HOW DO WE GET MORE WOMEN IN SECURITY?
Stop showing men in hoodies: Six women security leaders weigh in

When a young girl wants to learn about the field of security and Googles images for the term “cybersecurity,” what does she find? A man in a hoodie in a dark room analyzing lines and lines of code. This is not the most inviting image for a girl or young woman looking to get into the security industry. According to many of the women leaders who were interviewed for this discussion, it’s one of the perceptions that needs to change as we encourage more women to get into the industry. In a young person’s mind, perception is reality.
The Guy in the Hoodie

As a mentor to high school girls, Carla Donev, CISO at NIsource, hears firsthand from girls who think security is something that “males do.” She says many of the girls have told her “Men are better in security and better at more technical things.”

She has been able to change this perception by sharing her own background in security and encouraging these young women to pursue careers in STEM and in security. She is determined to show young women that this is a “fun and rewarding career” at which they can excel.

Like all of the leaders interviewed for this topic, Dr. Rebecca Wynn, Head of Security at Matrix Medical Network, echoes the sentiment that perception is the problem. “Hollywood also needs to help change the perception,” Wynn says. “There is Mr. Robot, why not Ms. Robot or Ms. Robot?”

Dr. Wynn is no stranger to flourishing in male-dominated environments. She was a quarterback while playing pickup football and also played trombone. “I was fortunate to have a mother who didn’t say that’s not for girls,” she says. Now she encourages girls and young women by letting them know that “with STEM, they can do anything they want.”

Manju Mude, the Director of Security Engagement at Oath, also notes that the image of the security professional needs to change. When she gives presentations, she makes it a point to use an image of a woman in a hoodie to show other women that they are represented as well. Mude also notes that the security industry is relatively new and has some catching up to do.

“Security is a scary field when you don’t know what it entails. Women and men in the field need to get out there and show the diversity of what they do,” says Mude.

As the Executive Director and Chair of the Institute for Information Infrastructure Protection (I3P), Associate Dean for Research and External Relations (Interim), and Full Professor of Human & Organizational Learning at The George Washington University (GW) Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Dr. Diana Burley focuses heavily on the workforce and how to fill the security talent gap. Since her days as a grad student at Carnegie Mellon, her career has been dedicated to studying the intersection of technology and people.

When asked why there aren’t more women in the field, she notes, “Security emerged from a technical foundation and there weren’t many women. It’s not surprising that there isn’t a more even distribution of women in the field.”

Dr. Burley’s advice on getting more women in the industry is similar to the other female leaders. “Educating people on the field of cybersecurity is key,” she says. She has seen successes with sharing the challenges, the excitement, and the interests that resonate with people to get them connected and interested in the field.

Mentorship

Mentoring women is a common thread for these female leaders. All of them shared stories of the strong mentors they’ve had in their lives and how they continue to give back by mentoring others. Candice Camp, Director of Insider Threat at GE Digital, has both male and female mentors that she uses as sounding boards and to get different perspectives.

Camp has also been a part of formal and informal mentorship programs as a mentor and a mentee. She says, “We win from each other’s successes. There are many women in the field who want to help.”

Dr. Chanel Suggs, Department Chair of Information Technology at the University of the Cumberlands
and the CEO of Wyvern Security, also shares her success with mentoring women. Most notably, she trademarked her name “The Duchess of Cybersecurity” and is passionate about it—because it gives women confidence to get into this field. People see my background and the things I’ve been through and can see that I haven’t been knocked down. This can give women the boost they need to explore this career path.

There is no magic bullet to solve this problem, however, there are many approaches that leaders can take to bring more women into the field:

- **Mentorship is mandatory.** Every leader interviewed shared the fact that they had amazing mentors of both genders along the way.

- **Look for skills vs. education.** Rather than going after the small percentage of women who are in technology, focus on the skills needed and seek out women with those skills who would be a good fit in your organization. Dr. Wynn gave an example of an office manager who helped transition to a security analyst when her skill set was a fit for the role—and it was.

- **Share your expertise outside of security.** The leaders gave examples of doing road shows and presentations within their organizations, as well as externally, to explain what they do as a security leader. This will help with the perception that everyone in security is not a man in a hoodie.

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