

Interview with Jeff Dixon

Manager of IT Systems and Engineering at Northern Regional Hospital

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Interview

Question 1: How did you get into the IT field?

Response: I have always loved computers ever since I was a kid. For my career, I started by working at my local Staples. You'd be surprised how many people bring their laptops or printers into Staples or other stores like that for IT help. I also worked at my local community college in their computer lab. From there it was about working my way up from entry level to jobs like consulting to the position I am in now.

Question 2: What is a typical day like for you?

Response: No two days are exactly the same since we're such a small department and there such a wide range of things we might have to do. For example, we put in a new set of firewalls in yesterday, which isn't something you need to do often. In general, I start the day by checking my email to see what problems need to be addressed today. From there I prioritize those problems and then start working through them. I also am over different projects, so my day might include working on those or attending meetings. The fact that one day is never the same as the other is one of things I really like about the job.

Question 3: What are some of your primary responsibilities?

Response: I tend to address issues concerning phones, servers, and networks.

Question 4: Are there any special security precautions you have to deal with since hospital systems have sensitive information?

Response: We have to conform to HIPPA standards on a technical level. This can be difficult sometimes, since the language used in the requirements they give us can be vague from a technical standpoint. Because of this we lean on industry standards like NIST. We'll actually map the two standards to each other and say "okay, this NIST standard actually matches this HIPPA standard so this is how we can be in compliance with HIPPA standards".

Question 5: What is a challenging aspect of your job?

Response: A challenge that we face is that things are constantly changing, so you have to keep up with new technologies or new threats.

Question 6: Could you give me an example of a challenging or interesting situation that has happened?

Response: A real, common threat that we encounter is actually targeted phone and email spoofing. Typically, it's someone acting like they're someone in a position of authority and try to engage in conversation and gain information. These attempts at communication can seem real since the attacker will use the correct information for who they're trying to be by obtaining information about them. The goal is often to get direct deposit information and usually is financially driven overall. A specific example that occurred recently was a spoofing incident that went through the phones in the hospital. It was caught before there were any major issues, but it

was definitely the kind of attack that would have been successful had it reached the right person before it was caught. Attacks like that can be difficult to spot and detect since there's really nothing wrong with it that would raise a red flag on a technical level, it's all social engineering.

Question 7: What would you say are some important skills or abilities to have in order to be successful in the field?

Response: It's important to be able to research and troubleshoot. There's such a wide range of things to know that you're not going to be able to know every little thing. This makes it important to be able to effectively find the answers you need.

Question 8: What is an important soft skill to have in your position?

Response: Being able to communicate and engage with the team. If you don't know the answer to something, you can reach out to someone on the team who may know.

Question 9: What would you say are some good entry-level jobs for beginners in the IT field?

Response: You can start at places like Staples like I did, community colleges or other places that offer lab technician positions. Internships are also really important. They help you get your foot in the door, which is important for smaller teams like ours that generally have a low turnover. It's also a potential way to get hired by the company after being an intern.

Question 10: What advice would you give to students that are interested in the field?

Response: You really have to have a passion for it, which really goes with any field.

Programming and IT are only getting bigger, it's not going anywhere anytime soon. I'd say it's helpful to get all the education you can in while you're younger, since it's more difficult to do once you have family responsibilities. It's doable, but it's easier to do early on. Certifications are also useful, but only if they're done correctly. You can pay to take the test and get the certification, but if you cheat or don't actually learn the material the certification isn't useful at all.

Question 12: If you were in a position where you had to hire a full-time employee, what qualities would you want to see in a potential candidate?

Response: I'd want someone who is driven, motivated, and wanted to learn. Someone who always is driven to work on the next task and just enjoys what they do. Trust is also a big thing in the IT field, and especially for us since there's not really anything in the hospital that we can't access. It's important that they're willing to ask questions and ask for help but also be able to be self-sufficient. Having a good balance there is important.

Question 13: Where do you see the IT field going in the next 5 to 10 years?

Response: I really see big changes with AI going forward. As it develops, I think we're going to see two sides. We're going to have more powerful and more sophisticated AI for backend and assistance purposes, but attackers are also going to have access to that as well. Quantum

computing also could play a part with AI. If you have AI in the future that has capabilities to do things like break encryption ciphers, you'll need powerful systems to combat that, so I think quantum computing going forward will grow as well.