cyber cybersecurity, I had to eat everything up. I, I. I felt like it was my responsibility to learn as much as I could, and this is definitely a career field where you have to continue learning.

[00:05:45] **Clint Kehr:** Where you can't just be comfortable with, oh, I have a master's degree in this, or I have, security Plus, or C I S P, or whatever certification it may be. You have to continually learn and that's how you keep growing and as a leader. Maybe you [00:06:00] don't have to be in the weeds as much.

[00:06:01] **Clint Kehr:** Maybe you don't have to be as technical, but you have to appreciate and understand and know the types of training and capabilities, the people who work for you. You know what that takes, if they ask for a training, How difficult is that? Is it, is that a good investment? I, what I do now is really focused on the training of people.

[00:06:20] **Clint Kehr:** And if you look at the amount of certifications I have, you might scratch your head and say, Clint, do you have an addiction to getting certifications? But it's really. I wanna be able to ask the people who work for me if I ask them to get a certification, I should be able to do that too.

[00:06:36] **Clint Kehr:** When I was an agent, I remember I was in the fire firearms range and the head of the range said, I have to be able to go out there myself and get a perfect score if that's what I expect my instructors to do. So I think I took that mentality in cyber security. If I ask somebody to do something, I myself have to do that too, because I think there are a lot of non-technical

leaders out there who put faith in, in [00:07:00] the line level employees or, or their direct reports that, they are doing the right thing and know the right thing.

[00:07:05] **Clint Kehr:** But, I don't know how to do that. I don't think I have the comfort level of not having that technical background to, to just, to just go with it. So I really think those critical skills are, getting hands on keyboard yourself even if you're a leader. And you may think you don't have time for that, but I think if you put your mind to something and dedicate the time you can do it.

[00:07:28] **Clint Kehr:** So now pivoting

[00:07:29] **Christophe Foulon:** into some of the commonalities that we've heard from some of the previous guests. How would you rate your own comfort level? Delegation on a scale of one to five and why?

[00:07:43] **Clint Kehr:** Sure. And I'll try to, I'll try to quantify. Is five being complete delegation and one being no delegation?

[00:07:49] **Clint Kehr:** Yes. So admittedly I, my score would probably be maybe a two, may, maybe a three because I am. I am still in [00:08:00] the trenches. I'm still doing the work, and as a line level manager oftentimes I'm working directly with people to, to solve a problem that's on the ground and. I've been reading, I read a lot of leadership books and it's like you get promoted because of your technical capabilities.

[00:08:19] **Clint Kehr:** So you know, in the role I'm in now, I was promoted because I was able to do the work, to do the things, and you're promoted because of that. But now that you are a leader, you have to be able to delegate those tasks. I find that to maybe be a common problem with newly minted leaders is the fact of how do you delegate?

[00:08:39] **Clint Kehr:** When do you delegate? And I have to check myself oftentimes because. Having that want to understand things that want to on the technical level, understand things. I wonder, how much am I delegating and how much am I trying to do myself? And really how much am I empowering my people to do things without micromanaging?

[00:08:57] **Clint Kehr:** So when I was in the service many [00:09:00] examples were given of officers walking in when enlisted were doing the job and the enlisted was stopped doing it. Cause they're like, why is this officer in here doing this? And they're like, don't be that officer that's just in there getting in people's way.

[00:09:12] **Clint Kehr:** And I don't wanna feel like that. I wanna feel like if I'm there, it's not to micromanage, it's to help support people. So it's something that I guess I'm struggling with now is I wanna give people, I wanna empower people because naturally, the best thing I can do as a leader is see the people who work for me get promoted.

[00:09:29] **Clint Kehr:** That's the biggest compliment is seeing people rise up, get good ratings get good, get good ratings, and also get promoted. I need to be able to step back and delegate tasks and empower them to do whatever it is I ask them to do to be successful. So that's really is lack of, checking your ego, making sure that your ego's not in the way because it creeps in.

[00:09:50] **Clint Kehr:** And as I talked about those bad managers in the past, I think they have the commonality of being a bad manager is they put their ego in the way, like they [00:10:00] wanted to look better than me, or they were, self-conscious that I was taking training and it made them feel a certain way. And I've been very fortunate recently to have some very great managers and.

[00:10:10] **Clint Kehr:** Where I work now, I do not see that type of mentality where people's egos get in the way. It's a very, it's a place where they want to see you succeed, and managers like are looking for ways to get you training, are looking for ways to get you to the next level. Really your potentials unlimited.

[00:10:28] **Clint Kehr:** If you want to un unlock that I've taken that and tried to emulate that and basically, allowing my, allowing the people who work for me to get as far as they, they want to go, where I don't want anything to be a barrier for them. So hopefully that answers your question, .

[00:10:45] **Christophe Foulon:** In line with delegation, there's collaboration.

[00:10:50] **Christophe Foulon:** How would you rate yourself on the skill or competency of collaboration on a scale of one to five and

[00:10:56] **Clint Kehr:** why? Sure. So I'll give [00:11:00] myself a better rating on collaboration. May, maybe a four. My, my past life as an agent, my last duty station was as a liaison. So collaboration, communication are of the necessities of what I do.

[00:11:16] **Clint Kehr:** In everything you, you do or in many aspects of cyber security, you are dealing with multiple teams. You're collaborating with multiple teams whether it be red, blue, purple, right? Which is, definitely a collaborative

team there. Cyber threat intel, which I think can directly feed into both red and blue team.

[00:11:34] **Clint Kehr:** I think that is so important because, I found oftentimes in my past life in the government, there were lots of silos and people liked having their way of doing things and, don't step on our toes and things like that. And that was bad lack of collaboration. Stove piping was incredibly harmful.

[00:11:54] **Clint Kehr:** And, from a historic intel perspective it's led to very bad things happening. Lack of [00:12:00] understanding of intelligence threats. So now you have me going into my past life of intelligence type things. But again, I see the shift where I work now to be an incredibly collaborative space where people want to work with each other and want to understand more.

[00:12:16] **Clint Kehr:** And it was a bit of a learning curve for me, coming from a space where people were siloed off to a space where people were openly collaborating. And I, again, had to check myself. I'm like, I think these people are saying too much. They're giving away too much information which understandably, you know, private and public sector have different mission sets and different goals.

[00:12:36] **Clint Kehr:** But that collaboration and that communication can lead to better things. For example, if I'm talking to cyber threat intel and maybe they have a honey pot set up somewhere, and I say, okay maybe for this cve What are you seeing? What attack payloads are you seeing the most common ones or ones that are actually getting through, wafts, web application, firewalls?

[00:12:58] **Clint Kehr:** Do you have any intel on that I could [00:13:00] use here to test for? And then they could provide that to me? And that only comes through collaboration and communication. If we were siloed off, then there would be no outlet for that. So that's think an incredibly important tool. Is to be able to talk to people.

[00:13:17] **Clint Kehr:** They talk about soft skills and apparently you're not supposed to use that term anymore. Both the technical skills and the, and being able to communicate with people is so essentially important.

[00:13:26] **Christophe Foulon:** You kinda led into the next question is communication. How would you rate yourself on the skill of communication from one to five and.

[00:13:35] **Clint Kehr:** Sure. I guess people will judge that they'll judge for themselves in the podcast. I feel and hope I'm a good communicator. And, my, my past life as an agent, I took many courses on interviewing and speaking to people. That was a big thing for me is getting, obviously my goal as a, as an agent was to get people to admit they were guilty for something and.

[00:13:57] **Clint Kehr:** Perhaps the ultimate level of [00:14:00] communication is getting somebody to admit to a crime that they did o openly admitting to it or how do you get to elicit that information from somebody? And that was a bit of, a chess game, but it continues also in, in the private sector as well or any sector for that matter.

[00:14:14] **Clint Kehr:** I think my communication again is probably a four, but. That being said, I found communication in the private sector. To be different than the public sector. In the public sector or in the military. It was like, I need you to execute on this thing. Go forth and do it. And that was it.

[00:14:33] **Clint Kehr:** In the private sector, it's often Hey Chris, I'm on Slack. Hey Chris, how are you doing? How's, how is your weekend? hope everything's going great. And then eventually, it was kinda like this little dance. Eventually I'll get to asking you. What it is. And that was a little jarring for me cuz I came from this environment where it's like, you need to get this thing done because, again, the mission sets were different at times.

[00:14:57] **Clint Kehr:** Things, could get a bit dangerous and you needed quick, [00:15:00] clear communication. But I had to learn how to modify that for the private sector where I couldn't come across as, being rude or insensitive or, you can't use those same terms or that same. Communication in the private sector.

[00:15:13] **Clint Kehr:** You need to lead, lead with empathy when you're communicating with people and you have to dip into that empathy as well when you're speaking to somebody.

[00:15:20] **Christophe Foulon:** Thank you for that leading with empathy almost. Ventures into the next skill of being able to influence. How would you rate your ability to influence others

[00:15:35] **Clint Kehr:** and.

[00:15:39] **Clint Kehr:** Sure. So it's funny cuz influence is often, people think of it with a negative connotation. But as you get into leadership, I think

influence is important. People need to be able to look at you as someone who's, who they can trust and knows what they're talking about. And I think influence comes from a great track record of being reliable.

[00:15:58] **Clint Kehr:** And being [00:16:00] trustworthy. So being reliable and trustworthy as a leader, it's so hard to build up a reputation of trust and so easy to lose that trust. And again, looking at my past leaders, There have been times where if I caught somebody in an untruth or I didn't feel like they were being fully candid with me, that trust would be damaged or lost.

[00:16:20] **Clint Kehr:** And the last thing you want to do is lose trust, especially with the people who work for you, is if you lose their trust. That is in, that's, you have to spend a whole lot of time earning that back if you ever earn it back I'm candid with the people who work for me and perhaps they'd tell you I'm a bit too candid at times, but I knew when I was working for folks, if they, if I felt like they were withholding information or keeping things from me, or trying to pull, the wool over my eyes, that, I, that would be an incredibly uncomfortable situation for me.

[00:16:53] **Clint Kehr:** Looking at people above you they too, from both below and above, they need to have that trust in you and that [00:17:00] reli, they need to be able to rely on you for the things they ask you to do. So I think that is what ultimately helps with your influence. And of course expanding your network in speaking to as many people as you can.

[00:17:12] **Clint Kehr:** Because I think, I don't know if it's a government saying I think it is, you don't know what you don't. The more people that if you don't know, you don't know. But the more people you speak to, the more I think you'll understand, for better or for worse, what their goals and ambitions are and how they can help you and how you can help them.

[00:17:28] **Clint Kehr:** But it's only in creating those relationships with people, not only within the, where you work, not insular, but expanding your network outside of just where you work.

[00:17:41] **Clint Kehr:** Which

[00:17:42] **Christophe Foulon:** leads into our next topic of networking, and that is networking with people. Why is that such a critical skill?

[00:17:49] **Clint Kehr:** Sure. It's like I read your mind, Chris. I know. It's like I know these questions

[00:17:56] **Clint Kehr:** so networking's vital. I really, I credit [00:18:00] where I am now because. My network ultimately, I was going to grad school and I was taking a course and I really liked it on hacking and I had two professors, but I probably bugged one more than the other and I bugged him so much. Hopefully doesn't say I bugged him but I bothered him, bugged him so much that, we formed a relationship, a friendship, and I kept in contact with him and ultimately, led to where I am today.

[00:18:27] **Clint Kehr:** And, I have to be very thankful that. You know that I took that class and and I was able to keep that network open. That communication line open and it goes the same for, LinkedIn as well. A lot of people reach out to me or that's, it was, again, hard for me coming from the government and intel space where, you can't have an online presence.

[00:18:47] **Clint Kehr:** To, you have to have an online presence. Personal brand is huge. You need to be out there, you need to be expanding your network. So I think that's very important. And, but I say that with a caveat, and this is my [00:19:00] caveat or caveat, depends where you're from. I'm from Philly network's important.

[00:19:03] **Clint Kehr:** Personal brand is I. But be able to walk the walk, not just talk the talk. I see a lot of people on LinkedIn, with their personal brand, and I, I'm the greatest hacker, whatever it might be. And again, I think hacker is not a pejorative term. I think hacker, I'm a hacker.

[00:19:21] **Clint Kehr:** Anybody can be a hacker. It's a good term. How good are they really? They're very flashy, but how good are they really? So if you're going to expand your network, using your personal brand, make sure you can do the work. And again, I think that goes back, just back to my background of, my dad being on the printing press, or me starting off my law enforcement career, writing, parking tickets.

[00:19:40] **Clint Kehr:** Like I started from the very bottom. Didn't make many friends writing parking tickets. But really knowing the job, really understanding the job that you're speaking about, just don't be out there to be out there to help people and train people. I think I credit a few of the jobs, a few of the things that I've done in cybersecurity [00:20:00] to my network, specifically LinkedIn to where I've met.

[00:20:04] **Clint Kehr:** It's so incredibly important. And God forbid, in the industry today, it is very sad to see a lot of layoffs and things like that. But ultimately, really it's your network that you see people reaching out to because

those are the people that will help you and don't go into your network being, narcissistic or in it just for yourself.

[00:20:23] **Clint Kehr:** Go into the network, go into your network to help people. I also say this too, to my folks, is I try to live my life based on the movie Groundhog Day. So for people who haven't seen that movie with Bill Murray, great movie. Apparently, I'm told it's an old movie. Maybe it is, maybe I'm just dating myself.

[00:20:42] **Clint Kehr:** But in that movie, Bill Murray lives Groundhog Day over and over again, until he gets it right gets it right per whom, you know, per a higher power, per God, whoever it might be. During his journey, he's trying to woo the, the not, she's not a news anchor, she's his producer.

[00:20:58] **Clint Kehr:** I believe he's [00:21:00] trying to woo her and ultimately doesn't work. But when he does get her is at the end is when he's just being a good person. When he's helping people, when he is out there doing the right thing, and that's how he gets the girl at the end of the movie. Is by just being a good person. And I think that's really how you have to go into networking is go into it, with an open heart and an open mind to, to help people.

[00:21:25] **Clint Kehr:** And I say this to my mentees as well, like just cuz we're in a mentor-mentee relationship. I have a mentor Doesn't mean that my mentees can't teach me something, I'm there to teach them something, but they can teach me something as well. And I'm also going into teaching as well and I just spoke to some of the students the other day and I said, Hey, just cuz you're a student doesn't mean that you don't have something to offer.

[00:21:47] **Clint Kehr:** This career field's always changing. You might have heard something that I've never heard of. So please don't be shy. Please share your knowledge. And speaking of.

[00:21:59] **Christophe Foulon:** What other [00:22:00] advice would you give to those up and coming leaders that are looking to get into leadership?

[00:22:07] **Clint Kehr:** Sure. So do some soul searching. I think, ultimately as a leader it's not a positional title, there, there's manager but you can definitely be a leader without having to be a manager.

[00:22:18] **Clint Kehr:** Whether it be technic. I would do a lot of technical demos. I do courses as well. And ultimately, am I a leader? In some ways, yes. In leading people and helping them understand more. But. Go into it. Try and

understand what path you wanna take, whether it's, being technically the best person.

[00:22:39] **Clint Kehr:** You, engineer you can be, and there are distinguished engineering tracks. Or do you want to be a people leader? Do you wanna help people? Do you wanna empower people? And drive the, drive the machine forward and help people do that and make the big decisions. That was a big decision for me as well in the military was.

[00:22:57] **Clint Kehr:** Do I want to have the strategic level [00:23:00] thinking or the tactical level thinking, and Al you it is a struggle for me. I say because I wanna do both. I wanna be both tactical and strategic, which you know, is ultimately a self defeating thing. At some point you have to decide. Do I wanna be making the big decisions and not being hands on keyboard, or not, very few hand, maybe a finger on keyboard.

[00:23:20] **Clint Kehr:** Do I want to do that or do I wanna stay technically the best I can and train people on how to do that? And that's to say that maybe at some point I'll decide. You know what people, leadership was great, but I want to go back to being technic a tech, getting that technical mastery and being a distinguished architect and I've seen people do that.

[00:23:40] **Clint Kehr:** I've seen people go from people leadership to. To individual contributor and I just read a book about failure and how failure's ultimately a key driver in success. To some people that might seem illogical, but failure's part of the process. As a hacker, I think I know that all too [00:24:00] well that you fail a lot of times before you succeed, so don't be afraid to fail.

[00:24:06] **Clint Kehr:** Don't be afraid to dip your toe into certain aspects of leadership, whether it's technical leadership, whether it's people leader. And go into it again with an open mind that you may fail and you may have to take a step back, or you may fail and have to fail forward and let those failures help you be a better leader.

[00:24:25] **Clint Kehr:** Again, be willing to fail. Rely on your network. Have mentors, have mentees, especially have mentees. If you want to be in leadership, I think the best way is to give back. Especially because I don't think anybody has this journey alone. I think everybody has, people have helped and supported them and the best way to give back to people is to help.

[00:24:50] **Christophe Foulon:** Wow. Thank you so much for sharing all that great advice today, Clint. And for those of you listening, thank you so much.

You can find Clint's [00:25:00] LinkedIn profile in the details below and share and follow us on all the major platforms, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter Twitch. So we're out there and we really.

[00:25:12] **Christophe Foulon:** Lots of diverse perspectives, and diverse backgrounds and diverse approaches to really solve all the complex problems of today. Clint, thank you for coming and have a great rest of your day.

[00:25:26] **Clint Kehr:** Thanks, Chris. Take care.