

An Interview With an James Zeigler

Director of Information Technology and Security

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Introduction

I chose this Mr. Zeigler to interview because he is my supervisor at my current internship, and he said that he was very open to answering any questions that I had for him. He is also the Director of Information Technology and Security here at UJFT, so I wanted to know how he became a person of such high status in a field that I would like to thrive in. I wanted to learn things like how someone gets into the field, skills and knowledge that he finds important to somebody in IT, entry level jobs that he went through to get here, and qualities that he would look for in a person regarding full time employees and he was just the right person to ask.

How Did He Get Into the Field He Currently Works In?

Mr. James Zeigler was introduced to technology at a very young age. His father worked at Sentara and he said that he would always play on the computer that was present at his work. Right there is where he became instantly interested in computers and how they worked. He said that he had fun finding ways to hack into his dad's computer and get into his machine by any means possible. I found this very interesting because this is a similar upbringing in technology to mine. My dad has worked with computers for as long as I can remember and he would always bring home extra laptops and I absolutely loved learning about the processes of these laptops. I would also spend countless hours on these devices as Mr. Zeigler did as a kid. He says that as kids we don't know what we were doing, but when you want to gain access to something or play games you find a way.

Mr. Zeigler also explained that as a young adult he didn't have wifi in his house, but found a way to survive and get free wifi in order to connect to the cyber world. He exclaimed that he probably shouldn't have done this, but one day he was talking to a friend of a friend about the methods that he used to gain this free internet connection

and off that conversation alone this friend of a friend said he should work with the government in cybersecurity. His friend then put in a word for him with the government job that he currently had. Then Mr. Zeigler went to D.C. to start the interview process for jobs and that is overall how he got his start. He also explained during the interview that things didn't always run smoothly and oftentimes went a completely different direction for him unfortunately.

What is an Important Ability, Skill, or Quality for Someone in This Field?

Mr. Zeigler states that an ability that is very important in this field is to stay curious. "If you are not curious for things there is no thirst for knowledge and with no thirst for knowledge you are not staying apprised as to what is going on." This is very critical for the field of cybersecurity and IT in general. Advances are being made every single second in this world and it is very important to not get left behind. If you aren't curious about it you won't be able to be successful in this field and won't be an effective worker. The ability to learn, retain information, and being ethical are also some things that he mentioned are very important for somebody in the field like him. It is also important to know that you don't know everything and not build a false sense of security because you have basic "book" knowledge. People think that they know everything and this can lead to being vulnerable in the field of IT and cybersecurity.

What Are Some 'Soft' Skills that Are Important In This Job?

Communication is very important and is oftentimes a big issue for the more introverted or "nerdy" people of IT as Mr. Zeigler states. He says that "A lot of times people don't practice communication skills and it is a big soft skill for this field." Another big soft skill is knowing how to handle people. It is always good to have the expectation

that yes you may be good at what you do, but other people did not go to school for this and you need to have grace and compassion for those people when explaining things.

What technical skills have they found are the most important in this job/position?

He says that the soft skill of communication is the biggest thing in his position because he has to relay information to people who are not experts at this. When it comes to technical skills he says he has to know about everything that his team is doing. All of his experience when it comes to technical skills up to this point is very important for him. He is the director so he needs to have knowledge about everything that his team is working on. He taps into all of his skills prior to this job “Whether that be my programming background, my analyst skills, even my help desk skills. All allow me to understand how everything works holistically and how to direct the rest of the team.” Being able to understand and do some of the work myself is the biggest thing for me.

What would be good entry-level jobs for gaining experience to become Director of Information Technology and Security?

He explains that the help desk is ground zero and is almost like going through a fire. Mr. Zeigler said that “It’s probably one of the suckiest jobs, but it helps to develop your customer skills and view the other people as customers.” This entry-level job of help desk helps what he mentioned earlier of giving grace and compassion when explaining things while not being frustrated or rude when doing so. He suggested that you go from help desk to networking rather than help desk straight to security. He thinks that having more knowledge in networking is important to the success of becoming a security analyst. He realized himself that there were some spots in networking that he

was really weak in when he went straight into security. Promoting more understanding as a whole of the cyber world before picking up a job in security.

What qualities are you looking for regarding full-time employees at your organization?

To put it simple Mr. Zeigler restated the qualities he mentioned earlier. He said that he looks for, "Curiosity, customer service, communication, and willingness to learn." He says that as long as you have those qualities then you will find your way in this field. The fact that he went over these qualities multiple times really shows how important it is to be able to have both soft and technical skills. He didn't list any technical skills because that is the bare minimum in this field. This showed me that to go above and beyond other candidates that may want the same job as me I need to be able to have these soft skills and abilities.

What Has this Interview Showed Me?

This interview was very eye opening to me. I have never had any work experience prior to this and was only doing the classwork that had been assigned to me. I wasn't sure how it would be to just throw myself into the cybersecurity or IT world and it was very intimidating to me. I felt very lost and felt I had no direction when it came to a career path. However this interview with Mr. Zeigler showed me that I can do this and helped me to gain some confidence. We had similar upbringings when it comes to technology and he explained that some qualities that I already have will be helpful in getting me a job in this field. This interview made me more hopeful for the future and I will take the information he has given to me wherever I go.