



Career Corner

Women in Security...Finally I'm Not Alone!

By Joyce Brocaglia

Introduction

This is a sentiment that is often expressed from many women with careers in information security. I have been recruiting in the information security and controls arena for two decades. Most of my early years were spent recruiting for Wall Street. I cut my teeth on clients like Bankers Trust, Drexel Burnham, Manufacturers Hanover Trust, and Kidder Peabody. I'm proud to say that I outlasted them all! Back then, more often than not, I was the only woman in the room. If there were any women in the department at all, you could bet that they certainly weren't the hiring manager. So how much has really changed in the field since the early 1980s?

I have found that although information security, like information technology in general, is historically male-dominated, the number of women working in security-related positions is steadily growing. A significant number of women now hold positions of influence within the government, corporate and vendor communities. I thought it would provide interesting insight to hear from two successful women with very different backgrounds regarding how they got their start in information security, their greatest challenge and a lesson they've learned in the process.

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An Interview With Two Women In Security

Linda Stutsman is CISO of Xerox. Linda has over 20 years experience in IT and information security, in both operational and leadership roles. She is the global manager of corporate information security and risk assessment for Xerox Corporation. In this position, she directs and manages a global information security organization including governance and oversight of all aspects of information integrity and risk management within the enterprise from policy development through implementation, monitoring and emergency response.

Becky Bace is the CEO of Infidel Consulting. She earned the title of the "den mother" of computer security by helping to build the NSA's computer research center. Bace helped bring much of the seminal research in intrusion detection to universities around the country and collaborated on law enforcement's de facto computer crime handbook before moving into consulting and venture capital.

• What was your first job in information security?

Linda: *I was responsible for operational security in a very large VAX/VMS installation with over 1000 users. I set up and maintained new accounts, trained users in appropriate use of accounts, installed security patches and tracked down and reprimanded those users who didn't follow the rules.*

Becky: *I was a senior electronics engineer in the research group of the National Computer Security Center. I'd gone to NSA from private industry in 1984 and joined NCSC at the behest of an old friend, Vronna Hoover, who was a manager in the research organization. My initial duties involved a mix of technical and project management tasks.*

• What has been your greatest challenge and what strategies did you use to overcome obstacles?

Linda: *My greatest challenge has been finding the time to stay current with new technologies and their inherent vulnerabilities and strategies to manage them. Most other areas of IT involve knowledge in depth in specific areas (operating systems or development languages). Information security requires knowing enough about all existing and emerging technologies to at least know the right questions to ask. Reading and research should be at least 10 percent of every security professional's job. I try to schedule that time into my week and then commit to doing it, and I encourage my staff at Xerox to do the same.*

Becky: *Probably the greatest challenge I faced was balancing the needs of my special needs son with the requirements of my professional life. My son was born autistic, and when he was three, came down with leukemia. We juggled therapy for his autism with therapy for his cancer for six years. Ultimately, we lost him in 1994. During those years, I was quite involved with the fledgling intrusion detection research community, and I learned just how valuable a community is when you're dealing with life crises. The support of the community was critical to my survival.*

• What lessons have you learned that would be valuable to women beginning their careers in information security?

Linda: *A lesson I learned the "hard way" very early in my career is that I provide an information security program to support the business.*


Everything I do is in support of business goals and initiatives...we are the "enablers"—helping to achieve goals and objectives while managing risks. Security should never be implemented for the sake of security. If you can remember this, it's much easier to make the case for security to management and to your user population.

Becky: First, be very clear about one thing—you are capable of, even entitled to, professional success. Information security is a complex and challenging field, and there are plenty of opportunities for anyone willing to roll up her sleeves and work on solving problems. It's tempting to say "but I'm not smart/technical/energetic/whatever enough to take on this area." That's simply not true. The security problems we face call for remedies ranging from bleeding edge technology to workaday common sense—regardless of your talents, there's a place for you to make a difference. Second, find a mentor (and later on, be a mentor). I've been mentored by a series of generous souls over my lifetime, and they've all had miraculous, transformative effects on my life. Third, tap into at least one of the communities of support available to you. The support of a community gives you the luxury of taking risks. These risks are often key to your success in life.


Never before has there been such a gathering of the most successful and influential women in the industry. Leaders include chief information security officers, chief privacy officers, chief executive officers and heads of research and development and engineering. 

Alta Associates Executive Women's Forum On Information Security, Privacy and Risk Management

These women will gather amongst the top 100 women in the industry at the Alta Associates Executive Women's Forum on Information Security Privacy and Risk Management on September 10th through 12th at Sanibel Harbour, Fort Myers, Florida. Although women in information security are lesser in number, they are growing and holding positions of significant influence across the US in all industry verticals.

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Joyce Brocaglia is the CEO of Alta Associates, the Human Capital Risk Managers specializing in information security recruiting. www.altassociates.com