

Do more with less:

5 Steps to Maximize Your Cybersecurity Workforce

The cybersecurity workforce isn't keeping pace. Some 83% of organizations say they lack the right skills and human resources to protect their assets.¹ In addition, 84% say that less than half of applications for security jobs are appropriately qualified.² Clearly, the cybersecurity workforce isn't where it needs to be to keep individuals, organizations, and nations safe.

¹ *Cybersecurity Skills Haves and Have Nots*, ESG, March 2014

² STATE OF CYBERSECURITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR 2015, ISACA and RSA CONFERENCE JOINT SURVEY (www.isaca.org/state-of-cybersecurity-2015)

For those organizations interested in effective security operations, the challenge is clear: Make the best use of the talent they already have.

It is critical to make sure they are maximally productive, to keep turnover low and thereby minimize “brain drain” (i.e. loss of organizational knowledge), and to cultivate future leaders. And this is even harder than it sounds.

Fortunately, though, there are a few easy-to-implement steps that security managers can employ to ensure they are making the most of their workforce resources. Of course, these aren't the only steps that organizations can take. We've selected these because they're easy to implement quickly, require little if any additional overhead or expense, and provide immediate value.

STEP 1

Staff Rotation and Cross-Training

Let's face it, not every security job is equally interesting, engaging, and/or fun to do. For example, a job like analyzing system log files is often a critical task, but it's likewise an area that can have high turnover. Why? Because it's challenging, it can get monotonous with little variation from day to day, and can feel like a “dead-end job” among folks doing that work for an extended length of time. Instituting a staff rotation program can accomplish two things: First, it helps “share the load” among other staff (thereby helping those folks to feel like they're gaining other skills besides just that one), and it has the extra benefit of helping to build a variety of skills throughout the team.

STEP 2

Clear Career Tracks

Unanswered questions about an employee's long-term position in the organization can be a source of anxiety – particularly when there are outside developments such as a larger organizational restructuring, reductions in force, or other events. Having a clearly articulated trajectory of career growth in the organization can help alleviate some of this. For employees, knowing what their next step is in advance and having a goal to work toward can help reduce anxiety, increase staff retention, and give confidence that they will be marketable in their next position, having demonstrated progression in their current role. Of course, this should be done in combination with clearly defined expectations and goals as well as a comprehensive, objective analysis of areas for improvement to ensure they stay on track to progress.

STEP 3

Individual Development

Investing in individual personnel is more than just sending them to training once a year and calling it a day. Employees, particularly in security, need to keep their skills fresh in order to stay relevant in the workforce. Training opportunities are obviously important in helping to achieve this, but budget dollars aren't always available. So keep these options in mind: networking opportunities (e.g. conferences and tradeshow), informal “lunch and learn” sessions conducted by other members of staff, webinars, industry competitions (e.g. the Cyberlympics or capture-the-flag style events at conferences), or even periodic unstructured “tinker days” can be valuable as a potentially cheaper alternative.

STEP 4

Measure at Department Level

It's hard to evaluate any improvement you make without some mechanism to measure the effectiveness of that improvement. If you're not already doing so, keeping some metrics about employee satisfaction, retention, and so forth can be extremely beneficial. Even if your organization is already doing company-wide surveys about employee satisfaction, having a department-level survey (preferably anonymous in nature to engender objective feedback) can help you fine-tune your retention and talent development efforts.

STEP 5

Alternative Work Arrangements

Lastly, consider a program of alternative work arrangements. Actions such as allowing staff to work remotely or at alternative times to suit their individual needs can increase both employee satisfaction and productivity in many cases. If goals are clear, output expectations are defined, and staff are held accountable for the work they do, does it really matter if employees do that work in the office or in the local park? Moreover, consider how you might best leverage advances in technology (e.g. mobile technologies, social media, etc.) to help foster a more interactive, collaborative work experience.