

So You Want to Be a CSO...

By Joyce Brocaglia

joyce@altaassociates.com

Being a recruiter is sometimes like being a bartender. During the course of doing our job we are told people's life stories, listen to problems, and are asked lots of questions. As the role of the CSO continues to evolve, a lot of security professionals are interested in what companies are really looking for when hiring a CSO and what qualifications are necessary for the role. As the career advisor for *The ISSA Journal* and *CSO Magazine*, I've received the following questions about qualifying for CISO and executive management roles.

Q: *What education does a typical CSO have and what will I need to compete for this role in the future?*

A: In the past, senior security executives have come from many different backgrounds and have attained their positions through experience and tenure with their companies rather than any specific educational pedigree. A survey of current CSO credentials would be very eclectic. Many of today's CSOs began their careers in the military, a government agency like the FBI, or the law enforcement community. These individuals have honed their expertise in information security and evolved into corporate security officers. Other CSOs have had very strong technology experience and developed a focused discipline in information security. There are security officers who are extremely technical and lack a formal degree as well as CSOs who are recognized industry experts who have many advanced degrees. It is only recently that companies are recruiting CSOs as opposed to promoting individuals from within their organization. As information security becomes a more important issue on the CEO's agenda and the role of the information security officer becomes more mainstream, we are witnessing the demand for more formalized requirements. In order to compete for a current CSO opening you will need:

- ▲ an undergraduate degree, although an advanced degree is preferred
- ▲ to be professionally active as an executive member of industry-related associations or advisory boards
- ▲ to attain professional certifications

However, it's important to note that the key to being the "new CSO" is not a particular educational credential or technical skill, but rather is someone who has a proven ability to interface with business units to develop and implement security solutions that meet their needs and allow them to remain competitive.

Q: *Are there any master's degree programs specific to information security?*

A: Yes, colleges are beginning to create advanced degrees specifically focused on information security. The following are a few schools with reputable programs:

- ▲ Georgia Tech offers a master's degree in information security. The objective of the program is to provide students with practical skills and a theoretical understanding of information security. Students examine ways to provide secure information processing systems, including secure operating systems and applications, network

security, cryptography and security protocols.

▲ James Madison University has an Internet-based Master of Science in information security degree that focuses on gaining expertise concentrated in areas of information technologies, administrative operations, law and regulations.

▲ George Washington University offers a master's certificate in information security for people who already have a master's degree in computer science, computer engineering, software engineering, or information systems who are looking to have a concentration in information systems security. The program consists of six courses that acquaint you with the methods used to protect the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information being created, stored, processed and communicated using state-of-the art computer systems and networks.

▲ A graduate certificate in information security is offered by the program in information assurance. The six-course graduate certificate in information security is designed to provide students the skills and knowledge required to establish secure computer information systems and networks. Students are provided with indepth technical knowledge, reinforced through hands-on labs. Students may apply all of the coursework from the certificate program to the MS in information assurance.

Q: *What is more important for CSO employers—years of experience or experience in strategic and tactical security management?*

A: When employers are searching for a CSO, they certainly consider both years of experience as well as strategic and tactical security management skills. The differentiator in actually choosing who is a stronger candidate for the position ultimately depends upon the strength of the candidate's strategic and tactical security management experience. Employers searching for an officer-level executive want to hire someone with a proven track record of establishing, implementing and managing an enterprise-wide program. The years of experience are not as relevant as the accomplishments achieved during their tenure.

Q: *Assuming an employer would hire the CSO for his previous hands-on experience and the requirements of the position, some certifications would always be desirable and in demand. In your opinion, which are the certifications and designations necessary for a successful CSO?*

A: There is no substitute for proven experience and education when management is evaluating candidates for CSO job positions. Certification is intended to provide hiring officials with independent verification that the person they're contemplating for such senior positions is qualified to provide governance over the business and technical aspects of the enterprise's security architecture. The most recognized and recommended certification for an executive-level security position is the Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP). Managed by (ISC)², a non-profit consortium, the CISSP is the only independent credential, based on an internationally accepted Common Body of Knowledge (CBK) and best practices. The CBK focuses on the management and technical skills required to practice information security at the professional level. Targeted at the professional, the

CISSP's rigorous examination, experience and continuing education requirements make it a unique credential. The CISSP is mature, with broad international acceptance. There are 15,000 CISSPs located in over 85 countries. For more information go to: www.isc2.org.

Q: *I have about nine years of security experience with the past four years at a Big 5 consulting firm. I currently have a BA in computer information systems. What is the next step to prepare for a CSO position? I was thinking of getting an MS in information assurance.*

A: Getting an MS in information assurance would be complimentary to your current degree. You may also want to consider an MBA. It is clear that the future requirement of security executives will include a lot more than just the technical knowledge of security. The most important qualities emerging are the abilities to comprehend, evaluate and communicate risk in a holistic approach to technical and non-technical management. Consider your own strengths and weaknesses, not just in a technical sense, but in a broader operational risk perspective and look for a program that will address how to understand these concepts. You will be much better prepared for the complex role that the CSO is morphing into.

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