

WHY YOUR CERTS AREN'T GETTING YOU HIRED

A Practitioner's Cheat Sheet for Breaking Into Cyber

UNDERSTANDING THE MARKET

- The cyber talent shortage is real - but mostly at mid and senior level. Entry level is crowded.
- You are competing with laid off experienced professionals willing to take a step down. Know that going in.

CERTS

- Don't over-invest in cert stacking if you're not pursuing a government or defense contractor role.
- For gov and prime contractor work, certs tied to DoD 8140 are hard requirements - not preferences.
- In many roles, Sec+ may get you past an HR filter. It doesn't separate you from the pack.
- Evidence of real work contends with a wall of certs for public jobs.

HOME LABS

- Don't just spin up a web server and call it a lab.
- Grab three realistic job listings. Run them through AI. Find the common skills and tasks.
- Build labs that produce artifacts you can post to GitHub or a personal site.
- Four or five purposeful documented labs is worth more than any completion badge.

TITLES

- Don't get locked on titles. Cyber work hides inside IT roles every day.
- A role with cyber in the title and no real cyber work is a trap. It will haunt your next interview.
- Read the responsibilities not the title. Ask in interviews what a typical week actually looks like.

KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GO

- Look at a cyber domain map before you chase any role.
- Cyber is dozens of careers under one umbrella. Pick a direction.
- Taking the wrong first role can lock you into a lane you didn't want.
- Be honest with yourself. A good title in a job you hate is its own trap.

NETWORKING

- Find your local ISSA chapter or BSides event. Get in the room.
- Show people your home labs. Invite feedback. Ask smart questions.
- Buy coffee. Keep meetings short. Tag up with multiple people.
- Jobs get filled through conversations about you when you're not in the room.

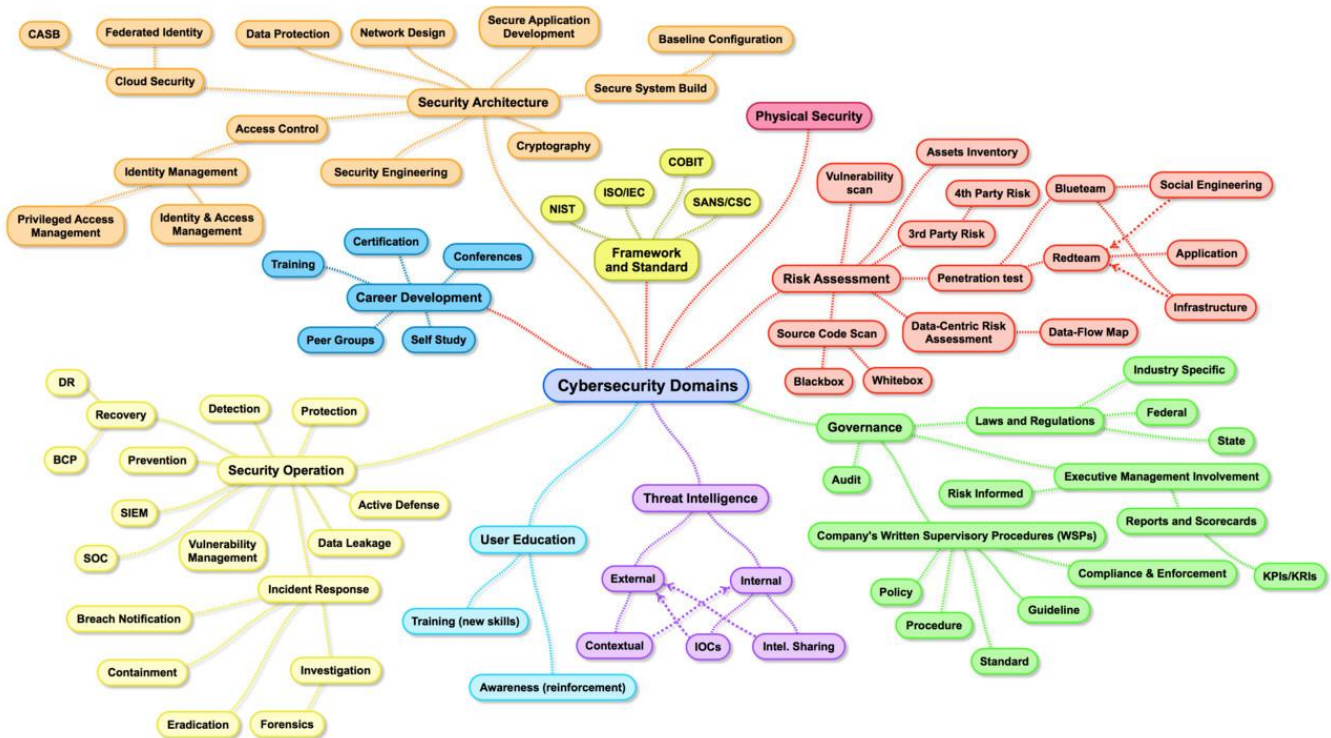
THE IT PATH

- **Your first cyber job is your first IT job. All of it builds.**
- Close the tickets but learn the cyber disciplines hiding inside the IT work.

- The sysadmin who has been doing security work for 15 years without the title will beat you on paper. Close that gap with evidence.
- If you like IT at some level the journey will carry you. If you don't, reconsider the destination.

MINDSET

- Don't chase the first role that says yes without evaluating what you'll actually learn.
- Document everything. Your labs, your work, your wins, your incidents.
- The journey is the preparation. Don't waste it.
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