

**The Path I Choose**

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Since high school, I have always been interested in the cyber world and what it has to offer. At the same time, I have a passion for helping others and an invested interest in law enforcement. That being said, throughout high school to now, I have heard and read of numerous people who have committed both foreign and domestic acts of terrorism alongside the rise of school shootings. In reviewing and seeing these stories, most of them had the common theme in the form of the usage of social media, private chat boxes, and game chats. Seeing this allowed me to find my passion in what I want to do—cyberterrorism. I want to monitor online activity and help prevent terrorists from succeeding with their extreme plans.

There is no straight path for someone like me to get into cyberterrorism, as there is no guidebook on how to get a career in cyberterrorism. So instead, I had to embrace the skillset I did have and use it to the best of my ability. I had my first part-time job in high school, being a cashier at Food Lion, and was later promoted to Customer Service Supervisor. One would think the role isn't too tech savvy, but it taught me how to use and navigate a POS system, along with understanding people's emotions due to everyday life, as my job was very interactive. Fast forward to Old Dominion University, where I became a Resident Assistant in my sophomore year. Since then, being in this position has allowed me to use the university's databases, manage crises, and learn different community outreach and support efforts. The guidance both of these roles have given me will help me move forward in my career where communication, quick thinking, and attention to detail have a crucial role.

My interest in cybersecurity didn't stem from just one moment that happened but was instead a trend that I kept seeing. As I mentioned before, I have always had a huge interest in technology and its capabilities. I really enjoy using social media, going on streaming platforms, etc. One social media platform I enjoy using is YouTube. However, I was exposed to the

different ways it can be dangerous. Both social media and streaming platforms allowed me to see how a person can influence someone to do terrible things just to be a part of the crowd or to be heard. At the same time, I have scrolled through different types of media and seen people post hate speech, join extremist groups, and be radicalized from the comments.

It was in these moments that I had so many questions as to who is truly responsible for controlling and isolating these people's posts and extremist groups. The more I thought about it, I realized I wanted to be a part of the group who stopped the control and isolation. For me, cybersecurity isn't just making computers and coding but also protecting the person behind the computer and preventing devastating incidents from happening. Having said that, I knew I didn't have any direct experiences that correlate to the field, but I do believe I can use my skills from my other job experiences to help me in the field.

From the moment I applied to Old Dominion University, I knew I wanted to be a cybersecurity major as I knew it would give me the skills needed for my career. The courses I've taken here at ODU have helped show me that cybersecurity is more than just building computers and coding. It's also about protecting people, understanding national security, the different types of cybersecurity attacks/threats, social engineering, and the human behavior of the individual behind the computer. Learning these skills from various courses and professors explaining what they do and have done has shown and given me hope that my dream job is possible.

There have been several courses throughout my time at ODU that have helped me understand and shape my career path. One course that stood out and taught me so much was my cyberterrorism course. The cyberterrorism course opened my eyes to domestic terrorism groups, far left and far right extremist groups, and how said groups recruit and radicalize people on the internet. Overall, this course showed me firsthand what I want to do in the future since it takes

both the cyber and technical aspects, combining domestic and foreign terrorist and extremist groups into one. Another course that I found helpful was my cyber techniques and operations course. Despite this course being more technical, I learned how to penetrate systems, cryptographic and steganography skills, counter cyber attacks, and manage personal data on a system. This course was helpful because it taught me how to overcome challenges, pay attention to details and work as a team. It also gives me leverage on the technical aspect to other individuals in the cyber terrorism field. Here at ODU, I have had professors who have challenged me to think of cyber roles and its role in society. They have encouraged me to use open source tools to find not just the “how” of a cyber incident but the “why.” With taking these courses and professors leading them, it allowed me to finalize my path in cybersecurity.

Despite not directly working in the cybersecurity field, I have picked up various skills from jobs that I believe would be useful in the field I want to go in. Looking back at the time I have spent being a Resident Assistant (RA) at Old Dominion University was the most unique and challenging experience I’ve had in my career so far. As an RA, my responsibilities were in a variety of aspects such as supporting residents—who are also students—handling conflicts and crisis situations. In this role, there have been many times in which I have taken a leadership position, worked as a team, worked under pressure, and responded quickly and made decisions in a timely manner. Overall, those experiences gave me better insight and sense as to what it takes to be a leader and crisis management. In turn, this will help me in the high stakes environment of cybersecurity I want to work in.

My role as a Customer Service Supervisor at Food Lion allowed me to gain skills that I can carry with me into my future career as well. In this position, I had management responsibilities such as monitoring customer services, responding to customers complaints and

problems, upkeeping the POS systems, putting money in the register for the cashiers and self-checkout, wiring money, and more. I learned skills such as multitasking, communicating clearly, and problem-solving. The skills I learned from being a Customer Service Supervisor will definitely be used in my career as I will solve problems and handle multiple tasks at the same time.

Reviewing my role as a government intern, I gained valuable technical skills in regards to cybersecurity. I was taught how to use Linux, Ubuntu, and basic computer programming languages. On the technical side of cybersecurity these skills are the most useful as there might come a time in my career that I will need to reprogram a computer or extract a computer to gain information.

In total, looking back at my journey so far I am confident in saying that everything I have done so far in all my roles have led me successfully towards the field of cybersecurity but more specifically the fight against cyberterrorism. It started as an interest that came from being a normal teenager surfing the internet on social media and streaming platforms who saw the consequences of being influenced. There is a risk on each platform for people to be radicalized into committing hateful acts. Over time, I grew a passion to help mitigate these problems through my schoolwork at ODU where I was shown both sides of cybersecurity by understanding how to protect the person behind the computer and the system itself. My work experience may not be directly related to the career I want but it still gives me transferable skills that will be used in said field. As an RA, I learned crisis management and leadership skills while Food Lion gave me managerial skills and multitasking with my government internship providing me with cyber technical skills and knowledge.

As mentioned before, my dream job is to work in cyberterrorism with a focus of handling the social media and open source side. I want to be a part of an organization of individuals whose job is keeping up with extremist organizations, monitoring social media platforms, and identifying potential threats. I know that this means I would need to work for a government agency or private organization that is contracted with one but that is something I have been looking forward to since high school.

In the end, I am driven to this path due to my morals and values, which come from wanting to help and protect people, an interest in technology, and the promise of problem-solving. Even though I know this path isn't the easiest to go down, I know with the skills and opportunities I have been given, it is possible as long as I trust myself and prepare for the challenges ahead. Every step I take - from classes, work experiences, and my internship have set up and continue to build the foundation of my future career. That being said, as I look forward I am motivated and confident in the future as I will be handling cyberterrorism and preventing tragedies from happening.