

Interview with Mark Campbell

Director of IT Ops and Infrastructure

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Who is Mark Campbell?

I decided to interview Mark Campbell because he has been a leader and a critical part of our team since I have been with the organization, The Global Electronics Association. I have worked closely with Mark for the past 7 years. He has served as a knowledgeable mentor and a pillar in our organization's information technology infrastructure and security. Mark has spent over two decades in a career in information technology and has extensive experience working with various systems as technology has evolved since the late 1990's and early 2000's. Given his experience, and the strong working relationship, I wanted to know more about what drove him to choose this career field, and what knowledge he can share as he reflects on a world of rapidly evolving computer systems.

Interview with Mark

Career Path & Background

I asked Mark a series of questions regarding his career and background in the field. I wanted to understand the foundation of his experience and career.

How did you get into IT/security, what made you choose this career path.

Mark had a foundational interest in technology from his teenage years. In 1993, Mark was in seventh grade and his family got their first family computer. He remembers that it ran Windows 3.1 as the operating system. He reflected on what piqued his curiosity the most, it was the idea of being

able to control things in any way through a command line. Understanding the architecture, and how to manipulate it, as opposed to just running a program. This curiosity stayed with him through high school. He attended a vocational school where he focused on computers as he knew from an early age that is what he wanted to do for a career.

What was your first position and where did you go from there?

Marks first job in the field of IT was with a small local ISP. Back in the early 2000s, he explains “ISPs were a dime a dozen”. They focused on selling lines for dial up connections and he worked with their helpdesk/technical team. After the company went under, he was offered a job through family friend working for a firm that hosted websites for the medical industry. He worked as a Jr level system administrator, and it was a major turning point in his career. He did not just focus on mundane tasks. His curiosity constantly pushed him to learn how the firm managed and cared for the servers from physical hardware, cooling, networking, and maintenance. During this time, he learned about networks since the servers were hosted behind load balancers. One single website they hosted utilized two hundred physical servers simultaneously. After several years with the firm, he moved over to E-Trade where he worked in a high stress Network Operations Center (NOC). On his first day, his supervisor told him it would be “At least a year before you know what you’re talking about”. The systems they used were extremely complex and vast. They had individual teams for each part of the Information Technology group. He enjoyed the work, even though it was a high stress, fast paced environment with an exceptionally high turn over rate. When asked what drove him to stay as long as he did, for 3 years, he emphasized that he really enjoyed fixing problems under the intensity and the knowledge he was gaining was the payoff. When he left E-Trade to work his current role at The Global Electronics Association, He made a step up into a manager role over helpdesk and infrastructure, then became Director of our infrastructure department.

What skills mattered early in your career and are they still relevant?

Mark said that the number 1 skill that carried him through his career is having the ability to troubleshoot effectively and a strong understanding of troubleshooting methodology. He said that this methodology was universal and used in most situations in work and life. “In addition to understanding how to troubleshoot, you need to have the drive to do what it takes to solve a problem no matter how difficult.”

What makes someone a suitable candidate? What is the biggest weakness you have seen in someone first starting in our field?

Mark said “Not asking questions.” Is the biggest weakness. If someone does not ask questions, they do not learn. It is easy to get complacent and not expand your mind, but in a rapidly growing field of technology, asking questions is necessary because it’s foundational for learning. “No one expects you to know everything when first starting out, so asking questions is a necessity.” A suitable candidate is not someone who possesses all the tech skills needed; those can be taught to a person. If you cannot communicate, ask questions, and be prepared, you will not move far in the Information technology career field.

What have you found to be the most rewarding while spending your career in the Information technology field?

“The good feeling you get when solving a big problem or completing a large project.” Mark said that the sense of accomplishment that comes with completing a project that benefits and helps people makes all the challenging work worth it. Being one of the driving forces in what people use in their everyday lives is a great feeling. The drive to help others is a core of what makes this career field rewarding and fulfilling.

Reflection

I reflected on what Mark told me during the interview. I was able to gather valuable information that will benefit me as I progress in IT and Cyber Security. When I started my Career in information technology, I had the traits and attitudes Mark spoke about and it makes sense why I

have been able to excel in my field. My first IT position was a level 1 helpdesk technician. I worked for a company that helped troubleshoot point of sale systems for Family Video and Marcos Pizza. My previous employment was in the retail sector, so when I started working with the technology around it, it gave me the empathy and communication skills I needed to help others. I could put myself in the customers shoes and realize that it may just be “A call” for me, but for them, their ability to complete their daily tasks was heavily impacted. This gave me the drive to want to help them in any way I could and the soft skills of being able to communicate with compassion. When I started my role at Global Electronics Association, I did my homework during the interview process. I researched the company, came to interviews with copies of my resume and came prepared. Mark told me during the interview that this is why I rose to the top of the list of candidates.

I have also always enjoyed technology and challenging problems since I was young. Whether I was trying to complete a video game, excel in chess club, or build an exceptional competitive deck in Trading card games, the idea of using my mind and focus to achieve a challenging goal, I have always had this skill and drive. My passion for computers with the soft skills I possess has made it clear why I have built my career to this point now. The interview with Mark reminded me that I need to remain curious and continue to ask questions as I progress into more senior roles.