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Interviewing for Your Core Security Team

Created by the Security Executive Council

The one thing a security leader must avoid is an ineffectual hire.

In many organizations, security teams must prove themselves to senior leaders and every employee and contractor. You can and should spend a lot of time finding the right mix of skills and personal characteristics that everyone in the company will respect.

Our subject matter experts recommend looking for team members who are self-driven—who can take on an assignment and determine what the real and underlying issues are, resolve every aspect of those issues, and provide clear and meaningful guidance to business leaders. Look for enthusiastic people who are truly committed to learning the business and contributing to its profitability.

If you are looking to hire a new member of your core security team, you can't let someone else do the interviewing for you. Meet eye-to-eye and have a conversation. Let the conversation reveal the things you're looking for. Be an investigator. Listen carefully, ask the right questions, and let the candidate do most of the talking.

Following are some questions that can help you decide if a candidate has the skills for the job. The "right" questions will depend on what you're looking for in a candidate, beyond the technical skills and educational accomplishments that HR or outside recruiters have used to narrow the pool of potential hires. However, you can use this checklist as a starting point for an interview, as a candidate or a hiring authority.

Is the candidate a lifelong learner?

- What kinds of hobbies or sports are you involved in?
- Why are these rewarding or important to you?

- What professional certifications do you have beyond your degree and why did you seek them? (CPP, CFE, CISSP, etc.).
- When you're faced with a topic or issue that's unfamiliar to you, what do you do?

A lifelong learner will be enthusiastic about learning a new business and will tend to treat challenges as opportunities rather than handicaps.

Does the candidate have a high level of energy?

- Describe your level of physical energy.
- What does your typical day look like?
- Tell me about your experience with international travel. How does it impact you mentally and physically?

You may ask these questions if you need team members who can get off a plane in another country and hit the ground running, or if long hours and late-night emergencies are expected. Innate energy is key in this environment.

Does the candidate want to be a business partner?

- Tell me about the values of your previous organizations.
- What did you do in your role to promote those values?
- How do you see the security team fitting into an organization, ideally? What is its role?
- What steps would you take as a security leader to become an integral part of other business teams across our enterprise?

Smart security works throughout the business to deliver tangible business value and improves net profitability. Ideal candidates will embrace this mission.

Can the candidate multitask in highly complex environments?

- Tell me about the most complex environment in which you've ever worked.
- How did you keep all the balls in the air, so to speak?
- What strategies did you use?

Most security teams need to be able to multitask in an organized way, dealing with multiple inputs simultaneously without neglecting any.

Does the candidate have a strength of character?

- Have you ever experienced pushback from leaders or colleagues on a given stance or initiative?

- If not, what have you done to avoid it or why do you think that's the case?
- If so, how did you deal with it?
- Do you see your attempts as successful or unsuccessful?

The security team will have to stand strong when decisions are in line with Security's values and the company's values. But they also need to be able to listen to business partners and change tactics when it benefits the business.

There are very likely some other characteristic that are important to you. Don't just ask if they have the characteristic, skill or knowledge; use probing questions that reveal whether they do. The right mix of team members is important to your ability to get things accomplished in the organization.

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About the Security Executive Council

The SEC is the leading research and advisory firm focused on corporate security risk mitigation solutions. Having worked with hundreds of companies and organizations we have witnessed the proven practices that produce the most positive transformation. Our subject matter experts have deep expertise in all aspects of security risk mitigation strategy; they collaborate with security leaders to transform security programs into more capable and valued centers of excellence. Watch our [3-minute video](#) to learn more.

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