

Cyber Smart CareerSpotlight

BY ACTUA

RITESH KOTAK

JD/MBA
HE/HIM

Lawyer practicing in cybersecurity and technology matters & on-air tech analyst

As a lawyer, I work with individuals to help solve their technology related issues. This can be organizations that are hacked and cannot get access to their files or helping remove fake accounts on social media that are causing harm and are misleading. My second job is to go on TV and radio and help explain new technology to the public. I try to focus on how this may impact their daily lives. Before starting in my role, I thought it would just be lectures, practicals and exams to work in this space, but I quickly learned that there was an entire community of “ethical hackers” who wanted to meet you and work with you to fight cybercrime. This space is complex, rapidly evolving and impacts everyone.

CYBER SECURITY

actüa

Cyber Smart Career Spotlight

BY ACTUA



**RITESH
KOTAK**

Describe your career path:

Growing up, I thought I would be an accountant and take over the family business or become an engineer. However, my interests were always in technology. Given that my parents owned a business, I decided to do a business degree from the University of Toronto. After graduation, I joined the Police Service and spent about seven years there before completing a Masters in Business Administration in the UK, with an exchange in China. From there, I worked in Big Tech before attending law school in Ottawa. In addition, I did several courses on leadership, digital investigation and other law-related courses. This really helped me learn firsthand multiple perspectives regarding cybersecurity, from investigation to governance and policy development. My hobbies outside of school were anything to do with music including listening to local bands, reading lyrics and DJing. Reflecting back, I believe this greatly impacted my career path because understanding rhythm and lyrics helped me pay close attention to details and truly understand words. It is literally my job to understand technology, how it works and then communicate it to an audience on different media outlets.

What challenges have you faced and overcome in your career?

The biggest challenge I had to overcome was my fear of public speaking. I knew what to say but was shy in large groups and didn't know how to say it. To overcome this I put myself in uncomfortable positions - called your "stretch zone". I was very nervous the first few times, but I got over it. I got the same feeling when I started going on TV to talk about cybersecurity. Practice helped me get over my nervousness and fear. As well, when I joined the Police Service, I knew the type of work I wanted to do, but the job did not exist then. Using the passion and knowledge I already had, I presented a case to the senior management and convinced them to create a new unit. In the practice of law, I found that "tech lawyers" focused on intellectual property or privacy and not necessarily on how cybersecurity impacts individuals on a daily basis. I had to take a non-traditional approach to build something that addressed why I decided to become a lawyer working in the cybersecurity space. I thought that people would not understand my career choice and how I got here, but instead it was embraced. The tech community appreciated my non-traditional approach as it brought different perspectives.

What advice would you give youth?

Try as many things as possible. I have had three career changes and what I thought I would do at age 10 was totally different than when I was 20. The important thing is to believe in yourself and never say no to any opportunity that comes your way. As Walter Gretzky said, "You will miss 100% of the shots you don't take". Aside from technical skills, the most important skill that I had to develop was communication. The best way to develop this skill is to practice. Get out of your comfort zone and just talk to people, volunteer to do presentations and do not say no to speaking opportunities.

Why does diversity in cybersecurity matter?

As a south Asian male, I was always the minority at the table. There were numerous times when I knew I was being unfairly treated and felt I could not make mistakes because my work was under a microscope compared to my other colleagues. Things are changing now because organizations know that having diverse opinions at the table helps them. This is especially true in technology and cybersecurity. For example, there has been a lot of talk about bias in algorithms. Facial recognition has made false identifications of members of the BIPOC community because the individuals coding the algorithm and their test data are not diversified. Now, even governments have recognized this and are working on passing laws prohibiting these types of biases. We will have new challenges in the future, however, a diverse workforce and being aware of this issue will help in mitigating these issues.