



W4C GR CYBERSECURITY WOMAN PROFILE OF THE MONTH

INTERVIEW WITH STAVROULA!

Name: Stavroula Karagianni

Job Position: CISO & Head of Protection & Resilience

Current Employer: Allianz Greece & Cyprus

Cybersecurity areas of interest: Strategy & Architecture

Previous career(s): Big4 Consultant

Educational background: Electrical and Computer Engineer with a MSc in Information Security

Other interests/hobbies: Theatre

Favourite quote: "You make your own brand"

Network with me: https://gr.linkedin.com/in/stavroula-karagianni-057a632a?original_referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

Are you hiring?: Yes in a few weeks 😊

Intro & Inspirational

1. What's the most important life lesson you've learned?

People is the most valuable asset. Not money, nor wealth or fame. Because, even on work environment, your network, your people, your team are the ones that will support you on every step, in order to grow and evolve.

2. Success mean different things to different people. How do you define success?

On work level: a weekend without an incident.

3. What's the best advice that you can give about success?

Never doubt yourself once you take a decision, trust the process, it may take more that you'd anticipate but it will come your way.

4. Do you think your job makes a difference? How?

Definitely, yes. It may seem that in corporate environment the ultimate goal is profit. However, in the field of Cyber Security, the trust that you get as a feeling from your colleagues that you keep their data safe, makes a big difference.

5. Can you name a book that has influenced your journey?

Malvino electronic principles" – passing this exam was a pivotal moment to leave the electronics behind and focus on cyber security!

Cybersecurity General

6. How can someone stand out in a competitive cybersecurity job market?

Consistency on providing results and speak to their mind. Cyber Security is an industry where details matter. Once people feel that you are a professional that pays attention to the details and knows how to handle them, you built trust and they will pick you over another professional.

7. What trends in the technology & cybersecurity industry are you keeping an eye on for the future?

Quantum Security. Although right now AI is a buzz, Quantum Security or Post – Quantum Cryptography is the one that is already changing the way we built software and the way information systems operate.

8. What is the most common mistake someone could make when applying for a role in the cybersecurity industry? What do you believe makes a successful candidate/application?

CV has a very general approach and does not get into the right details of the profile. For example: When I am looking for a new team member, I would like to see if there is a field of expertise (technical / governance) preferable with examples or indicators of such experience. General CVs with a holistic approach do not show the experience and do not give me, as a hiring manager, the information I would like to see.

9. What is your opinion on mentoring as well as on getting a start via an internship/traineeship?

I believe mentoring is a step before internship / traineeship. Because mentoring, for someone that wants to be involved in cybersecurity, is getting the inspiration he/she needs to follow this path vs internship / traineeship which is the 1st contact with the art of cyber. Mentors whether they are a professor at school / university or a professional of the field, play a crucial role in someone's decision on following a dream or new adventure such as cybersecurity.

You & Your job

10. Did peer pressure or other factors play a role in your choosing cybersecurity and particularly your specific field of work in it? Nope. No peer pressure. Nothing like that. Just a very special and talented mentor and my favourite TV show at the time: CSI!

11. Can you summarise your career path for us? What of those would you say were key steps you took to help you get to where you are today? I started in consulting in 2 of the Big4 which gave me a broad view and experience on Industries and different projects in cybersecurity. Then jumped on Financial Services Industry, with an internal role. This gave me the opportunity to build things from inside and see them operate and evolve, and with them I evolved and came the role that I currently hold.

12. Did you face any challenges related to your gender, race, visual appearance, or background, or any stereotypical biases? How have you overcome these?

I believe that, on the early years of my career, there was a misconception that I did not have technical skills or couldn't handle difficult discussions. This misconception was forgotten, once they get to work with me. That is because when I speak it is for a domain I master, and I am confident with or for an issue I know in depth and have researched beforehand. With this way, I show that I can deliver and be trusted.

13. Do (did) you ever experience imposter syndrome and self-doubt about your career and skills?

Yes, every day. However, this is my motivation. This is what drives me. To research, try new things and make mistakes and at the end evolve. Once you realize that there isn't an individual that knows everything about security and everyone is either trying to learn or pretend to know in depth, you get a creative freedom, confidence and start doing your things your way. And this is what matters, to be yourself and enjoy what you do.

14. Are you planning to mentor or coach others in the future, or have you been mentoring already? I have been a mentor in the past and plan to continue to be. Not because I feel I am good at this but because I honestly believe from my experience that mentors create the safe environment for an individual to be inspired and decide free of pressure whether he / she want to follow the path of cybersecurity. A mentor was my inspiration for choosing my path and I am thankful for that.

Other

15. How do you handle criticism?

I decide which criticism is of value and can be helpful and which is just negative vibes. It took me a lot of years in my career to understand and be able to separate the criticism from constructive feedback. We have the power and when we let criticism affect in us, we give this power to other people, so we should choose which people we give this power to.

16. How do you manage stress?

This is a constant battle. Managing stress is a skill that is built over time and experience. I think that I still have things to learn on how to process it. However, I have found certain personal mechanisms to cope with at some level: during working hours, I take a short break when I feel very stressed and put my mind on a subject outside work (like going for a 5 min coffee break with my colleagues). Off working hours, I try to exercise, mainly as a mechanism to decompress the mind and of course spend time on my hobbies which are very important for my mental health.

17. How do you avoid job burnout?

Set boundaries. No matter the level or the job role, the workload will never end. Therefore, it is up to us to set the boundaries. What works for us and how we want our professional life to be.

18. How do you set boundaries in the workplace?

Don't be the professional who always says "yes" but not the "always no" either. Take some time to respond, set rules first on yourself and then on how you respond to requests from others. If you follow your boundaries, the others will respect them as well.