

TOP TEN SERIES

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BUILT
BLACKS UNITED IN LEADING TECHNOLOGY INTERNATIONAL

Guide to Switching Roles into Cybersecurity

Diversity in cybersecurity is instrumental in advancing the industry and creating a more secure world.



(ISC)² is proud to be a top resource to help professionals acquire the best skills they need to become information security leaders with the mission to support professionals by providing industry information, vast networking, collaboration opportunities, and development tools. We have the necessary **tips and resources** to help diverse professionals thrive in the industry and take their careers to the next level.

We know that it's essential for cybersecurity professionals to look like the people they serve and protect. Diversifying the industry improves online defenses and allows a space for different perspectives to contribute to the advancement of technology.

Our efforts have provided a diverse, equitable, and inclusive cybersecurity space for nearly 330,000 members, associates and candidates who serve in critical cyber, information, software, and infrastructure security roles.

As a part of this commitment, we have joined forces with Blacks United in Leading Technology[®] International, Inc. (**BUILT**) to provide multiple guides with proven methods that Black and diverse professionals use to get in, stay, and advance in cybersecurity.

Are you considering changing careers – and into cybersecurity?

Well, you are not alone. Research from the **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics** shows that the average worker holds upwards of 10 different jobs before the age of 50, and this number is set to rise even further in upcoming decades. But some people take on the challenge of changing careers, and it's estimated that the average person will change careers between five and seven times over the course of their working life.

The most common reasons people change careers is:

- 1. A need for a new challenge**
- 2. Changes in values**
- 3. A desire to focus on other things**
- 4. Realization of new passions**
- 5. Dissatisfaction with their current job**
- 6. To increase earning potential**

So, if you have been in only one or two careers over the course of your lifetime, then you are either incredibly lucky or perhaps missing out on life-altering opportunities.

Recent research found that more than half of those who work in the cybersecurity industry are in the 35 - 54 age demographic, while another survey found that the average age of a cybersecurity analyst in the United States is 41 years old. (ISC)²'s research also found that more and more young professionals are moving into cybersecurity from a career outside of IT. So, if you are considering a mid-career move to an evolving and exciting industry, the numbers are in your favor. **It is never too late** and here are ten practical tips and strategies you can employ for your mid-career switch into cybersecurity.



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BLACKS UNITED IN LEADING TECHNOLOGY INTERNATIONAL

TIPS

on Switching Careers Into
CYBERSECURITY



1. Assess Your Motives and Skills

Know why you are considering the move. Talk it over with advisors, family, and people you trust. Be sure you are making the move for the right reasons.

Decisions about changing your career are best posed with mentors too. And, you will likely need to augment your current education with training and development specific to cybersecurity.

Many organizations and online sites provide skills assessments, while certifications like **(ISC)²'s Certified in Cybersecurity entry-level certification** can help you get your foot in the door.

Are you willing to move down to move up? In many cases, you may actually move to a more junior role or to a smaller company to find someone who will support your change in life direction. For instance, you may give up some perks as a retail store manager to transition to working a shift in a Security Operations Center (SOC) watching for and resolving alerts.

If you're certain you want to make the shift, consider taking less pay if those opportunities bring the experience and training that you want. Also consider making a partial shift from a non-technical company (i.e. a grocery store) to a tech company where you work in your same field (i.e. Human Resources, Marketing). Once you work at tech company, it may be easier to pivot to cybersecurity there, later.

Likewise, you may make a partial shift in your career by simply getting an IT job (i.e. in help desk support, as an administrative assistant) and then pivoting later into cybersecurity.

2. Make Sure Your Interests Align with Your Career Goals

To stay in the field, professionals must have a passion for cybersecurity. Some people pursue careers in the industry because of the money, but these jobs pay more because not everyone is capable of effectively using the various technologies and required techniques. A career in cybersecurity is not for everyone.

Take the time to understand what the work you will be doing is like, and assess if it aligns with your values, passions, and career goals. Choosing a path in cybersecurity that suits your interests can motivate you to excel in your role, improve your work ethic, and drive your ambitions.

Also, if you are switching from one career to another, remember that you are leaving behind your current career trajectory to embark on a new one. One part of growth is gaining maturity in recognizing how past choices may no longer fit, and that new careers may be better aligned with changing goals and new circumstances. We all have the ability to rise above our circumstances and the work you do in matching your career goals with your personal passions can pay dividends for a lifetime.

- See, *Student Pathways*, Tip #3: Limit Your Search to Areas of Passion

3. Know Where to Fit In

Cybersecurity is not monolithic, as there are **numerous job categories** including compliance, defense, education, development, management, offense, planning, research, response, and sales and marketing. Some jobs are technical in nature, but many are not. Technical and non-technical career opportunities include programming, graphic design, cyber forensics, cyber mitigation, application security, coding, log analysis, ethical hacking, and **many more**. You may start in a technical role but gain interest in a non-technical role soon after, and vice versa.

If you have a predominantly STEM background in your education and prior career pursuits, be sure to factor that in. Complementary past career roles in risk management, analytics, and communication, among others, are extremely important in cybersecurity as well.

As a career switcher, you'll likely possess many advantages in getting a job in cybersecurity over those who are just entering the workforce. When you've identified a job that you're interested in, showcase how skills gained from your prior roles can be applied to your new role.

4. Be Confident in Your Leadership and Non-Technical Skills

As a more seasoned worker, emphasize any strengths you've acquired over the years like leadership, negotiation and strategic thinking abilities. Many people pivot into tech from non-technical roles, so be confident in knowing that your maturity counts as much as the untapped potential that younger workers bring.

Demonstrate how you will create and build diverse and inclusive teams. Most companies are excited to hire diverse technologists, but every employer wants to be sure that team members can work together. Projects, jobs, and examples in your past that you can describe that show your ability to work with diverse teams are certainly a plus.

- See, *Staying and Advancing*, Tip #6: Demonstrate Added Value and Be a Resource for Others

5. Retool Your Resume

If your resume was focused on jobs in non-technical fields such as retail, home healthcare, criminal justice, beauty and fashion, construction, or education, you may need to restructure your resume to highlight your skills and not your employment. But remember that industry experience counts, as the need for cybersecurity transcends most industries. Your past experience in non-technical roles may help you identify the best avenues to transition into tech - i.e. cybersecurity in criminal justice.

While retooling your resume, be aware of potential bias based on race and gender, but as you grow older, you may also face age discrimination. Be sure to make your experience and resume work for you and not against you. Limit the number of years of experience on your resume to those most applicable to the jobs you are applying for, and focus on your flexibility and professionalism.



Look for opportunities, like for dues-paying members of BUiLT, to obtain free resume reviews. For most job opportunities, your resume is your “first impression,” and getting peer reviews can help you make your first impression count.

6. State Your Business Case and Uniqueness

Businesses need to hire employees with different, diverse backgrounds, so be sure to emphasize how your life experience will bring a fresh perspective to a potential employer.

People relate with and admire characters that overcame being a young parent, achieved an education despite poverty, or people who volunteer to help society in spite of non-traditional family origins.

Lean into your diversity as you may not realize how central to the conversation “who you are” can be. Experienced interviewers often, recognize a candidate’s ethnicity, gender, and in some cases, sexual orientation.



Employers do better with team members who are authentic about who they are. Show-off your uniqueness and have a pre-planned business case on why you, and your personality, are right for every team to employ.

- See, *Getting Into Cybersecurity*, Tip #9: Be Bold

7. Network and Volunteer with Others in the Field

Many professional cybersecurity organizations like (ISC)² or BUiLT have local chapters where you can make connections with other professionals who have made successful mid-career switches. They are also a great place to meet hiring managers or cybersecurity team members who can help open doors. Take advantage of a tried and true approach to cracking into any new field by networking with influential people as part of your journey.

Not only can you join nonprofit organizations like (ISC)² and BUiLT, but consider becoming a volunteer leader. As a leader, you -

- 1. Become a center of gravity for the cause in which you serve**
- 2. Increase your opportunities by placing yourself in the middle of new negotiations**
- 3. Get to hone and practice your leadership skills**

8. Be Vocal and Enlist Allies

Consider transitioning to a cybersecurity role within your current company. Let your leadership team know that you're interested in pursuing a career switch. Here, your past work ethic, good relationships, and past performance evaluations are a major asset that you use to your advantage. Explore opportunities to have a mentor or advocate at your current company to help you change roles, without changing companies.

If your organization is large and a cybersecurity team already exists, say yes to job shadowing and project opportunities to help that team. Consider helping after normal work hours, on weekends, or over holiday periods when cybersecurity demands often rise.

If your organization is small and no cybersecurity team exists, you have another advantage. Create your own role in cyber and just start doing the work. Let management or the company owner know of the positive ways you are increasing the company's security posture.

If a switch into cybersecurity at your current company is not a viable option, enlist the help of your current peers and managers to give you online recommendations, referrals, and introductions to people who may help you breakthrough at other companies.

9. Show How Passionate You Are About the Industry

Professionals must have a passion for cybersecurity to stay in the field. Some people pursue careers in the industry because of the money. But, a cyber career offers benefits far beyond the attractive salaries. Make sure you take the time to understand what they are and find your passion within them.

Many people join the cybersecurity industry because they are passionate about helping others. Be truthful and show why you want to make a career change. Share with others what your motives are, what drives you, and how you specifically can help the organization's bottom line by helping to make it more secure.

Remember, to get into the field you must win the support of someone already in cybersecurity, typically your first hiring manager. Given who you are (e.g. ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age) and regardless of your education, certifications, and work experience, someone has to say "Yes" to you.

Demonstrating authentic passions about who you are and what you want to do often helps job seekers find employers, careers, and jobs that make them the happiest. When you bring your 'best game' to the interview and you are told "No," take that as a sign that the situation was not meant for you.

• See, *Student Pathways*, Tip #3: Limit Your Search to Areas of Passion

10. Follow Up, and Follow Up Again

If you find your job search stalling, follow up with the organizations you're interested in and strategically utilize your personal and professional networks for leads. Remember, persistence is key to getting your foot in the door and the path to success is often hidden from those who are not diligent. Be sure to follow up, and then follow up again.

Networking and volunteering is a secret jewel, but actually going further and joining membership organizations often provides added benefits. For instance, BUiLT solicits internships for their members through their equity partner **Protechten** who helps professionals crack into the cyber industry.

The knowledge required to be a successful security professional is vast and constantly changing. Every day, new events reshape the security landscape, requiring a combination of innovative experience and knowledge. As a seasoned professional with a resume, you already have shown commitment to learning and development. Now it's time to translate that into a successful, long-term career in cyber.





Blacks United in Leading Technology® International (BUiLT), founded in September 2020, increases the representation and participation of Black people in tech. And as we hold the **Three Doors Open**, others can follow in too.

BUiLT’s 2022 annual survey reconfirmed what Black professionals seek most:



Professional networking



Jobs



Technical training/certification opportunities to advance their careers in tech

BUiLT’s growing worldwide footprint meets those needs with programming on career and professional development, technology training, and volunteer opportunities to hone leadership skills.

Our partnerships with organizations like (ISC)² are vital to the industry’s success at filling the hundreds of thousands of technology jobs with people who bring creativity and diversity of thought in today’s business problems are solved.



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How to Get into Cyber © 2023 - (Getting In)

Student Pathways Guide from Class to Your First Gig © 2023 - (Student Pathways)

You Already Have the Skills and the Talent: A Guide to Switching to Cybersecurity Mid-Career © 2023 - (Career Switchers)

How to Stay and Advance in Cybersecurity © 2023 - (Staying & Advancing)