Heather:

Welcome to the Hurricane Labs podcast. I'm Heather and today we are going to be wrapping up our talk about diversity in InfoSec. This time focusing on what companies can do to more effectively address the roadblocks to improved diversity and inclusion. Now, if you haven't had a chance yet, be sure to check out parts one and two of this series. And, before we dive back in, I do want to say that we are going to be tackling this talk from our own perspectives and they are not representative of everyone's experiences. This chat reflects our own personal ideologies and opinions. As always, we welcome conversation about our content. You can reach out to us on Twitter @hurricanelabs or to me directly at @curious_words.

Heather:

We'll go ahead and continue our talk with Roxy, Meredith, Aysha and Ryan about how companies can tap into the potential having a diverse group of employees provides. Tackling first, the concept of culture fit. So how do companies achieve getting people who will work well with their company and work well in the position without then also using phrasing, using mentalities, that create a disclusive environment? How would a company go about doing that?

Roxy:

My answer to that is that they, they need to throw away all their ideas and concepts around what is a culture fit, because if they focus too much on finding people that really go well with the team, they focus too much on that, they're going to just be hiring the same people over and over. Sometimes you need a disruptor in order to improve your procedures and processes and the things that you do at a company.

Aysha:

I absolutely agree with what Roxy just said. I really feel like when speaking and considering culture fits in companies, it's really important that the company also kind of do some, just kind of some internal evaluation of, okay, well, what are we doing? Culture wise? How do we operate as a company? And are we functioning as well as we could? And, in hiring, are we making the best decisions for the company by trying to hire people that fit within our culture? Because I feel like progress doesn't come by doing more of the same and I think that's a big thing to look at when speaking about diversity and inclusion, how important it is to really look at the people that you're hiring and not count them out because they are different than the things that you're currently used to in your company.

Aysha:

For example, when I was brought on to Hurricane Labs, I came from a university setting, so extremely structured, and the processes that I followed were processes been in place for years and years. It wasn't a lot of room for innovation and ad hoc, anything. In the cybersecurity industry, everything's always changing. There's always things that need to be done, things that are happening and it's very much, everybody's thinking on their toes and being the best person for the situation at the time. Whereas that structure can, I feel like, be a little bit lacking and if they had, or if, Hurricane Labs, when they were hiring for a project manager had saw me and my work background and said, "she comes from a university, that's not going to be a culture fit here because project management like that is not what we were used to," they probably wouldn't have had the little bit of success that we have had in the projects that I've worked on, because the big thing that I'm doing here is coming in and really examining the

things that we're working on and setting up those processes and procedures and working with everybody to pick their brains of what's working and what's not working and what can we get in order.

Aysha:

But if they did not want somebody to come and kind of like shake things up and pick brains, I probably would've been out of here within the first month, because I was definitely doing a lot of brain picking and well, why do we do that? Well, let's try it this way. So I just think that's really important in hiring and making sure that you have a diverse skillset and thought background.

Heather:

I love what you said about "you don't make progress if you just keep doing more of the same." That was really on point. One of the things that we talked about in a previous episode was how, when companies are wanting to fill a position and they have a posting and they aren't getting a diverse applicant pool. They need to really sort of question their public persona, the company's public perception. What can companies do in your opinions to of start changing that public perception just to even help increase the diversity of their job applicant pool?

Ryan:

It wouldn't have to be just the leaders and executives. It would also be whoever's in charge of outwardly talking out to outside the business or corporation. Are they portraying diversity and inclusion?

Heather:

So I guess Ryan, what you're saying is reaching out with the community and actually engaging with what the community is saying and being accessible. What other sort of things can companies do to change their public perception if they are apparently being perceived in a way that is resulting in that lower diversity pool?

Ryan:

One of the things that I enjoy about working at Hurricane Labs is the culture here fosters this culture of, if there's an issue or if there's a problem, you shouldn't, feel afraid to, speak up. And very open, I've been told by my team lead to, "if there's any problems, if there's any issues, please feel free to come to me anytime, no matter what." I feel welcome, heard, respected when it comes to things that I have to say. I think for any other company, as well as our own, you would want to make sure that, that exact respect and welcoming and the ability to be heard like that we would want that as well. If you can just kind of exemplify that, not only just talking about it, you're not advertising it on a Twitter ad or something, or a Twitter post, you're also doing it internally and other people are talking about it because people will brag about it, people will suggest, "Hey, we have an open position. Can you come? This place is very inclusive."

Heather:

You're right. That word of mouth is super powerful when it comes to public perception. What other things can companies do to help improve the way they support these communities?

Roxy:

If you're queer, you may have different needs as far as benefits go as well. If you have different healthcare needs or you have different scheduling needs or something, you should feel safe and okay to be able to mention or ask for different benefits and for the company to actually have the benefits, that's the important part too. To actually have parental leave benefits or trans healthcare benefits or things like that, that queer families might need.

Heather:

Nothing says we support diverse communities, like actually offering real, tangible supports for diverse communities. Ryan, I like the phrasing that you used when you and I were speaking earlier about closing the doors and windows. Did you want to touch on that a little bit?

Ryan:

Yeah, sure. I said door at first because door is like a person. You obviously walk through it, but not everybody arrives at a destination the same way as everybody else. So the window part, I guess you could say, and if you want to put this in there too, is the window is the ability for you to see outside of your business, but also there's people looking in, so what are the things that they're seeing? Are there diverse groups of people that are working within your business? Is there a diverse culture that's able to actually be seen and heard and felt by not only people internally, but also outwardly as well. Is that the perception or persona that you're trying to show? First podcast, I think Meredith brought up the organization that was all about diversity and then turned out their actions didn't follow up with what they were saying.

Heather:

That survey, I was going to bring up that as well. You were talking about windows and being able to see outside you and using surveys and like you said earlier about communicating via Twitter or whatever, with the community that your company reaches out to, actually being able to communicate back and forth with them, but you have to be careful. Meredith, what was the survey again? Refresh my memory.

Meredith:

It was the survey about women in technology and why they felt that there were specific barriers. But the way that the survey was worded, it essentially became, what are the things preventing you from joining the security workforce? And it was women aren't qualified to do this job, women don't know enough and there was a third one that's currently escaping me, but I'll go hunt it down.

Heather:

It was like, where they aren't encouraged enough, perhaps?

Meredith:

Something thoroughly asinine.

Heather:

Right, right, right.

Meredith:

Rubbed a lot the wrong way.

Roxy:

That's something businesses need to look out for, is when people are looking into the windows, as Ryan was saying, what are they seeing and does it match your values on diversity?

Heather:

Do we want to talk about pay inequalities while we're talking about what companies can do and how diversity of companies is impacted by their decisions?

Meredith:

Yeah, sure. I can touch on that because I've had an interesting story to give. So back when I was still a full-time college student and shopping around for both internships and full-time places of employment, I learned pretty quickly on, I think I may have mentioned this in a previous podcast, but I took my first name off my resume after having been burned a few times. One particular instance stood out to me where a company in the area which I am from chose to look at my resume the first time as a female and provide an offer of an unpaid internship, even though they were advertising a $17 an hour internship in cyber security. I far surpassed their minimum requirements and they wanted to speak to me. One of the things that they mentioned in my first interview was we're not really looking for somebody like you, a female who really needs her hand held and is just trying to get some guidance and support.

Meredith:

I was like, "alright, I don't think this company is the fit for me either," especially after they sent the offer of an unpaid internship via email. I chose to respond with a list of my qualifications and said, "I'm sorry, but I think I'm going to be declining this as I'm going to search for a better offer." They made the comment that I likely would not be receiving a better offer anytime soon and we just left it at that. My university holds a large career day once a year, before the pandemic of course, where you could just drop your resume off or go speak to recruiters, I guess is probably the best word for that company. I chose to leave my new resume that had my first name taken off and merely had my list of qualifications. Low and behold, within three weeks, I had received an offer for the internship at full pay and I chose to turn them down.

Heather:

From the same place?

Meredith:

From the same place. I chose to turn them down by forwarding that email to the email that they knew from before and attaching it to the previous thread. It's very interesting to me that not only does the gender pay gap exist in areas where people are just trying to learn, and there isn't tens of thousands of dollars at stake, but all the way low, all the way down to the internships.

Heather:

It's like some companies' management has a difficult time believing in your qualifications, especially if you're from an underrepresented group.

Roxy:

Yeah, companies really need to understand that if you hire someone for a certain skillset, they have that skillset. Just believe them.

Heather:

If you put someone, they expect them to do their job, and then they have lied about their skills. It's going to be pretty apparent pretty quickly if they didn't have those skills to begin with. It's not that people don't have the propensity to be dishonest about it, but if they're doing the job, if they're able to do what you hired them to do, why shouldn't they be compensated properly regardless of gender or race or background if they're doing the task that you need done, that should be enough.

Roxy:

A good thing to do for companies to do is not just look at how much people are making, but are they at the correct level for their experience?

Roxy:

The other thing is, look at your interview process, because even though I could come into an interview and say, I have experience with this WAF, the way that they ask the question could be intentionally done to stump me. Then they go, "oh, you just don't know what you talking about clearly, because you don't know what we're asking." Having a look at the interview process and making sure the questions are asked correctly, all acronyms are explained, there are ways in the interview process that, and it could be just one person, it may not be the entire team or everyone that's interviewing. It could be just one person that's doing it intentionally.

Heather:

The experiences that Meredith shared a little bit ago makes me really wonder about the company's anti-discrimination policies. What can companies do to sort of address these issues in a way that actually makes anti-discrimination policies effective?

Roxy:

They have to actually enforce them. I can have a policy, but if I don't investigate if it's being followed and I don't enforce it, then it's worthless.

Heather:

That's such a concise and common sense answer that we have nothing else to, but you're right.

Roxy:

You can also put in the policy what the consequences are and actually follow through with them.

Heather:

Being clear about what the expectations are and like you said, follow through. I mean, that's really, a lot of the issue is the follow through.

Roxy:

Right, like if I'm a director and I never attend an interview, then I'm not going to know the types of questions that they're asking. So you have to be involved and you have to investigate and if you're not sure about something, if you're not sure if something is discriminatory or not, ask someone. There are professionals that can tell you and hopefully your company has someone that can help you with that.

Aysha:

I think one thing that's very important when thinking about diversity and inclusion is eliminating those barriers to entry for diverse candidates. I know when I was on my job search journey, there were quite a few companies that I had applied with and probably because I was using a diversified tech job board, so they would have all of these things, but on the actual job posting, they had language like "don't be intimidated by our listing," "still apply if you feel that, you could do a good job," "still apply if you think that your skillset would be a benefit to our company" or at the bottom of the posting, they would say, "does this job not fit your exact skillset, still use this link to submit your resume because we'd love to learn more about you." Those kind of things within the cyber security industry, I think would be very helpful because a lot of the time I feel that diverse candidates, your minority candidates, don't have that formalized background in cybersecurity or in tech, so a lot of the times they're coming from different industries and they're not entirely confident in their abilities just yet. They don't have all of the networking and everything else that others may have had to transition into the industry or to start off in the industry, so it's very important to create an inclusive and welcoming environment from the beginning and onset of whatever you're seeing from the company. I think that was really helpful when I was applying for different positions.

Aysha:

The other thing that I just thought about was how I've noticed in a lot of jobs, when you apply you're automatically sent like that screening of "complete this assignment," or "record a short video about yourself and submit it." Just like all of these barriers, which are of course in place to help, I'm guessing the hiring manager, sort through qualified people or not, you're definitely losing qualified candidates by doing that because one it's intimidating and then two, if I have a full-time job, and I'm also applying for jobs, which is a full-time job in itself, I don't have time to do five of these things. I feel like there needs to be some type of language and applications like that, that kind of say, "this is what we require, but in the event that you don't have the capacity to complete this assignment, here's our HR, reach out to them, send your resume directly, and we will review and reach out to you if we'd like to interview." Just something to kind of bypass those barriers that prevent good candidates from coming on.

Heather:

And that's all for today. Thanks for joining us and stay tuned for next time when we start our two part series on security, starting with physical security, weaknesses and hardening. Until then, stay safe.