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Do you need a CISO?

by

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The CISO, or Chief Information Security Officer, is the person responsible for a wide range of local and global marketplace regulations and compliance issues as well as technology, business continuity and resiliency, etc. You might have a CISO at your company and not know it. Or you may realize that you need a CISO.

The CISO has responsibility for architecting, implementing and monitoring an enterprise wide information security and risk program that ensures the security, integrity, privacy and availability of information and systems globally. They provide guidance to management on matters related to their company's compliance with state and federal laws, industry related regulations, and privacy policies while assessing the impact of such matters on business operations.

As with any job, one description can't define the work of all CISOs. In one company, a CISO can have no operational responsibilities and only a small team to address technology policies, compliance, and PCI (peripheral component interconnect) issues. This person would likely report to the CIO, the CFO, and the Legal Counsel.

In other corporations, a CISO could have a more elevated position on a level with the Chief Information Officer (CIO). The CISO could oversee non-operational and operations firewalls, intrusion detection system (IDS), virus protection, and other areas of technology risks.

"Although information security, like information technology in general, is historically male-dominated, the number of women working in security-related positions is steadily growing," says Joyce Brocaglia, CEO of Alta Associates, one of the leaders in information security recruitment. Her company hosts the annual Executive Women's Forum where top women in the new and growing field of Information Risk Management (IRM) gather.

When asked, "What do women bring to the job of a CISO and the field of IRM?" Brocaglia responded, "The number one characteristic is adaptability. The field requires people who can adapt to new requirements and ways of looking at what a risk is. Women tend to be more holistic in their approach and can easily apply not just their technology skills, but their business acumen, effective communication approaches, etc, in a collaborative manner."

There is not one, but many paths to reach the top job of CISO. An example of this is a woman who has worked for nine years in various positions within customer service management at a health care related company. One

part of her recent position was to identify techniques to streamline and/or automate business processes, tasks, and functions. When reorganization eliminated that position, she was offered a lateral move to be the company's security officer, reporting to the vice president of IT.

"It was a natural move for me," says the now happily challenged CISO. "I feel that I am able to demonstrate my detail oriented skills while at the same time understanding the big picture. I can ask for assistance with the technology procedures and easily write and manage the other processes on my own. This job – and the field – is a great fit and can be the stepping stone for a great career in security for me."

"What's the five-year outlook for the field of information security?" I asked Brocaglia.

"There will definitely be a need for strong candidates – the complexities and challenges of the field continue to grow. Those who possess executive leadership skills and are business and technology savvy will be highly sought after for the CISO role," the New Jersey-based executive predicts. "With things like identity theft, we all have a heightened awareness of the need to protect our information. In today's global economy, companies are prioritizing IRM as an important business requirement."

Look around your company. Even if there isn't a CISO now, the role is one that we'll be hearing a lot more about in the future. Who knows? Maybe the next CISO will be you.