Meet New Cybersecurity Product Manager, Swati Handa

Swati brings more than a decade of applied knowledge and expertise in cybersecurity. Before joining Networking Academy, she worked for a Fortune 500 financial services company as a Security Architect. We are fortunate to have her be part of the Networking Academy product team where she can support the portfolio and give students more to love about this field.

Interview follows:

Q. What brought you to Cisco Networking Academy?

A. The opportunity to make an impact in education on a global scale. Networking Academy's ability to train 10.9M students in the last 22 years is very impressive.

Q. What's your background?

A. I started as an IT engineer and then received my Masters in Information Management so that I could follow my passion, which was cybersecurity. During my career, I have worked in all domains of the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) cybersecurity framework. From triaging zero-day threats in the network to auditing the security controls in the cloud. I've enjoyed the opportunity to be mentored and be a mentor for others. Besides receiving my CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional) certification, I have authored several vendor-neutral cybersecurity certifications as a way to give back on my good fortune to others.

Q. What got you excited about cybersecurity?

A. As a kid, I had a knack for treasure hunts. While I was getting my B.Tech in Information Technology, I participated in a few cybersecurity weekend boot camps. My first "Capture the Flag" experience changed me. Few careers offer the rapid challenges and utilization of the latest in technology that cybersecurity does. It also forces someone to see their adversaries' in a creative light and participate in a constant battle between good and evil.

> *"Few careers offer the rapid challenges and utilization of the latest in technology that cybersecurity does."* –Swati Handa

Q. What would you like to share with others about pursuing this field for a career?

A. Once a cybersecurity professional, the world is your oyster. You will possess highly transferrable skills

that companies continuously seek. You can expect a variety of opportunities to open up to you in many industries—and work in a field that pays well with an average annual salary in the U.S. of over $100K.

Few people know this, but you don't have to be a technology expert to work in cybersecurity. In addition to the technology-focused roles, there's threat intelligence, legal and regulatory compliance, business analysis and recruitment.

Q. Are doors opening up for women in this field?

A. Doors are opening thanks to increased awareness—but they only form 26% of the current global cybersecurity workforce. Jobs using jargon can sometimes be intimidating to not just women but everyone. That's why when I'm hiring for candidates, who are early in their career, I like to hone in on the basic skills. For example, if you can solve puzzles, have a knack for understanding how things connect and like to think "big picture," cybersecurity is a good

fit for you. Another valuable skill is if you like storytelling and verifying truths. Real-world experiences in your day-to-day life can also help, such as creating automation and tying together spreadsheets. My main interest is seeing that someone has the passion, drive and initiative to spend their free time learning whatever they can.

Q. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

A. Many people think of hackers as real-life versions of Elliot Alderson—the nerdy, antisocial recluse portrayed in the TV show "Mr. Robot." But, many cybersecurity professionals never touch a line of code or configure a server. Cybersecurity isn't just a *job*, but a long, varied list of jobs. For example, you need lots of different kinds of skilled professionals to have a good healthcare system. i.e., some are EMTs, and first responders others are nurses and doctors with various specialties.

"Cybersecurity is not just a job, but a long, varied list of jobs." –Swati Handa