Cyber Smart CareerSpotlight

BY ACTUA

KOURTNEY HAYES

SHE/HER

Senior Industry Specialist, AWS Security

I work in Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cyber Security Organization called AWS Security. I am a Cyber Security Program Owner that helps protect important information and critical assets and data within our organization. I also work on creating ways to prevent security problems before they happen and make sure the organization follows all the rules and regulations set by auditors, regulators and our customers. It's a complex role that focuses on keeping our systems secure and compliant with industry standards. This role challenges the myth that coding is a requirement for working in tech or cybersecurity. It encompasses a wide range of responsibilities in cybersecurity and compliance without the need for coding skills and showcases the diverse opportunities available in the field beyond coding.

CYBER SECURITY

actua

Cyber Smart CareerSpotlight

KOURTNEY HAYES

CYBER SECURITY

Describe your career path:

I was originally interested in becoming a doctor because most people I knew growing up were doctors, nurses or teachers. I didn't know anyone in the tech industry nor was I exposed to it at an early age. I excelled in math and had a natural passion for numbers and computation, however, I had no clue I could make a career out of this ability until later on in life. In college, I studied business and graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Management and later earned my MBA. I started my career in a customer service role and became interested in cybersecurity when I found out that working in tech could bring good opportunities and money, without having to do physically hard jobs like doctors or nurses. I was curious, and I wanted a rewarding career that involved technology, so I chose to go into cybersecurity.

What challenges have you faced and overcome in your career?

One of the main challenges was learning new things about cybersecurity because it was a completely different field for me. I spent time studying on my own to gain the knowledge and skills I needed. Also, because I started my career in customer service, I needed to convince employers that I could be successful in cybersecurity. I worked hard, kept learning and proved myself, and in the end, I was successful. I focused on improving my technical skills, like understanding computer networks and systems and using special tools and software to monitor and detect cybersecurity threats. Good communication and teamwork skills were important to explain complex ideas and collaborate effectively. Lastly, I made sure to keep learning to stay ahead in this fast-changing field.

What advice would you give youth?

Try out coding, cybersecurity challenges or even building your own projects to see if you enjoy it. Focus on developing strong analytical and critical thinking skills to help you assess risks and find effective solutions. Additionally, continuously learn about the evolving field of cybersecurity. I started learning about cybersecurity and studying on my own and the more I learned, the more I realized how important it is to protect digital systems and how there's always a need for skilled people in this field.

Why does diversity and representation in cybersecurity matter?

By embracing diversity, we bring together a team with varied backgrounds, experiences and perspectives that enable us to better understand and cater to the needs of our diverse customer base. It helps us think outside the box and come up with new ideas to solve security challenges. It ensures that we have a wide range of talents and skills in the field, better equipping us to tackle emerging threats. Diversity in cybersecurity can also motivate more diverse youth to consider this career path. For example, I was inspired by a successful cybersecurity executive I met at a tech conference. This woman was African American—she looked just like me—and she had shattered glass ceilings in the industry. She encouraged me to pursue my dreams despite the obstacles I may face down the line. Her success and determination served as a powerful reminder that representation matters and that I, too, can make a difference in the field. It was a life-changing encounter that fueled my passion to excel in cybersecurity.