

My Path into the Cyber World

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Introduction

In life we all take different roads, each path can be smooth, bumpy, full of twists and turns but in the end will always take a person where they need to go. The paths we choose are what make us who we are, and they are important for others to understand. Seeing how someone reached their destination can show how much they have learned and what they are capable of. This is a story about my own path that I chose to become an Information Systems Technician.

Early Life

Growing up it always seemed like I was surrounded by the kids who had these fantasies of what they wished to be when they are older. I was never like any of them though and when asked what I wanted to be my typical answer was a shoulder shrug. I truly never knew what I wanted to be all the way up to the time I became an adult. I was always so indecisive when asked the question and at one point I considered going into Accounting or Cooking just so I had an answer. I had never even once considered a career that was technical until later in life because I had not considered how much I loved working with computers. The first time I ever got my hands on a computer I was around ten. My mother had decided to get a new one and had no use for the old one, so she left it for me to play games on. The computer was one from the 1990s and the system still operated on Windows '98. I truly could have cared less at time and thought it was the most magnificent thing I had ever seen. I used to spend hours on that thing, playing music and simple games like solitaire and minesweeper. I slowly started messing with it more and learned how to reimage the system just for fun. Having that computer made me want to take computer classes that were being offered once I entered middle school. Every fiber of my being longed to see what made a computer tick. The first computer class I enrolled in allowed us to tear

into a computer tower to learn all the different components. It also taught us the basics of different Microsoft programs like Power Point, Word, and Publisher. Of course, this only opened the door for me to take more advanced computer classes as I went on through High School. It seemed like every chance I could get I would enroll into some type of computer class. During my teenage years, computers never seemed like a viable career as they were something I enjoyed playing on and never in my mind could I have imagined making money with the skills I was acquiring.

Graduation

As graduation was approaching, I realized that I could no longer afford to be so indecisive about what I wanted to do with my life. All the other options seemed unfeasible and not quite as lucrative as I hoped they would be. My father had been pressuring me, saying that I could only live with him if I was either working or going to college. I had started applying for community college and simple jobs. I failed interviews with both Walgreens and Target. I also felt as though I would never be able to afford the student loans that were going to come with the pursuit of any kind of degree, not to mention I was still undecided on what degree I wanted. That was when I decided to start talking to a Navy recruiter. In the past, my father was always extremely pushy about getting me to at least take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) for the military so that I would always have something to default to during the worst-case scenario. Finally, I had hit my breaking point with trying my other options and chose to fully embrace my transition into the Navy. I passed my ASVAB and was offered the job of Information Systems Technician, most widely known as IT. My road that had been all over the place was finally starting to feel like it was going somewhere.

The Navy

Once I had joined the Navy and completed boot camp, I was sent off to Pensacola, Florida to begin my nine-month training as an IT professional. There I had ascertained the skills necessary to become a cyber expert. I graduated with a certification in A+ and Security+ which were the requirements for becoming a Systems Administrator on all Navy networks. These certificates were my most prized positions as an IT because I knew that they would allow me to continue doing what I loved most, working on computers and networks. After the IT school graduation, I was sent to my first duty station aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, an aircraft carrier stationed in Newport News, Virginia.

While being aboard my first ship I began soaking up IT knowledge through all of my trouble ticket experiences. When I first started there, I had a simple job of being a Helpdesk Technician, which meant I answered customer phone calls, and I would troubleshoot any issues people were having. These issues ranged from hard drive failures to simply not knowing how to log into a computer. One of my favorite trouble calls to this day is the one where the person had forgotten to plug in their computer. I began moving up the latter as quickly as I could and took on more responsibility as an administrator for a system that ran on Linux. I had no previous knowledge at the time of Red Hat Linux but once I got my hands on the server I was hooked. Everyday I learned new commands and had to troubleshoot different issues in the Linux server. By the time my three-year tour was over on the ship I had become their Linux subject matter expert. The end of my time on the USS Abraham Lincoln is what led me to my next destination, a Navy shore command in Norfolk, Virginia called COMSUBLANT. This shore duty was one that specialized in the communications of shore to Navy Submarines. We were what provided all

types of communications for them and ensured they could talk to higher authorities and receive necessary updates. My IT duties felt a bit simpler at this place considering I was once again the Linux server technician but somehow, I was still picking up new skills that I had yet to acquire. On top of that I had learned how to perform daily maintenance of the system that was being used to communicate with Submarines. I also had to dabble in the Radio communications side of being a Navy IT, but I do not want to delve into that portion much. After my three years was up there, I had reached the end of my Navy contract and now had to choose a new path to walk upon.

Real World

This is the part where my path took a left turn and it felt as though I was leaving my military life for the real world. I stayed as an IT in the Navy Reserves so that I could still work towards one retirement while obtaining whatever skills I still could from my drill weekends. My new goal in life was to work towards getting a job that would pay me properly for my skills. It was at this point that I chose to pursue my bachelor's in cyber security through Old Dominion University. I had decided to stick with what I loved and what I knew would make the most money. During my studies I have gathered up more skills when it comes to understanding vulnerabilities and how to deal with them. I have also learned how use tools that the Navy had never introduced me to such as Wireshark and Splunk. College even brought me back to the operating system that I knew like the back of my hand, Red Hat Linux, and taught me more tricks that I had never learned during my Navy experience.

Conclusion

No matter what path I could have chosen in life, I am glad that I took the one I did. I pursued a career that will always be necessary in this ever-changing world of technology. I also chose what I knew I would be able to enjoy doing day after day. The cyber world is one that is for all technology lovers, and I wish that I had realized the career potential of it sooner. Everyone's path is unique and shows what they have accomplished as well as the skills they have picked up along the way. My journey has been long but is far from over and I will continue going forward until I reach the destination I am pursuing.