

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023

Voices at the Forefront

8 March 2023



In addition to celebrating the achievements and contributions of women in various fields, International Women's Day 2023 celebrates the contributions and achievements of women in the cyber sector as well. We interviewed three BDO professional women in this field to gain insight into their experiences.

During their discussion, they shared their career paths, challenges they have faced, and advice they would offer other women interested in careers in this industry. Their stories provide valuable insight into the experiences of women in the cyber field and remind us of the importance of gender diversity in this critical industry.

FRANZISKA HAIN

Country: Germany

Current Role
Cyber Practice Leader

Career Path

10 years with IBM in IT-Outsourcing in several roles (e.g., executive assistant, project manager, division leader of IT-Compliance, risk, and security at BWI (non-military IT outsourcing of German armed forces to Siemens and IBM)

10 years in the Big 4 (of which 7.5 years at PwC), developing the practice of Cyber Resilience

How do you perceive women in cyber leadership roles?

The few women I know leadership positions are either of extraordinary character or have perfectly adjusted to men's world.

What have been some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a woman in your career?

The first challenge has been to recognize existing rules nobody talks about, referring to an environment created mostly by men's behaviors and practices. The second challenge was to find my way to adapt to the rules without changing my attitude.

Although both can be managed up to a certain point, raising a family without compromising a career becomes the biggest challenge.

What is the added value women bring to cyber management?

In general women bring a wonderful balance to teams in terms of competence, social skills, and perspectives to look at things. Cyber is unique in that only a few women already make a significant impact, since it is even more male-dominated.

How do you balance the demands of your job with your personal life?

I have been asked this question many times and often I wonder myself. In the end I must admit that I have been fighting my way through every single day since my two boys were born. Managing a client workshop the next day is really crazy after sleepless night with a baby. It is a very personal decision to make repeatedly and for only yourself.

What advice would you give to women aspiring to have a career in cyber leadership?

Learn the rules and develop your own strategies. Make sure you start building your future client and people network as soon as possible. Once there is a family to take care of, there is less time to have long dinner nights to build client relationships.

Also find a way to take care of yourself. Know what you need to regenerate and what your non-negotiables are. Male leaders sleeping four hours a night, traveling five days a week, and having a strong wife at their side managing the family is probably not your exemplary role model.

What women inspired you to push yourself to pursue your professional goals?

I appreciate having my personal businesswomen's network. We have a lot of steak, a lot of laughs and support each other.

I am inspired by these women, knowing they reach for the world while having the same issues we all have.



SACHA BLASIAK-PRIESTLEY

Country: Canada

Current Role

Global Leader, Cloud Security

Career Path

Technology experience of 20 years. I started my career in security operations, working in incident response, vulnerability management, and application security. My industry experience includes telecom, retail, public sector, and manufacturing.

How do you perceive women in cyber leadership roles?

It's imperative to represent all areas. My career and I really benefit from diversity in leadership. Throughout my career I have often been the only or one of a few women in the room. There were times where I'm sure my skills and my knowledge were questioned. However, I found that my ability to be curious, continually learn and engage with people has made me successful.

What have been some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a woman in your career?

In a technology role, one of the challenges I faced was the stigma of not having the same technical depth as some of my male counterparts. I think this was, in part, because there weren't a lot of women in technical roles. Therefore, it is so critical. Diversity reduces the likelihood of someone feeling excluded in a team.

What is the added value women bring to cyber management?

Diverse representation is a necessity not only in cybersecurity, but in all fields. Everyone brings different perspectives and ways to tackle tasks to the workplace. It's enjoyable to work with people from different backgrounds. People with a wide range of experience can offer a wide variety of knowledge to clients when providing work.

How do you balance the demands of your job with your personal life?

Maintaining a balance between work and personal life is made easier by friends, family, and colleagues. While not always successful, I try to disconnect at the end of the day. By participating in hobbies and interests, I can unplug and manage stress better.

What advice would you give to women aspiring to have a career in cyber leadership?

I'd recommend jumping in. Cybersecurity covers a wide range of topics. In cyber, there is a place for everyone regardless of their background or interests. I think it's important to emphasize that coding and mathematics aren't the only things involved in joining the technology field.

Expertise in all areas is valuable in cybersecurity. Diverse backgrounds provide a unique perspective on cyber. Cyber roles range from technical hands-on work to policy development to training and recruitment. There is something for everyone.

What women inspired you to push yourself to pursue your professional goals?

I was very fortunate to have found my mentors organically through my roles in different organizations. These were people who really resonated with me and my career goals. They took the time to tell me about their work experience and what their journey was like. They always had time to listen to me and help me as I navigated my own career path.

Seeing diversity in leadership really makes a difference for me and my career. I am constantly inspired by all the women in my life who have worked hard to reach their professional or personal goals. I am fortunate to be part of a community of women from all walks of life and backgrounds. My career continues to be encouraged by these women from different professions.



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YARIN BAROM

Country: Israel

current Role
SOC Manager

Career Path

I have practiced data communication for 3 years. While being a computer science student, I noticed a job listing for a SOC analyst. I was aware that I did not qualify for most of the job requirements, so I skipped sending my CV. I submitted my CV and got accepted to a SOC Analyst position after participating in a scholarship program for women's leadership empowerment. Later I became a team leader, and a year and a half later, I became deputy director. 4 years later, I moved to BDO for an MDR position.



How do you perceive women in cyber leadership roles?

Simply don't think we should be perceived differently. As each person is different from each other, women also bring their own uniqueness, along with pros and cons. My perception is that caring for people under my supervision is mandatory, and I believe I will receive it in return.

What have been some of the biggest challenges you have faced as a woman in your career?

I did not have any. Ever since I was young, I have been taught that I can achieve anything I set my mind to, and it all depends on me. I do not find significance in the fact that I am a woman, nor in the signals I pick up from my environment. I believe that the communication we make outside will be reflected to us.

What is the added value women bring to cyber management?

Emotional intelligence views analysts as individuals. I am interested in the personal lives of my employees. In addition, they know I will back them up, protect their rights, and take action to address personal and professional issues. I also have strong intuition that helps me pay attention to small details when recruiting employees. Being the only woman in the room, I can provide a different point of view on a given problem. Also, I pay attention to unusual hints, and I take action to address them correctly.

How do you balance the demands of your job with your personal life?

To gain mental relief from time to time, I schedule fixed recreational time for myself. The only thing that can cancel this time off is a client attack. Following my recreational session, I will continue my work if I haven't completed my tasks for the day. I exercise once a week, have an NLP session twice a week and occasionally meet with family and friends.

I also volunteer for an association called "AliceCode", which trains young girls in programming, and provides them with solid foundations. All these helps me to keep the balance between work and personal life.

What advice would you give to women aspiring to have a career in cyber leadership?

Do not give up. Opting for a job position? Find out what the requirements are and do whatever it takes to meet them. Getting a "no" should not stand in your way of pursuing that job position, so keep on applying to more places. A second piece of advice is to step outside our comfort zone. Men are more comfortable asking for a promotion or a raise. As women, we might feel somewhat rude to ask for it. Can we possibly lose anything if we ask?

What women inspired you to push yourself to pursue your professional goals?

Classically put, my mom. From a young age, she taught me that I could have anything I wanted. The success of my goal depends on my efforts.

The celebration of International Women's Day 2023 is an important time to recognize women's contributions and challenges. To shed light on these challenges, we spoke to three cybersecurity professional women to understand their experiences and learn from their insights.

This interview provides a glimpse into the challenges and opportunities that women face in cybersecurity, as well as advice for women looking to build a career in this field.

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