

CHECKING IN: ARE WOMEN ADVANCING IN INFORMATION SECURITY?

It has been over one year since we put a focus on women in information security. In August of 2015, we learned that women make up just 11% of the IT security workforce, and fare only slightly better in IT in general – at 28%. This is the reality even as our industry battles with jobs we simply can't fill, as openings in our industry outpace security professionals by more than 3 to 1. At the same time, women are now the majority sex in colleges. These three realities should be inter-related. We should be seeing more women entering the security industry.

But, sadly, one year later that's not really the case industry-wide. Women have made small gains – up one percent in information security roles in 2016.

What are the challenges and barriers to women working in IT security? What can we do to encourage more female participation in our industry? We turned to the experts for advice.

Women Find Success on Aetna's Security Team



Jim Routh
CISO
Aetna

Jim Routh, the CISO at Aetna says that 41% of his team is female, including 60% of his direct reports.

Routh proudly reports, "My leader, Meg McCarthy, is the keynote speaker at the upcoming Executive Women's Forum (EWF). Several of my direct reports regularly participate in women in security industry events."

Routh states, "Several companies (Aetna, Facebook, Uber, etc.) have mature and sophisticated programs in place that enable them to greatly exceed industry norms in hiring and retaining women in cybersecurity. Sharing this information throughout the industry can do a lot to ultimately turn the 11% into 22%. Also preparing featured articles on profiling those women that have been successful as cyber leaders would be helpful.

Routh has suggestions for what we can do as an industry to increase the ranks of women on our teams.

Routh shares three ways to increase the ranks of women in our teams:

1. IMPROVE RESOURCES SUPPORTING STEM

Primary policy focus is to improve resources supporting STEM- the more female students are interested in math and science the higher the probability of them gravitating toward computer science and ultimately security.

2. MENTORING WOMEN

Next priority is mentoring for women once they choose a cyber security related curriculum. We need undergraduates and graduate programs to help find internship programs for them and guide them on curriculum choices.

3. INCREASE PROFESSIONAL MENTORING PROGRAMS

We need to increase professional mentoring programs (like those sponsored through EWF and Women in Security) to give women access to mentors from both genders.