

# Mental Health in Cybersecurity: Preventing Burnout, Building Resilience

Learning Lab Summary

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## Summary:

The RSA Conference 2019 in San Francisco had a Learning Lab on “Mental Health in Cybersecurity: Preventing Burnout, Building Resilience”. The session provided the attendees with a presentation followed by an interactive discussion.

Among the topics presented: public perceptions of mental health and of security; parallels between different fields such as medical professions and security professions in terms of stressors and features of work; mental health stress and cybersecurity with challenges of the profession and impact on individuals; burnout; depression; the tension of people from what they say on the outside and what they are feeling on the inside; and about resilience. The session provided an exercise of using a kitchen organizer T-R-A-Y as a metaphor and tool for managing stress: Triage - Reflect - Action - You.

During the interactive session, participants were provided with an individual self-reflection personal activity of “Where are you?” to locate where they believe their position is on a chart of mental wellness and illness, and to use this tool to track history and plan for future trajectories. The participants had a group discussion, with individual tables talking about topics in their small groups and then presenting to all participants. Topic areas included: psychological safety; stressors at the organizational level; stressors at the personal level; issues unique to cybersecurity; good stress vs. bad stress; boundaries; work - life balance; what has worked well and what has not; managing stress. Participants received 3 stress management tools to take with them: the “Where Are You?” activity; the kitchen T-R-A-Y; and a charting method to monitor situations - thoughts - feelings - behavior. Participants discussed topics including: the stigma of stress; fear of failure; corporate cultures; boundaries; work-life balance from the start; having a stress management plan; getting help; the importance of a non-technical hobby; the challenges of too much work and too few people, the difficulty of finding new people; a “thankless job”; lack of resources; poor management; on alert all the time; the need for exercise; the need for building trust at all levels. One participant provided a useful example from air travel: “Put your oxygen mask first” before helping others.

The session concluded with action steps for participants to build their own pathway forward. Physical, cyber, and all security starts with mental security.

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