

Podcast Transcript

Risk Never Sleeps

Episode 102

Hugo Lai

Ed Gaudet: Welcome to the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast, in which we learn about the people that are on the front lines, delivering and protecting patient care. I'm Ed Gaudet, the host of our program, and today, I am pleased to be joined by Hugo Lai, the CISO at Temple Health, part of Temple University, correct?

Hugo Lai: That is correct, yes.

Ed Gaudet: Excellent, excellent. Welcome. I'm excited to learn about your journey. I've done a little research on your background, so I have a couple of questions about your background. But let's start off with your current role and your current health system, a little bit about the organization.

Hugo Lai: Yeah, thank you for having me, Ed. I'm Hugo Lai, I'm the CISO at Temple Health, and I've been with the organization for about three years now, and my cybersecurity journey has been very interesting. I actually started as a security consultant providing services to some government clients. And I got married; obviously, I don't want to be traveling as often as I wanted to, so I decided to jump into healthcare, and it's been a wonderful 20 years.

Ed Gaudet: Excellent, excellent. Yeah, I know I noticed that about your background. I noticed that the time you spent at Booz Allen, and Deloitte, and BearingPoint brings back memories.

Hugo Lai: That's right, that's right. Good consulting days.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, good consulting days, for sure, yeah. That's when the internet was really starting to build out the infrastructure, back in the late 90s, early 2000.

Hugo Lai: That's right.

Ed Gaudet: Pretty exciting time. So, how does that experience translate into healthcare? Were you able to take some of that experience and apply it?

Hugo Lai: Yeah, I was actually supporting some of the health-related government agencies in the public health space. There's been a lot of demanding work ranging from penetration testing to GRC risk assessments. I've actually done cybersecurity work in many different disciplines, if you will, and I honestly enjoyed my consulting days because those are typically short engagements, and I get to work with many different clients in different environments, and I certainly learned a lot from each of these engagements.

Ed Gaudet: Excellent, and as you look out over the next 12 months or so, what are your top three priorities?

Hugo Lai: Yes, good question. Certainly, helping the organization to prevent ransomware attack, that's definitely very high up on my radar, as well as assisting the organization to build a business resilience. That's, these are no-brainers. For the past few years, I think the entire healthcare organizations have been struggling in many of these areas. We are also trying to make sure that our third party risk assessment program is robust as well.

Ed Gaudet: Excellent, excellent. And I imagine you're also dealing with innovation, new technology that you have to run through your overall risk assessment program. Talk to us about and share with listeners your experience so far with AI. How are you embracing it, or maybe you're not? Have you set up a governance structure internally? I hear varying degrees of adoption at this point.

Hugo Lai: Yes, internally, within the organization, we do have, we set up an AI committee, and I am a member of that committee. As the organization, we are approaching AI very cautiously at this point. I think we all understand that it will certainly bring efficiencies within the organization, but we are carefully evaluating as to which areas that we want to start utilizing AI. So we are performing quite a bit of assessments as well, because we want to understand the potential security impact when we're bringing AI into our environment. There has been a lot of discussions around at the very minimal enabling, for example, like Copilot or some of these large language model. I can see that everyone's going to be embracing this technology very soon. But at the very beginning, I want to make sure that we're setting up the right infrastructure with the right configurations, and we understand the potential security risk that comes with the technology.

Ed Gaudet: I imagine, with AI, unlike some of the other technologies that you bring in-house, you have much more interaction with the clinical side of the house, because they're probably pushing to adopt AI quicker than other parts of the business. Is that what you're seeing, or?

Hugo Lai: There's certainly been a lot of discussions from the clinical side as well, and we are primarily relying on our vendors to introduce some of these technologies to us where we feel it's appropriate. I think we will put it on our list of evaluations. And again, on the clinical side, we're definitely a little bit more cautious. And we also want to make sure that when we are leveraging, there is a centralized user experience that we can offer our clinicians without having them to go to this application to launch this AI and then launch another application or different workflow. So we try to pay attention to that, and we haven't really come to a conclusion as to how we want to approach it.

Ed Gaudet: Interesting. Yeah, integrating into the clinical desktop experience.

Hugo Lai: Correct, correct. Yeah

Ed Gaudet: Excellent. And you think about your next 12 months, 12, 24 months. What are some of your top challenges that you're facing, whether they're on the process side, technology adoption, or the people side?

Hugo Lai: Yeah, I believe it's finding the right talent to fit into the team. It's one of the challenges that I've seen, and it's becoming more challenging for us. Part of the reason is because of the technology innovation that's been going on within the organization. There's a lot of demands. We're trying to go through many different technical projects at the same time. So it certainly gives a lot of pressure to some of our staff members and finding the right talents to help us resolve some of the, help us tackle some of these projects. I can certainly see that it's challenging.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and is the university a good source of talent, or have you found?

Hugo Lai: We're certainly partnering with the university to help us in some of those areas.

Ed Gaudet: Got it. Excellent. And so, when you look outside of your current day job, what are you most passionate about? What would you be doing if you weren't doing this?

Hugo Lai: I'm actually a martial artist. I practiced, I practiced Japanese fencing, and I do it together with my daughter as well. It's been fun and fascinating.

Ed Gaudet: So tell me about that. I don't know much about that. That's really cool.

Hugo Lai: Yeah, this is as close as Star Wars as it can be. And that's a lot of self-reflection. Actually, it's not about beating your opponent, but really looking towards yourself. And every single move is about how to perfect that movement. So, there's a lot of self-reflection in each of the practice. We normally start the practice with a little bit of meditation, so it also helps with the stress of the CISO life. And then, during the practice, it gets very intense. You also get to smack a few folks, if you will. So I certainly enjoy that a lot.

Ed Gaudet: Nice. That's terrific. I think that's the first time I've heard anyone with that passion, so that's really unique and interesting. What if you could go back in time? What would you tell your 20-year-old self?

Hugo Lai: Party less, study more.

Ed Gaudet: I don't think I've ever heard that.

Hugo Lai: You know, I think when I think about it, knowledge certainly helps. And, but honestly, I think it's actually spending a little bit more time to understand myself a bit more. To some people, I think it comes very naturally, but to others, it takes time to look deep underneath yourself to know, for example, what are some of the things that motivates you in life, right? What are some of the things the people that you enjoy hanging out with, for example? And I feel that, for me, it takes a long time for me to find out, and it certainly helped me in my career as well because you get to know yourself a bit more. And for everything that you do in life, I think sometimes you just need to understand, right? Like why you're pursuing something, why you want to do certain things, yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. The why is so important. I'm so glad you said that, and I love that. I love that, your comment there, because the journey is so interesting to me, not so much the destination, obviously, but that journey of self-discovery at any age, right? You can never be too old to learn something new or to change something about yourself, and so I love that response. That's a really good way to think about it. And I should have told myself less partying too, and more studying.

Hugo Lai: So I had a good time in college.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, I didn't do anything related to what I'm doing today, so.

Hugo Lai: That's right.

Ed Gaudet: The universe is, it's an interesting teacher for sure, if you let it, if you're open to that, which I certainly am. So I often ask people, and I love to really get to know people about their cultural tastes. And we talked a little bit about Japanese fencing, but what about music and movies? If you were stuck on the desert proverbial desert island, is there a certain set of music that you'd bring or movies that you'd bring with you that you could watch all the time or listen to all the time?

Hugo Lai: Oh, that's going to be very difficult. I think I'm a very typical German. I actually, I embrace diversity, so there's not one type of music or one genre of movies that I enjoy, and that's why I find it very difficult at my early days in my life, trying to understand myself because I do enjoy a lot of things. Yes, I have to look very deep inside myself to truly understand. Okay, is it something that I would like to pursue? Is it something that I enjoy doing? But in the end, what I discover is that I actually, the type, I'm the type of person that would enjoy doing many different things. And that's why I enjoy my consulting days, right? Because I get to meet different people, I get to do different things. I get to work on different projects, to work in different environments.

Ed Gaudet: I love that. So any particular, any records or music that you'd bring to your desert island off the top of your head? Even if it could be eccentric.

Hugo Lai: It may be a classical music. Yeah, yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Oh. Classical music?

Hugo Lai: Yeah. I enjoy a ... jazz bar, yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Oh, very nice, very nice. Excellent. But you'd think back over your career, what's the hardest lesson you've had?

Hugo Lai: Wow, the hardest lesson. I think that would have to be how to apply cybersecurity in a, in an enterprise environment. I think we, at least for myself, I learned cybersecurity by understanding what are some of the controls. I read a lot of the documents and I'm very boring person. No one would actually flip open a document and start reading them.

Ed Gaudet: I, guilty, guilty as charged.

Hugo Lai: But I think we, at a certain point, you have to understand whether it's actually bringing value to the organization in how to apply these security principles. And it took me a while to figure how to connect the dots together, and I just hope that when I started my career, maybe I shouldn't be learning about cybersecurity in the first place, but really trying to understand the business a little bit more first, and then learn about the technical security principles and then try to apply them to the organization.

Ed Gaudet: Which is probably why you're an excellent CISO and a great business partner, because.

Hugo Lai: I certainly hope so.

Ed Gaudet: I talk to a lot of CISOs, and it's rare that people make that connection. I think the great ones do. They recognize that cybersecurity and risk is a business decision. And so you have to figure out how to connect with the business, understand the business, and communicate and collaborate with the business appropriately. Last question. If and again, I'm sure, is the health system close to the university, like physically or?

Hugo Lai: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. We are very close to the university.

Ed Gaudet: Okay. So you see a lot of, probably a lot of students. What would you tell a student that wants to get into cyber and/or healthcare? What advice would you have for that person?

Hugo Lai: Be prepared to work a lot of long hours. I think, honestly, one of the differences in working in healthcare is that you get to feel the impact that you're bringing to the organization. You know that you are protecting the patient's privacy or making sure that their information is being protected. I think the difference is that you can actually put a face right to do some of the patients as well. So, I think that gratification is something that I enjoy the most. I would also ask a lot of our engineers to remember that the very reason why you want to work in the healthcare space is. At least, for me, that's one of the reasons why I'm working at Temple Health today is because of that.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, that shared mission that we have; that is unlike any other industry.



Hugo Lai: Absolutely, yeah.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, it's so important and so unique, and, yeah, I know; I'm glad you mentioned that because it's so important. Otherwise, it would be just a job.

Hugo Lai: That's right. That's right.

Ed Gaudet: Like anything else. Oh, thank you, Hugo. It's a pleasure spending time with you today. This is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. And if you're on the front lines protecting patient safety and delivering patient care, remember to stay vigilant because Risk Never Sleeps.



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