

Career Choices: My Path to Cyber Security

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Introduction

Over several years, through different degrees colleges and careers, I found my way into Cyber Security; by moving away from things that were not working into things that were, I was able to find out where I needed to be. Starting from a career in Mining Engineering, I realized that I was not doing what I wanted to do and decided to choose a new career. During the end of my Mining Engineering degree I decided to get a job at DISH, excelling in that position gave me the thought that I should be doing something that deals with technology. Covid changed a lot of things, at the time I was struggling through a Computer Engineering degree that was turned into a Computer Science degree once things had come back to normal after the pandemic. Computer Science would provide another dead end and after performing a student job in IT I decided once again to change career paths. Through several dead ends, ups and downs, trials and successes, I pivoted my way into the career I now do and love.

Mining Industry

Before I came to Norfolk and started a degree at Old Dominion University, I was a Mining Engineering student at Virginia Tech. Nearing the end of my time in Blacksburg I was working hard and trying to help my then Fiancée finish her master's degree while I was working at various

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places to make rent money. I was never really that interested in Mining Engineering and was just kind of going through the motions. Initially I was going to be in engineering to follow in the footsteps of my father, but it was more of his dream that I became an Engineer than it was mine. A big thing about the mining career at the time was that I did not have the grades at Virginia Tech to really be a mining engineer yet and I would have to spend several years working as a mine laborer before I had the experience necessary to offset my bad grades. I was too proud for my own good at the time and decided that I would do another degree instead of mining, as I felt insulted, I was not allowed to be a mining engineer. As a side note I wish I had gone for a Mining Career but ended up burning a few bridges that would have made that possible. Fast forward for a couple months when my fiancée was done with her graduate degree, she found a job that was taking us to the coast of Virginia Beach; this move really worked out for me because it gave me a chance to attend ODU and pursue a degree in Computer Engineering.

DISH Network

During the time I was waiting on my Fiancée to finish her master's so we could go where her job took us, I spent some time working for the DISH network as a customer service and technical support position. At this point in my life, I had decided that I did not want to do Mining Engineering and was doing several different things to try to figure out what direction my life was going to take. DISH came up because it paid well and was a quick hire, additionally it would make enough money to support my fiancée in the last few semesters of her job. What made this such an impactful experience was that I got to the technical support position and realized that I was good

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at technical support, specifically dealing with their computers and networks. This really got me thinking about what I wanted out of my life, here was this career possibility in front of me, I could be anything from an installer to maybe pursuing other options that are available to me. As I was at that point at a crossroads between a career I did not like and an uncertain future, this played a big role in deciding that I want a career in IT.

Covid and Computer Engineering

When my Fiancee and I had moved out to Virginia Beach so that she could start her job I had quit Dish Network and was without a job sitting around. While she was going to work I was trying to figure out what my next steps in my career were going to be, I remembered at the time that Old Dominion University was nearby and decided to start something there. The summer of 2019 I went to the university and decided to try and go for a degree in Computer Engineering, with the experience I gained at Virginia Tech it was a pretty easy process and I started my classes in that field. Everything was going fine until I reached a few classes that were a bit out of my skill range and started needing to buckle down, it was the Spring of 2019 and I was going to buckle down and do what I needed to do. The next weekend we were all on the lockdown because Covid was in full swing. My plan to get everything back on track was to go to the professors of the classes in person and get a lot of things done, Covid made all of those things impossible, and I was left with nothing. That semester, and the Fall semester, I had to withdraw from a number of courses and it looked like Computer Engineering was not going to work out for me. Now I needed to pivot

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again, the career I had envisioned was nothing something I was going to have access to; I decided to try and finish my computer science degree and see what I could do with that.

Pivoting into Cyber Security.

The final step of joining Cyber Security would happen in the Spring of 2021 with some struggling I was having with some Computer Science courses and ended in the Spring of 2022 when I pivoted into Cyber Security. I was not doing well in Computer Science, this was mostly because I did not practice programming like I needed to; at this point I reached out to my advisor, who tells me I need to look for work and start practicing. Looking around for what I could do for a job I landed on the Systems Group at Old Dominion University, this job would have me setting up labs across campus and doing troubleshooting work for the Computer Science department. This job made me realize that this was what I wanted to do, I wanted to be IT and do technical troubleshooting; I was still not doing well in my Computer Science classes and then decided that I should pursue a degree that taught me more about what I was doing in the Systems group. Talking to other people about it there were two different choices, the first choice was an IT degree, and the second choice was a Cyber Security degree. Hearing that the IT degree was not a great bachelors to have, I went after the Cyber Security Degree. Since pivoting into Cyber Security, I have done very well and definitely think I found my niche.

Conclusion

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Though I made a lot of mistakes and went through a few different changes in my life, I eventually ended up in the career of my choice, Cyber Security. From Mining, where I did not feel a real passion for doing, I made a big pivot into technology, radically changing the trajectory of my career. Helping customer with technical issues, working for the DISH Network as technical support, made me realize that my future career should be involved in technology, with computers more specifically. Though the pandemic took away the ability for me to be a Computer Engineer, I was able to make my way back into a new career path in Computer Science. After the end of the pandemic, when I found myself floundering in the Computer Science Department, a student job would help me realize that I needed to make another change into Cyber Security. From a beginning not even working on Computers at all, to a degree in Cyber Security, I made a number of different pivots, each pivot driving my closer to my eventual career.