KAREN STEPHENS

Karen is CEO and co-founder of BCyber, an agile, innovative group that works with SMEs to protect and grow their businesses by demystifying the technical and helping them to identify and address cybersecurity and governance risks. In 2021 Karen graduated from the Tech Ready Woman Academy's Accelerator and the Cyber Leadership Institute's CLP programs.

Three steps to cybersecurity staying power

You might think it would be easy to empower women and retain people in the cybersecurity industry, but it is not. Sometimes the challenge seems insurmountable, almost. Therein lies the key to the problem. 'Almost' means there is a glimmer of hope we can focus and build upon. While there is no single all-encompassing Big Bang solution, focusing on a few well-integrated actions will help address the challenge. Here are three initiatives any individual can take to help them take their first steps into cybersecurity, or help them stay there.

- **Network, network, network.** Dust off your business attire and attend functions where like-minded people are to be found. Go out and 'make a friend'. Not easy, I know. I am a natural-born introvert, and after years of Covid and lockdowns the idea of getting out of my 'comfortable clothes', throwing on some shoes other than joggers and then 'making nice' with a bunch of strangers can fill me more with concern than excitement. But you can do it. Take a deep breath, put on your business armour (aka business attire), smile big and introduce yourself to the first person who smiles back. Aim to engage with just one or two people. Trust me, it becomes easier and increases the group of people you can call on, or bounce ideas off.
- **Allies.** You probably already have these people in your life; you just might not label them allies. They are your supporters; the people who believe in you, even when you do not. They provide the antidote to your internal 'I am not good enough' voice that can chip away at your confidence. Fun fact: I would not have moved into cybersecurity and been named Female Cyber Leader of the Year in this year's Australian Cyber Security Awards if my
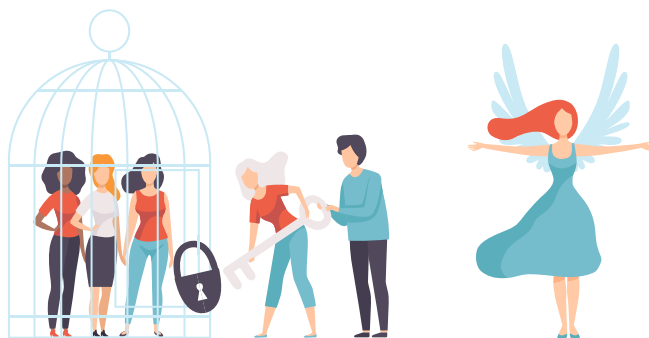
business partner had not pushed me with "I know you can do this" followed quickly by a challenge I could not resist. "Isn't it better to have tried and failed than to never have tried at all?"

Micro courses. University courses, be they undergraduate or postgraduate, while wonderful are not the only way to learn. Sometimes you do not have the time, bandwidth, or money to go down that route. And this is where micro courses come in. They are a short, sharp cheaper option. Just decide what you want to learn—for example general cybersecurity 101, or something more in-depth like threat hunting—and decide where to start. Choose your own adventure, and depending on the course you choose, you might even be able to network…network…network.

So, a few small steps, albeit ones that may take you out of your comfort zone, could be your empowerment key. And on that note, I look forward to seeing you at the next industry function. I will be the one that smiles back!

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