

KAREN STEPHENS

Karen Stephens is the co-founder and CEO of BCyber. After more than 25 years in financial services, Karen moved into SME cybersecurity risk management. She works with SMEs to protect and grow their businesses by demystifying the technical aspects of cybersecurity and helping them to identify and address cybersecurity and governance risk gaps. She was recently named inaugural Female Cyber Leader of the Year at the 2023 CyberSecurity Connect Awards in Canberra.



C O L U M N

Simply sitting down at the table isn't enough anymore



“We, today, stand on the shoulders of our predecessors who have gone before us. We, as their successors, must catch the torch ... passed on to us ... We cannot lose in this battle.” — Dr Benjamin E Mays

The cybersecurity industry is evolving, and women are stepping up as the business landscape changes. It's all very well and good to say this, but, as you know, words don't bring about change, actions do.

Getting beyond the 'seat at the table' and into making impactful change is rather like building a Lego house; sometimes you need instructions or support from another to get those foundations sturdy, so the house does not collapse. Here are four actions to help strengthen the foundations, so we and others may thrive.

Lead by example. Have you ever heard someone share their work experience and their career evolution and thought, “Wow, I'm not the only one!”? What seems mundane to you could be remarkable to someone else. By sharing your story, you show others they are not alone. In my case, after 25+ years in financial services, I took the leap into cyber risk management. It was not an obvious step, but one that led to a wild ride, proving to myself (and others) that making a change can have a positive outcome, if you give it a try. Sharing the story of how you got to where you are today has the power to connect, uplift and maybe even inspire.

Change your hiring practices. In a sea of applications, it's tempting to rely on checklists, 'bots' and tech skills to filter candidates. While I recognise

the importance of time, it might be better to think laterally and prioritise those who demonstrate skills like problem-solving, creativity and relationship-building. Technical skills can be learnt, but these other core traits are far harder to develop.

Your actions speak louder than words. You're busy. I'm busy. The world is ... well, busy, so it's easy to overlook the value of connection. Taking the time to meet with peers to brainstorm and/or meet those thinking about moving into our industry (proving that, yes, a career left turn is possible) is impactful for both you and your new 'coffee' partner. Let's prioritise these conversations and help guide the next generation, or "solve the problems of the world" with our current peers. Your engagement could be their inspiration.

Your personal growth. When flying you are always instructed to put on your own mask first in the event of an emergency. So, my question to you is: "What have you done to grow your knowledge lately?" And now for a 'repetition warning' because, as I have said before: traditional university programs are fantastic but not always appropriate due to time, budget or other constraints. Enter micro courses; your quick, affordable learning solution. Don't let the barriers of conventional education hold you back: embrace the flexibility of micro courses.

I look forward to hearing how your foundation strengthening goes. This means you are not just taking the proverbial seat at the table; you're pulling out the neighbouring seat and guiding someone into it.



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