

Building a Security Mindset



Josh Michaels, 2011-22-12

****Disclaimer: I'm not a psychologist, psychiatrist, brain matter expert or guru of all monkey manners. This post is my viewpoint from what I've experienced and learned... or tried to learn. If you have a different viewpoint, please post a reply, and let's have a rousing discussion about it!****

Humanity's reliance on interdependence has required us to trust. It makes life easier, faster, and simpler to live if we have some basic trusts. Every day I get in my car and I trust that the engineers that designed it didn't wire the spark plugs into the fuel tank. I trust that the other drivers on the road are somewhat trained to not kill me (though some days rush hour can really test that trust). I trust those that prepare my food, repair my car, protect my streets, and all other manner of things.

This trust is what makes us vulnerable. Every person I trust is another potential exploit path. People trusted Bernie Madoff with their life savings, only to have that trust turned against them.

So, what can we do about it? Should I go live in a remote corner of the woods, make my own clothes from tree bark, and do everything myself? Tempting, I'm not going to lie, as I had that dream as a kid(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Side_of_the_Mountain). But no, I will continue my trusting existence. I will keep getting in my car every day, turning that key and hoping I don't explode. Why? Because, to survive in this world, we need to have a certain amount of trust in it. If we don't have a level of trust, each of us would spend our entire short and stress filled days worrying about every interaction and movement we make.... What kind of life would that be? Not a life I think I would enjoy taking part in.

Of course, this leads to an issue. How do I have a life where I am safe, but not spending each moment worrying about the next? There is no simple answer, but I believe that I can help increase my chances by remembering one thing. No matter what.. Be inquisitive. Ask questions, get answers, search for answers, or create answers, whatever it takes to solve the riddle. The foundation of a great security mind is an inquisitive spirit.

Hackers want to know how things work. What makes the car go or the doorbell ring? How do magnets work or where is Schrödinger's cat? If a person is inquisitive, they would seemingly be less likely to accept the status quo without asking... why?

Why do you need to know my password mister IT help guy?

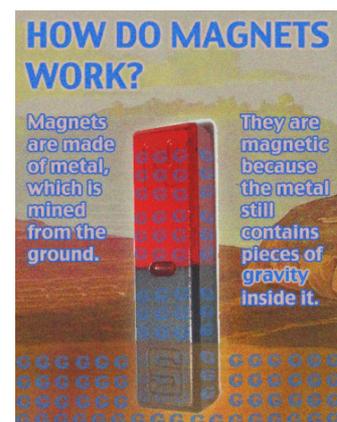
Why are you offering me the chance to launder money from Africa, oh great Prince Malhaka?

Why do we store passwords in plaintext?

The inquisitive nature can then help inspire creativity. When I get an answer that I don't find fulfilling, I often go in search of my own. Maybe I can make a different path and generate a better answer. Or more likely, in my search for an answer, I will find a better understanding of the question, which allows me to accept the original answer.

So, how do you take a trusting vulnerable human being and grant them the inquisitive spirit to lay the foundation needed for a security mindset? In my mind, it seems to boil down to awareness and experience.

The end goal is to keep asking those questions. Make it a habit to ask questions and be curious about you interactions in the world. If you do, you will begin to realize many of the places where you subconsciously place trust, and be better able to evaluate that trust. Have it become second nature, and you'll be on the path to building a security mindset.



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