

KAREN STEPHENS

Karen is CEO and co-founder of BCyber, an agile, innovative group who works with SMEs to protect and grow their business, by demystifying the technical and helping them to identify and address cybersecurity and governance risk gaps. Karen has recently graduated from both the TechReady Woman Accelerator graduate and CLP program with the Cyber Leadership Institute in 2021.



C O L U M N

Financial services to cyber... A journey has begun

After over 20 years in big financial services corporations I made the move into cybersecurity. You're probably thinking "Why?" or "Are you stark raving crazy?" or "Maybe I can do it too."

The answer to the first question is "Why not?" Business skills are transferable, and a (relatively) new and definitely exciting industry beckoned. The jury is still out on question two, and the answer to the final question is "Yes, yes, you can." You just have to want to do it.

With the exponential connectivity growth brought about by COVID and the rise of data breaches, it does not take a genius to work out there is a need for cybersecurity professionals. But cybersecurity is a broad church embracing very technical people (e.g. engineers) and the non-technical.

All have the potential to make a positive contribution. I am just getting started, but I have learnt a few things on my journey so far.

No two days are the same. Every day you will learn something new - so you need to be comfortable with change.

Read like your life depends on it. I read anything and everything cyber-related, from white papers to technical briefings. Nothing is safe from my prying eyes.

Education is queen. Self-education is important, and while it would be great to go back to university or do another postgraduate course, sometimes it is just not possible. Learning through microcourses is one way you can build your knowledge quickly and meet a great cohort of new people (I've just completed the AWSN Security Pathways Program and can highly recommend it).

Technical terms do not always translate between industries. After accepting an invitation to an asset management meeting and expecting a fund manager but getting a CISO (sad, but true), I have made it a

personal mission to ensure I translate cyber into the language of business.

Your experience is transferable. Build on what you already know. In my previous work I specialised in SME risk management, compliance and business growth. Cybersecurity is vital across all these areas, and yet is often overlooked.

Reality versus expectations. Many people believe cybersecurity is all about hunting down threat actors and searching the Deep and Dark Web on The Onion Router, just like in the movies. For some, perhaps, but for the majority of us cybersecurity is about working with clients to harden their cyber resilience programs, putting in place workable frameworks and well-practiced incident response plans to deal with the inevitable breach.

It takes a village. My move into cybersecurity was made easier by finding a mentor and joining like-minded groups (another shoutout to the AWSN). To date everyone I have met has been very generous with their time and knowledge. The hard part is asking for help.

So, if you're given the chance to join the amazing and fast-moving world of cybersecurity, jump in with both feet. After all, is it not better to give something a red hot go rather than to die wondering?

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