

**Reflection #1**

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For years, I have studied what being a true leader means. Around ten years ago, I read an article that sums up the definition of a true leader. It is a person who leads by example. It does not need to raise their voice to be heard and respected. They are open to communication. They delegate and trust their team. They are the shield of their team and the energy that propels them forward. In the months since I met Daniel P. Smits, he has shown me that he is all that and more. For this reason, I selected him as the person to interview for this task.

Mr. Daniel P Smits is the Branch Head of the Cybersecurity division for the Naval Sea Warfare Center of Dahlgren, Dam Neck Activity, located in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He sat with me for the interview on February 28, 2025.

I asked him how he became interested in the Cybersecurity Field. He told me that he is a millennial. During his growing years, he became interested in repairing personal computers, which had become prevalent since the early stages of DOS and Windows, thanks to a friend's dad. He was also exposed to the hacking scene and electrical engineering. When he reached the appropriate age, he joined the Navy and pursued a career in Information Technology. During his years of service, he continued his education in information systems. This background helps him to transition to civilian life and his current position.

When asked about the most essential knowledge, skills, and abilities for the Cybersecurity field, he said that a combination of independent learning and logical troubleshooting techniques was necessary since the field constantly changes. He also mentioned being able to adapt to change and solve problems in creative and unusual ways.

When asked about the most important soft skill, he said the ability to explain to a non-technical leader the necessity for a technical solution. He explained to me that senior leaders

have little time and desire to sit through a lengthy explanation, and being able to resume in short, understandable terms why something was needed will make you stand out from the crowd. He also pointed out that the technical skills necessary for a Cybersecurity engineer relied on understanding and working with different technologies. The time for unique specializations has passed, and a person who understood and was comfortable working with technologies in networking, cloud computing, virtualization, and containerization, among others, was more valuable for the organization since they could fill the gaps in different teams.

Lastly, he explained that during his early years, he stood out by becoming a software developer that later transitioned into team leader, coordinator, project manager, and other support roles. He said technical knowledge was good in the early stages of becoming a leader in the field, but soft skills and networking were the paths to grow. He still understands the need to learn technical skills but knows that soft and negotiation skills are more critical as a Branch head. He uses the technical aspects to understand his team and the soft skills to manage the outside world, which is necessary to keep his team running.

In conclusion, the interview was enjoyable and filled with knowledge. He provided insight into how to grow in the organization. I admire Mr. Smits as a fantastic leader and look forward to continuing working with him.