Chris Hughes' Security Sales Career Story

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Read this career story as Chris tells us about his career, how he's reached his current role and shares his thoughts about security career development.

Tell us about your current role

I lead the sales team for BT Security in the Americas where I am responsible for 16 security sales specialists. I work with my team to help drive BT security sales into our target customer base of multinationals. We work hard to make sure we position our security solutions in a consultative way that is focused on helping our customers accomplish their business goals and objectives. Much of my time is spent communicating BT Security's Vision and market differentiation both internally and externally to our customers. Also, our team here in the Americas works closely with BT Portfolio to make sure that our solutions and services fit with regional demand in the most compelling and competitive fashion.

Tell us about your career and when you joined BT

I attended Occidental College in Los Angeles and graduated with a major in Economics and a minor in Political Science. Fun Fact: While at Occidental I shared a dorm with Barack Obama (known as Barry back then), though unfortunately we were not friends. The lesson I learned from that was the importance of creating as broad and diverse a network of friends as possible and the importance of treating all people with respect. One never knows who might be a future President or Prime Minister.

My first job after college was at PepsiCo in their management training programme, which is similar to BT's graduate programme. At Pepsi I was busy using computers to help automate various sales and delivery processes. I liked it so much I then accepted a position with a software start-up in the IT Industry. Within a few years, I found myself working on a project to reposition a software product into a security product. It seemed clear to me that Security would continue to be a fast growing market, so I took the plunge, made a commitment going forward to focus on IT Security and completed my CISSP security certification. This decision to focus on an area that I was passionate about and to invest in my security-related skills has been one of my best career moves. I believe it has helped differentiate me in the marketplace and most importantly has helped me build credibility with my customers.

Since then, I have worked with both security start-ups and in security at large telecommunications companies. I joined BT over 3 years ago because I felt that working for a global company like BT would help broaden my experience and exposure to security outside of just the United States. That has truly been the case as I have moved from sales specialist position to now managing a team of great Security Sales Specialists in both North and South America.

Have you been supported by a mentor throughout your career development?

Yes, I have had several mentors over the years. Throughout my career I could always count on my father for the best council. He was a successful businessman who always stressed to me the importance of showing up, staying positive, taking risks and most importantly trying to learn from the inevitable periodic failures we all encounter. A second mentor was a previous manager of mine early in my career. By demonstration he taught me the importance of listening and the powerful effect of silence in a business conversation. He used periods of silence during meetings as a way to encourage customers to begin to talk about their real issues and goals, and it worked every time. Finally, I feel I am mentored and motivated by my peers here at BT. Our BT culture is different from anywhere else I have ever worked. On the whole, people at BT try to stay calm, to keep moving forward, and to not let the "little things" slow them down. I am inspired by so many of my co-workers who every day keep their eye on the ball, keep pushing towards their personal and company goals, and always try to make difference.

If you could give some advice to people starting out in their career or looking to develop their career in security, what would you recommend?

If you find security truly interesting, then take the leap and commit to it. Read broadly and extensively about security topics and the Security industry in general and it will increase your confidence, credibility, capability and most importantly your enjoyment.

Regardless of the industry and profession you chose, remember that there are always going to be issues and problems to tackle every day. You will often hear that something should have been fixed in the past. That's your cue to action it today. Make a conscious choice to be part of the solution and it will pay dividends in your career.

What professional networking do you recommend for people to link in to for their career path?

General industry networking at local and national trade associations, vendor events, and via LinkedIn is of course a given. However, I kind of feel that successful and meaningful networking builds from a core outwards and is then reinforced by the strength of that core. The immediate team you work with today to achieve business goals together can become your best networking reference for the future. They have seen you in action and can be counted on to help grow your network meaningfully throughout the rest of your career.

For more information, check out why you should choose BT Security