

Reflective Journal #2

Jasmyn Wilhelm

Old Dominion University

CYSE 368: Cybersecurity Internship

Teresa Duvall & Sai Gireesh Komaragiri

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The Head of the US IT department Mark Rushing sat down with me to discuss his background and help advise aspiring IT and Cybersecurity students.

Interviewer: First off, let's get your name and title.

Mark Rushing: Mark Rushing. As of Friday, I'm actually the head of IT.

Interviewer: Oh, congratulations on the promotion!

Mark Rushing: Yeah.

Interviewer: What's your backstory in getting into this position? Specifically, your career in general?

Mark Rushing: Well, I've always been into electronics and stuff. My parents joked they couldn't leave anything sitting around without me wanting to take it apart. Rarely would I get it back together, but I was always interested in computers. My dad was in the first wave of people to get a computer; he worked for the state of Virginia at the time. They were giving out computers for the office, trading files on floppy disks. He saw it wasn't going away, so he bought one for home and became the computer guy. He wasn't in IT, but he knew it was the future and needed to know how to use it. That gave me access to a computer at home.

Interviewer: Did you tinker with it a lot?

Mark Rushing: Yes, several times. I inherited that computer when my parents got a new one, so I could tinker with it whenever I wanted. In high school, online gaming was becoming a thing, but LAN parties were still popular. I organized several LAN parties at my house or a friend's house, and when the parents got tired of us, I started organizing LAN parties at the local library, which let us rent the room for free. That's where I got into networking. We had to figure out how to get the network working at the library, buying network cables, and crimping the ends ourselves.

Interviewer: Where did your education fit into all this?

Mark Rushing: I started out at TCC, the community college here, and got an associate's degree. Then I transferred to ODU. My last semester at ODU, I applied for jobs through their intern-specific job board and got my first internship, which was more part-time work than an internship. I was working with a guy I went to high school with, unknowingly. We had both gone to Chesapeake's vocational school; I got Net Plus and Security Plus certificates there. I worked at that company for nearly ten years through multiple acquisitions and divestitures. Then, about three years ago, I moved to my current company.

Interviewer: What led you to this specific position?

Mark Rushing: The last company was too big for me. They wanted me to fly down to Atlanta once a month, but when COVID hit, I realized I preferred working remotely. I saw the writing on the wall there and started browsing LinkedIn. I saw Kevin Harris, a former colleague, working here, and they had an open IT manager position, so I applied and got it.

Interviewer: What does your current role involve?

Mark Rushing: Day-to-day management of the team, which includes service delivery (help desk), applications, business intelligence, and infrastructure. Service delivery is the biggest part—managing tickets, password resets, and similar tasks. We also handle applications and business intelligence. I've moved more into the managerial side of things, making sure projects are completed, tickets are worked on, and communicating with the business.

Interviewer: How does the merger with Pfeiffer affect your work?

Mark Rushing: It's still a bit wacky. Bush bought controlling ownership in Pfeiffer and has been taking over operations. Even the guys working on the Pfeiffer side are now part of the Bush group, although it's a separate legal entity.

Interviewer: You've been in IT for how many years now?

Mark Rushing: Seventeen years.

Interviewer: Did you always aim to move into a managerial role?

This journal reflects 100 hours as an IT Summer Intern for Busch Vacuum Solutions in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Mark Rushing: A lot of my career happened naturally. At one point, I considered specializing more in technology, getting more certifications. But when I got the opportunity to manage a help desk at my previous company, I found that the managerial side came more naturally to me.

Interviewer: What advice would you give to someone wanting to get into IT regarding education and certifications?

Mark Rushing: I learned more in the first six months on the job than in my entire college career. There's value in both education and certifications, but experience is crucial. During interviews, you can tell who has knowledge but no practical experience. Knowing how to manage real day-to-day operations isn't taught in technical classes.

Interviewer: What was your first official job in IT?

Mark Rushing: My first official job was the internship I got out of school at age 20.

Interviewer: And your view on balancing degrees and certifications?

Mark Rushing: Different strokes for different folks. Personally, I'd put more value on experience. Technical classes and certifications are beneficial, but practical, hands-on experience is irreplaceable.

Interviewer: Any final thoughts on your journey and advice for others?

Mark Rushing: IT can be a natural progression if you follow your interests and stay open to opportunities. Management might come naturally to some, while others may excel in technical expertise. It's about finding what fits you best and building on that.