

Heather ([00:12](#)):

Welcome to the Hurricane Labs Podcast. I'm Heather, and today we're going to talk about diversity in InfoSec. Now, before we begin, I want to say that we recognize diversity is a complex topic and it can be difficult to navigate well, as demonstrated by some of the anecdotes we'll be sharing today. Our interest in discussing this topic is one of exploration and honesty. Now, we'll be tackling these issues with the understanding that they are from our own perspectives and are not representative of everyone's experiences. Because this talk is based on our own personal experiences, it reflects our own personal ideologies and opinions. As always, we welcome feedback and discussion about our content. So you can reach out to us on Twitter @hurricanelabs, or to me directly at @curious_words. To help us explore this topic, I have four of my Hurricane Labs coworkers here with me. Thank you everyone for volunteering today. Why don't you go ahead and introduce yourselves and then give us a little bit of background on your experiences and what brought you to today's podcast.

Roxy ([01:22](#)):

Well, thank you for having us. I'm Roxy and I do vulnerability management and compliance type work here at Hurricane Labs. And what brought me to this podcast is that I actually came into cybersecurity about 10 years ago. I started to self study back in 2011 and I just was not prepared for the gender imbalance, which was much more male heavy back then. Nowadays there are more underrepresented genders in cybersecurity, but it was a struggle at first and it continues to be a struggle sometimes. So I just have a lot of experience dealing with that particular gender imbalance, but I've, I've been at Hurricane Labs now for about four years almost, and really starting to work at Hurricane Labs is what kept me in cybersecurity. I did almost quit four years ago, so I'm very happy to be here.

Aysha ([02:47](#)):

Thanks for having me here today. My name is Aysha, I am the project manager here at Hurricane Labs. I've been here for about two and a half months, almost three, and this is my first role in cybersecurity and in tech, but it was a purposeful transition. And we're going to have a little bit of a story time to explain that. In my last role, I worked at a university and I was in the web development space. So the university was embarking on a migration to a new platform, and I was a part of the group that had to assess what company we were going to hire to assist us in that migration. It was a high dollar contract and any time we had high dollar contracts we had to basically interview each of the companies that had put a bid out for, you know, our contract. So, you know, every week I was on two to three meetings that were hours long, interviewing these companies, and it got to a point after I sat in about three of these meetings that I realized there's absolutely nobody on any of these teams that we met with that looked like me. There was nobody in the teams that we met with that looked like me. And then there was also nobody in the room of people that I was sitting in and at the, well, I won't say table because it was Zoom at this point because of COVID, but anybody on the Zoom calls that looked like me. I was the only young person. I was the only black person. And I won't say I was the only woman, but I was the only young black woman on my team. And then also within any of the teams that we were looking for to take on this contract. So one day I was in one of the meetings and I pulled up a tab on Google and I just Googled, you know, jobs for, you know, black people in tech. And that took me to a website called Diversified Tech. And it opened my eyes to just how under represented we are within this realm. So when it came time for me to start job searching for a project manager position, I intentionally sought out tech positions. And then from there I intentionally sought out cybersecurity companies that I could apply to just to be a face and make a valuable contribution in this space. So that is what led me to take part in this podcast.

Meredith ([05:13](#)):

Good afternoon, everyone. I am Meredith. I have been with Hurricane Labs for, I want to say almost four years now. Time has fallen by, so I guess it's all relative, I can't really make any promises as to how long I've been here, but I have a similar story to Aysha where I, for my first job, my first real job, I was the only female in the application pool. And this was a company that did very large group interviews. And not only was I the only female, but I was the only person who was not white there. And one of the hiring managers walked up to me and asked, you know, in the politest way that they could, what are you, because we're really looking for diversity. And my response was, well, I can fit pretty much any category of diversity. You know, just tell me what boxes you need to tick. And when I was hired, I was the only female on the team. And then I was the only female there for about seven months. And there was only one other person who was non-white. So a lot of assumptions were made and my life goal has been to break out of some of those assumptions. Just the fact that they only cared about ticking the boxes of diversity or the reason that I wanted to continue fighting the diversity and stereotypes in technology. And then the same thing sort of happened to me with cybersecurity in college. And then I found Hurricane and I'm very happy.

Ryan ([06:48](#)):

Hi my name is Ryan. I'm an administrator here at Hurricane Labs. Most of the things that I do here a lot of it is triaging a lot of problems helping to write documentation and working closely with my team on various issues related around internal and our customers requests. A little background about me, I have worked most of my life with the public in like libraries and universities. Most of the things that I've done have been mainly that I've enjoyed is teaching and training technology. I've worked with a lot of diverse communities, a lot of diverse individuals. Those that I've helped and those that have helped me and also taught me things about diversity as well as skills. And I'm just hoping that I can share what they have taught me in any way possible.

Heather ([07:53](#)):

So I am Heather I have been with Hurricane Labs now for two years as a technical writer and now content manager. Prior to Hurricane Labs, I taught high school for about 10 years, a high school English. So I was one of the things that we're going to be talking about is in the spectrums of diversity is professional background diversity. And that was something that stood out to me personally was, well, frankly the owner's willingness to take a chance on someone who had no technical background or experience in the field and, you know, kind of letting me stretch my wings some here and, you know, figure out where I can fit in even though my background is fairly different than most people who get into cybersecurity. Although Ryan, you and I have more in, in that avenue, but also, you know, just, I was one of the things I was worried about was, you know, gender politics and being a teacher for 10 years, I was very, very sheltered from that sort of thing. And that's something that I think is an incredibly important topic. You know, diversity is how diversity sort of impacts our careers and the industry's growth and progression. So that's what sort of inspired me to bring this podcast about today. So let's go ahead and dive in a little bit. And first things we should talk about are some of the terminology that we're going to be using today. So that we're all on the same page. I guess I'm Roxy first things first. What do we mean when we say infosec or cybersecurity?

Roxy ([09:42](#)):

So information security is probably the term I hear used the most. People just don't like the way cybersecurity sounds for some reason. It's basically the same thing, but I say, when I say cybersecurity

people outside of the industry, understand what it is, when I say information security people outside of the industry don't know what I mean. So that's the distinction I use when I'm talking about infosec versus cybersecurity. Most people in the industry will use information security and it's really built on the concepts of confidentiality, integrity, and availability. So that would be the confidentiality of information would be making sure that information that's not meant to be seen, is not seen by people not meant to see it. Integrity means that the data is or the information or the data that the data remains unchanged and accurate. Of course we can change it if we need to, but, for example, in integrity means that somebody does not go in and change the data as a—for malicious reasons. So we protect the integrity of data and we also protect the availability, actually keeping data available and keeping websites up is part of information security as well.

Heather ([11:27](#)):

So, you know, moving into more about the terminology that we're going to be using regarding diverse groups of people Aysha, you were talking a little bit about diversity and inclusion. Could you go ahead and expand on that a little bit for us?

Aysha ([11:42](#)):

Oh yeah, for sure. So diversity and inclusion they're often mentioned, like, you know, as things that just go together, like, you know, cookies and cream, peanut butter and jelly, but they're two totally different things. In the context of the workplace diversity to me equals representation. So, you know, gender, your race or ethnicity, your age sexual orientation, or even maybe veteran status. Inclusion is a measure of the company's culture that enables that diversity to thrive. So say, you know, you can hire a handful of women or people of color or people with disabilities, but if the company's culture doesn't embrace the different perspectives there. You won't be able to retain that talent because you're missing that fundamental link that enables those diverse hires to, you know, do their best work and feel welcomed and valued and respected and just, you know, comfortable even working. That's the, you know, I feel that's the big difference between diversity and inclusion. You can have diversity, but not have that inclusion piece. And then I also feel that you could have inclusion, but that inclusion just be grouped to, you know, focused on the dominant group and you're missing that diversity piece. So I just think it's very important to be able to distinguish the two when talking about diversity and inclusion, it's not a one-stop shop of I have this, so I must have that too.

Ryan ([13:15](#)):

Do we think that it's easy for people to like confuse the two?

Aysha ([13:19](#)):

For sure. I think it's definitely easy to confuse the two one, because it, it, I feel like in recent years it just became such a, like a, a buzz word and buzz phrase type of thing. It became sort of a, hey, let's make sure we put a sentence or two about diversity and inclusion and our HR paperwork to make sure that box is checked. So I don't think that there has really been any like deep, fundamental, like understanding of exactly what diversity and inclusion is. Companies are just saying that they value diversity and inclusion and, you know, it's, it's something that's seen, but not understood.

Heather ([14:00](#)):

One of the aspects of diversity and inclusion that we're going to be covering is neurodivergence. Roxy if I'm not mistaken, that was a topic that you wanted to touch on.

Roxy ([14:13](#)):

Yes. So one of the things that people overlook, I think sometimes is neurodivergence and how that affects how we work and how we communicate. Like, for example, somebody with ADHD, I have ADHD, I have a big problem getting started on things. Actually, Heather is very familiar with this, but once I get started, I do really, really well. And one of the traits I have as somebody with ADHD is that I have make to things perfect. And I panic if things are not perfect enough and I just won't turn them in, but somebody that will work with me on that and understand that about me, like Heather, for example, will get good quality work out of me. And so we just have to consider everybody's brain works differently. Everybody reacts to things differently, everybody communicates differently. And if we can just take the positives that occur from neurodivergence, and if we can just consider that there are positives out of neurodivergence, then we can have, we can have a lot more. There are people that may have a lot more success than, than what we initially realize or assume.

Ryan ([15:46](#)):

I think I remember where that came from my brain was like trying to think of other things other than the two things that come to my mind when I think of, or I think what I would imagine most people, but I shouldn't assume, come to their minds when they think about diversity, which is gender and race. And then I was like, what are the others? And at the same thing as Roxy, you know, I have ADHD as well. And like I was trying to come up with like other ways in which like people don't normally think about, or like, you know, the hidden parts of that.

Roxy ([16:20](#)):

Yeah. And also something to include as well is disability. There's a lot of people that need accommodations or need yeah, there's, there's a lot of people that need accommodations. And if they are just simply given those accommodations, they will succeed and they will thrive and holding it back from people or not hiring people because they're disabled, you're potentially missing out on an entire group of people. Even though for example when I started, well, not when I started at Hurricane Labs, but when I started having more health issues after I had already started Hurricane Labs, it was difficult for me to sit at a desk and work for eight hours, but I could work six hours from my bed. And I got the same amount of work done in six hours as I did in eight hours. But it's just, I needed accommodations. That's simply it just because somebody works differently or works in a different timeframe or works in a different way, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're not going to be successful or they're not going to thrive. It very much depends on what accommodations they get and the type of environment that they have.

Heather ([17:51](#)):

An anecdote that I used frequently back in my teaching days was this story about there's a teacher and he's got a group of students sitting in a circle and he puts like a cracked open geode, a large geocode in the middle of the circle and has all of the students describe what they see of the geocode. And so, you know, on one side, you know, you have just like the sort of blah, gray, rocky sort of description on the other side, of course, the other side is seeing all these crystals and, you know, the spectacular colors, maybe it's an amethyst or a quartz, or what have you. And it was only from all these different perspectives that these different, you know, facets that they were able to really succeed in as a group describing this particular item. And I think that, you know, I think that's what diversity offers, whether it's, you know, whether we're talking gender diversity racial, where we're talking, neurodivergence,

professional background, all of these different perspectives coming together, incredibly important you know, what they offer the company, what they offer projects and completion is incredibly valuable.

Ryan ([19:13](#)):

Also to combine with what I guess Roxy was saying earlier, like the maybe, you know, unless you open the geode, you're going to think it's just a rock, you know?

Heather ([19:25](#)):

Yeah, that too, you know, you never know what you can, what someone can accomplish. What's inside someone, what, you know, what value they bring until, you know, you give them a chance to open up. So now that we've covered our basic definitions you know, what can we, as individuals do to help capitalize on the benefits of diversity, both whether that's, you know, professionally or interpersonally, so that we're not allowing these differences to become blockades between us?

Meredith ([19:55](#)):

I think one of the simplest things that everybody can do is just to recognize the differences that there are between people and respect those differences. If it's, you know, something that you've never been exposed to before, do some research, to recognize each diversity identifier that somebody has and respect all of them, whether that comes professionally in the workplace and understanding how somebody's either culture or background may shape their experience and how you interact with them professionally, personally, or just treating somebody like a decent human being when I'm walking down the street or in a store with a mask on, as is the current climate, but respecting others and doing your research seems to be the first step.

Aysha ([20:50](#)):

Yeah. I agree with Meredith's points and then looking at it from another viewpoint as you know, the person who is not a part of the main dominant group. So as the, you know, the diverse person I think a key thing both professionally and personally is to not water yourself and your skillsets and your contributions down. I think it's very important that when you have the opportunity to be great or do something or make a contribution, you know, make that without any, well, I don't want to say like be unapologetic, but just like, you know, bring your full self to the equation. Like you don't have to try to, you know, check a box or, or hide yourself because you're there for a reason your the diversity that you bring is valuable.

Heather ([21:54](#)):

Don't leave part of yourself out, you know, away from the table, just to try to fit in.

Aysha ([21:58](#)):

Yeah.

Heather ([21:59](#)):

You know, something that occurred to me about you know, what Meredith was saying about, you know, educating yourself and things like that when you are engaging with, you know, underrepresented people, you know, is also like don't expect them to necessarily be your resource for educating yourself, because it can be very exhausting to constantly have to explain to anyone who hasn't been in your

situation. You know, it's a balancing point being open, being presenting, you know, real of you know, what your background is and where you're coming from, but then also not feeling like you're the sole representative to, you know, sort of explain your perspective and experience, you know, that might be unique in the situation, but that is representative of, you know, millions of people. And so, you know, both sides, you know, the communication that needs to go both ways, you know, I guess it just there's, I guess there's a fine line to sort of walk, right?

Aysha ([23:00](#)):

Oh, for sure. For sure. And there's also kind of an added, I don't know if it's a pressure is the right word, but I know personally speaking you know, when you are the only person that looks like you are, you are the like, you know, quote unquote representative, it's kind of like a, is my opinion, is my thought process is all of that valued and are the contributions that I'm bringing to the table. They are, they are outside of the box. They are not what has already been done here. Or, you know, it's not a process that has been established. Am I even thinking in the right way. It's almost like a, you know, I'm happy to be included. I'm happy to have a seat at the table, but also, you know, is my seat, a worthy seat, or is this a diversity and inclusion hire. And this could also be like a whole spinoff of this, because I think this is going, like going left of this main conversation here. But because this would kind of be tackling the, you know, what's going on in the minds of the underrepresented people and the industry and overcoming those things.

Heather ([24:18](#)):

I mean, it adds a whole other layer to imposter syndrome.

Aysha ([24:22](#)):

Yeah. No, for sure. Yeah.

Roxy ([24:24](#)):

And I wanted to mention also that maybe we should just do away with the idea of a diversity hire at all, because I know that companies mean well when they are looking for diversity, but there should be no differentiation between a diversity hire and an average hire. That's kind of the problem is the fact that people assume things about diversity hires because people specifically look for them. So if we just happened to be looking for people to hire, and we just happened to hire a lot of underrepresented people, that has a different effect than if we say, oh, we have to have a diversity hire. You know what I mean? It's like, if you want to hire more underrepresented people, then just start hiring more underrepresented people. Like just when the applications come in, you know, interview them. Because people often think that adding diversity will lower the bar. When in fact if you're always hired, because you're a white man, then continuing to do that, lowers the bar. It's only when you introduce other people and other underrepresented people that have to work harder in order to get hired because they have to work harder to get hired they're usually more qualified. And people hate it when I say that. But I mean, if you just think of it well, when I say people, not everybody, but some, some people get upset at that and saying, oh, you're saying that white men aren't qualified. And no, I'm not necessarily saying that. I'm just saying when you're underrepresented and you have to work harder, you end up having more qualifications than the average person. That's all I'm saying. So the idea that diversity lowers the bar I think is actually completely opposite than the truth. I hope that all made sense.

Heather ([26:49](#)):

Yeah. Well, and I think like part of the issue though, like with you know, doing a way with, you know, with the, all right, let me back up. But we have these sort of, latents like these sort of subconscious aspects to decision-making, you know, what I'm thinking of that's driving my mumbling session here is that you know, that there was an orchestra that was trying out for some, you know, some new positions, you know, in the, in the orchestra. And they had noticed that they were selecting far more men than they were women. And so, you know, as part of this experiment, what they did was they had all of the candidates take their shoes off and they had the judges sit with their backs to the stage. And so all the candidates had to take their shoes off to come and perform on the stage for their audition. And what they found was when they did that the male to female ratio was far more balanced than it had been when the candidates wore their shoes, because the high heels were giving away, which candidates were women and which candidates were men. And I would like very, very, very much to believe that at least by and large, the judges do not identify themselves as overtly sexist, but they were judging the female performers more harshly than they were the male candidates. And so, as a result, when they knew that they were judging a woman, they were less likely less inclined to select that performer over a male performer for the position. I, 100% hope that, you know, they were falling prey to their, to the, to the subconscious expectations where like you were saying that, you know, if you are a member of an underrepresented group, you have to be that much better in order to secure the same position. And so I think, you know, we get to the sort of tricky spot when we're talking about, you know, hiring practices and stuff like that. Like how I think a lot of it is based on are these overt decisions or how much is this sort of subconscious level.

Roxy ([28:57](#)):

Yes, exactly.

Heather ([28:59](#)):

We're going to go ahead and take a break here, but be sure to check in with us next time when we continue this conversation and delve a little bit more deeply into perception, language use, and how they impact the infosec workplace and community. Until next time, stay safe.