



Podcast Transcript

Risk Never Sleeps Episode 42 Matt Christensen

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 excited to be joined by Matt Christensen, Senior Director of Cybersecurity at Intermountain Health. Matt, how are you? Good day, sir.

Matt Christensen: Good day. Thanks for having me on.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. No, good, good to see you. And good to have you on the program. So tell our listeners a little bit about your role and your current organization.

Matt Christensen: Yeah, you bet. Thanks so much. Matt Christensen, I work for Intermountain Healthcare. Intermountain is the largest nonprofit health system in the Intermountain West. We're 33 hospitals and hundreds of clinics, seven states. We also have a payer system, which is pretty cool too. So we have an insurance arm. And right now, I'm leading our governance risk compliance program. And then under that is business continuity disaster recovery. And then also have roll-up for service management function, which is kind of a cool thing as well as training and education.

Ed Gaudet: Wow. So small job.

Matt Christensen: Yeah, I mean, your podcast is Risk Never Sleeps. I'd like to say Matt never sleeps either, so.

Ed Gaudet: Perfect. Don't be stealing that now for your podcast. How did you get into healthcare and cyber?

Matt Christensen: Great question. Remember in the late 80s watching a show called Sneakers. You probably know that, most people do. And I remember just watching and understanding, even at a young age, what, what it meant to social engineer, either for good or for bad. And that show, I've probably seen no less than 100 times. And so it was one of those things that was always in the back of my mind. And then in my teenage years, I actually wanted to be a first responder, whether that was a paramedic or a police officer. And then just through trial and error of interviewing people and just trying to weigh out options, and then just naturally landed in cyber.

Ed Gaudet: How about healthcare?

Matt Christensen: Healthcare. I always wanted to do something in which I knew I could leave the end of the day and make a difference. And you and I have been in meetings before where you're like, I made zero difference. I had zero impact. I may as well have not been here. But that's hard to be in a meeting in healthcare, when at the end of it you don't say, this is going to have direct impact on how we provide care to patients, members. So to me, it's a natural fit.

Ed Gaudet: It's so unique in other industries. You don't really have that so much, and.

Matt Christensen: No. In fact, I've been in hundreds of meetings and never once has someone said, How can we get more money out of people? Like, in healthcare, you just don't, right? It's the opposite. It's how can we save more lives? How can we help people?

Ed Gaudet: Exactly. You know, it's shared too, regardless of who you're talking to in healthcare. If you're in healthcare, you participate and you share in that mission, which is fantastic and very unique.

Matt Christensen: Yeah. And the other thing I love too, our former CEO used to always say everyone's a caregiver. It doesn't matter you're the guy cleaning the floors, you're serving food. Whatever role you have in healthcare, you're a caregiver. And I've really likened to that. I've really challenged our team to, to say it's not just clinicians that deliver care. Every one of us has an impact. So that's why healthcare.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. And you've had an interesting background. You were an auditor, right? You were in the audit function at one point. How did that, how does that uniquely provide you with some experiences that you may not have, other, otherwise had if you came in a different way into cyber?

Matt Christensen: It's funny too, because I remember telling my father-in-law at the time, still is, but I was, he was like, My daughter's dating a dreaded auditor. Like that was really like his word. So she kind of had to defend me a little bit. And we got married and everything has worked out, it worked out perfectly. But I, I chose audit because in, especially in IT audit, you get a dip into every realm of the business. And the whole point of it is continuous improvement. It's not finding errors and writing these reports inked in red. I didn't find value in that. I found value in getting with the customer, understanding a process, looking for inefficiency. And I actually found value in writing reports where there were no findings. Most auditors would be like, I don't think you belong in audits. You can't do that. Yeah, it just gave me a different lens into all areas of the business.

Ed Gaudet: So with the broad background and obviously the focus, what are your top three priorities over the next 12 to 24 months?

Matt Christensen: Top three is tough, but top two is easy. Automation and efficiencies. And I know that's like the buzz words and everything. It's what everyone should be working on. But we're really looking a hard look at our processes to say what waste can we cut, you know, and taking a lean approach to it. I think the biggest thing is just, it's so easy to point delays, people who don't report to you, or in our cases, vendors who they just, they don't have that same expectation of a, of an SLA. And so we're looking at how can we improve our process to, to shorten that delay in areas that we don't have direct control. Because where we do have direct control, it's easy. You get the job done in the work and the timeline that we've agreed to. So that's one area.

Matt Christensen (cont'd): Another area that I'm actually pretty excited about. So we are taking, we're going to make, everyone's using ChatGPT and playing with it and everything, but we have an internal instance of our ChatGPT that we're going to take all of our audit responses and our cyber liability insurance response. I mean, these are to put together responses for some of these audits, it's hundreds of hours, right? And then that data is a point in time. It's, you collect it at a point in time and then it gets lost until the next audit. Then you rinse, repeat. But we get asked the same question over and over. So can we just dump everything into the GPT instance, query it, and see what it pumps out? And so, you know, our team alone external audits. We, 50, 60 is a low number for us every year that we're putting through. People asking me, Intermountain, mountain what are we doing to protect that data? Yet, the bulk of the questions are the same. So ironic that you and I are talking, because that's kind of the solution that you've helped the industry solve or the problem that you helped solve. So yeah, that, that'll be one I think will be a big win because then someone can query it, whether it's, it's our CISO or any member of cyber. You can query that. Just say, okay, what level of encryption are we using on databases, whatever it is. So I'm excited about.

Ed Gaudet: How do you think we're doing post-pandemic as an industry from a cyber perspective?

Matt Christensen: It's an interesting question. I feel like the whole hybrid remote work has played a huge factor into how we're doing. We've proven that that's effective or it can be, and I think fax is here to stay. What I've loved the most, though, is I collaborate better with teams than I did when I was five feet from them, or a cubicle row away from them.

Ed Gaudet: Interesting.

Matt Christensen: We get to issues a little faster. And I won't, I'm not going to say take the stand. Remote work is the only effective way to work. But I will say in a team where we did have silos, leveraging an electronic instance of communication, Microsoft Teams, or whatever the platform might be, I think we solve things quicker and there's more transparency.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, that's a great point. And are you still getting together periodically in person?

Matt Christensen: And you need that. If you don't, you lose. I think you lose the human element element of it. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. So you need that. Yeah.

Ed Gaudet: I'm sure there's a lot that keeps you up at night. Anything you care to share with listeners?

Matt Christensen: For me, it depends on who the audience is. So if the audience is a technical audience, like, not having to ... place everywhere: easy answer, but so fundamental, that's, how do you not worry about that? If my audience is business, then it shifts to a risk-based response and that is, can we have more discussions around is that risk probable or possible? Because then we shift away from technology and that those lenses or blinders we have on and we move to something I think a little bit more compelling and then it's a business-driven discussion. So I think that's the biggest thing that I'm trying to work first on myself and then with my team is to say we need to think more like business leaders and not technologists.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, no, that's a really great point. And that connection with the business is so important. And as IT folks, we sometimes miss that. How are you ensuring that is getting stronger in your organization as you bring in new people into the fold, and you've got to train them and onboard them? And what are some of the tips that you may want to share with listeners in that regard?

Matt Christensen: I learned something from a great innovator. His name's Todd Dunn, very active on LinkedIn. But he taught me this principle of going to Cambodia. And if you remember the story of the Lucky Fish where there was all this iron deficiency in Cambodia, someone just learned that if you spend enough time with the people in that culture, you can actually learn how to make change that will last and not just tell them what to do. So even with the big like, 50% of Cambodia is iron deficient, so everyone will just take more iron or eat things that have more iron. But they wouldn't. So they learned. They just drop a little ingot into the soup in the shape of a fish. And the Cambodians were more than willing to do that, and they got the benefit of the iron. And what that taught me was, when there's a problem that needs to be solved, you can't just have a meeting, have a phone call without, like, you got to go there. You need to physically go there and sit person.

Matt Christensen (cont'd): So I did this with my team a few years ago, actually. I took them to our, one of our call centers. I made them put headsets on, and I come from the call center where I work for the largest one in the world for a few years, and they were so uncomfortable. Here they have headsets on, they're listening to calls with people talking about real health issues, right? And it wasn't more than two hours in. They all came to me like, I don't need more of this. I know why I work here. I know why I work here, and I know that I don't just provide security so that we don't have to pay for data breach notification or data breach cost. I work in security so I can keep someone's mental health notes confidential. And it was just this eye-opening thing. So that's just one instance. But we go to Cambodia often.

Ed Gaudet: No, that's a really great point. And it's a great analogy too to think through. Been a tough couple of years for folks obviously given the pandemic. What are you personally or professionally or both, most proud of?

Matt Christensen: It applies personally and professionally. And I think for me it's to quit caring what others might think, but focus on making the right decision, even if it's the hard decision. A lot has happened in the last couple of years, and without going into too many details, when you have major life events, your mind shifts. And it doesn't just shift personally, it can shift professionally as well. So I think getting more to the point of problems and being less focused about kingdom building or hierarchy or the optics or just the things that a lot of us get caught up in, at least in, in the corporate world, and more focused on helping others solve problems, making them be the heroes.

Ed Gaudet: No. That's so great. Yeah. No, that's, I love that. I remember having a similar epiphany a few years ago where I realized it wasn't about control, it was about influence. And they're different. And influence, actually, in the scheme of things, was much more powerful and much more important than, just like you said, building fiefdoms or having that sense of direct control over everything. And I just love the way you describe that.

Matt Christensen: I think too getting people energized about their job because, and I think the pandemic, for good or for worse, I think it helped people realize they either really love their job or they really hate their job, right? Because now you do your job at your home and so.

Ed Gaudet: You better love it.

Matt Christensen: You better love it. That's right. Otherwise, now your whole family gets to hear about it all the time, not just after hours.

Ed Gaudet: You can't hide from it.

Matt Christensen: But, but I will say, you know, there was a takeaway I had from Malcolm Gladwell's book, *Outliers*, a few years ago, and it was: people are satisfied when they have three things, I hope they get it in the right order, autonomy, complexity, and a connection between effort and reward. If they don't have all three things, they'll never be satisfied in their job. So it's kind of that three-legged stool. And I don't know, I think that would be another takeaway that I've had is just I want high-performing teams, in order for them to be high-performing, they have to love what they do. You can't force someone to be passionate about something like, you have to want that. And so, we've been focusing on those three things: giving, letting people operate at the top of license, making sure that their roles are hard, like they should not leave the end of the day thinking like that was an easy day, and then making sure to connect their effort with some form of reward.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, I love that, I love that. And again, that bringing passion into it is so important because, again, how do we get out of bed every day if we're not passionate about what we do and love what we do? I don't know how you can do that. And so, when you think about what you do outside of your day job, what are you most passionate about, outside of work?

Matt Christensen: Ironically used the word outside because that's what I'm most passionate about, anything outside or outdoors. We moved to a rural community in the mountains because every weekend we were just driving up here playing in the mountains, so it kind of made.

Ed Gaudet: Perfect sense, right?

Matt Christensen: We have a large garden that we love to care for. I love meticulously cutting our lawn. There's so, I don't know, maybe I just have an extreme lack of vitamin D, and it's the world pulling me in. He needs more sun. You've got, you don't ever get outside because of your job, but. No, really, I think honestly, just anything outdoors, that's where our family lives.

Ed Gaudet: You are hiking a lot and? Yeah.

Matt Christensen: Hiking, trail running. It's definitely a go-to; also a great energy release.

Ed Gaudet: How about skiing?

Matt Christensen: So I hate to admit this. In junior high school, I loved skiing, loved snowboarding. And now I don't know if I'm just too cheap or I'm getting old, but I'm just so.

Ed Gaudet: It's so expensive.

Matt Christensen: Yeah, I don't know. It's, it's a pretty big commitment. The skis used to be the expensive part.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, yeah. But you live next to so many, near so many beautiful places.

Matt Christensen: Yeah. 40 minutes we could go to, I think, 7 or 8 resorts. Pretty fun.

Ed Gaudet: Best skiing I've ever done: snowboarding in Alta, like, it was, oh, such magical places. Now, this is probably last year for you, but what would you tell your 20-year-old self?

Matt Christensen: Last year?

Ed Gaudet: You got, you got that!

Matt Christensen: I knew you had to introduce an element of ageism in the podcast. So thank you for that.

Ed Gaudet: You look great. You look great, by the way.

Matt Christensen: Hey, we married, I married in the, near my mid-30s. It's a great thing. Growth comes on the hard days comes to mind. I think I would tell myself that it's really not about me. That a pro lifestyle of servant, servant leadership I think has been, I've been benefited and blessed by having leaders who use that as their mode, right? So I would also probably say don't worry so much. Things generally work out.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah.

Matt Christensen: And that happens personally and professionally. You have, it's just so easy to doubt yourself. You know, you look everyone else and they've got it all put together. And I'm learning the more experience I get. No one really has it all together.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. The more you know, the less you know.

Matt Christensen: Yeah. And I'd probably tell myself, I'd give myself a hard slap in the face too at 20. You have to be grateful for every day that you're given because you're not guaranteed one.

Ed Gaudet: What do they say life is wasted on the youth or something like that?

Matt Christensen: Yeah. Yeah. As the parent of four, my wife and I are told, The days are long and the years are short, and.

Speaker3: Yes, isn't that true?

Matt Christensen: There is nothing more true than that.

Ed Gaudet: Kids mark time like nothing else. It's so true. It's, what? Wait. What happened? How old are they? I have three daughters and they're all in their 20s. And so wait, how did that happen? I know, it's crazy. I got to ask you this question, Matt. I'm sure you got a lot of things here that you could answer from. But this is the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. What's the riskiest thing you've ever done?

Matt Christensen: I don't know that I can tie that to a single event. Perhaps coming on this podcast might be the riskiest thing that I've ever done.

Ed Gaudet: No, it's not. Come on.

Matt Christensen: I've gone skydiving. I've lived in very dangerous country and very dangerous neighborhoods.

Ed Gaudet: Really?

Matt Christensen: I've done things that you would think of, the world thinks of as, That's risky. But I think of risk more in terms of reward, almost like consequence always has that negative connotation. In my life, I try and make risk be the positive, which is the reward things. Perhaps the riskiest thing I've ever done is to realize I don't know it all, and to understand that everyone, in some way or another, is a superior and I can learn anything from anyone I come across with. And accepting that I don't have to be the subject matter expert. I don't have to be the smartest person in the room. I don't have to be the most qualified. Maybe that's the riskiest thing I've ever done, is just coming to that realization.

Ed Gaudet: Letting yourself be vulnerable.

Matt Christensen: Yeah, which thank you pandemic. I tended to not be that vulnerable guy before that. I think it shook us all up a bit.

Ed Gaudet: It did. Absolutely.

Matt Christensen: Yeah. I would say that's, that's a terrible, maybe it's not terrible, but it's, it's the most honest answer that I can give you. I can't define the riskiest thing that I've done in my life. There could be, look, I'm a family guy. My 'why' is, everything I do revolves around my family. So, you know, if I committed to a baseball game and I miss it for a business meeting, that could be the riskiest thing that I might do in the eyes of my son, right? Something like that. And so, I don't know. And I probably, that's probably the worst response you've ever got on the podcast.

Ed Gaudet: It's actually one of the best responses I've ever gotten.

Speaker3: But it's my honest response.

Ed Gaudet: I love it. I love this notion of just being vulnerable. I think it is. I think a lot of people struggle with that. And you're right, within the last couple of years, for me personally, I've been on a journey that I've had to be very vulnerable to actually get on that path. And it's, I'm so glad I did. So thank you for that answer. It's a really great answer. I do want to know where's the most interesting place you've ever lived in, though, since you brought up you've lived in a number of different countries.

Matt Christensen: I've only lived in one other country, but I've visited many. I lived in Argentina in the northern part and like, a block from the railroad type of thing. It was, it was an interesting place, beautiful country food, the people. Everything's amazing there. They just lack a few things.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, yeah. We go to Aruba, you know, that's not Argentina, but it's probably closest I'll ever get. So have you been to the island at all?

Matt Christensen: Hawaii, Dominican Republic.

Ed Gaudet: Nice.

Matt Christensen: Puerto Rico.

Ed Gaudet: Very nice.

Matt Christensen: I think that's it.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah. Very cool. Last bit of advice before we end, to, maybe younger professionals in cyber or folks that want to break into cyber.

Matt Christensen: I love that question 'cause I'm actually an advocate for people who don't come from technical backgrounds or development or IS backgrounds to come into cyber. In fact, one of the best hires I've ever had, he came from food operations. I guess my advice would be, regardless of your background, if you're passionate about cyber, there's a place for you. And sometimes that doesn't mean landing where you want to spend your career for your first job. I see to many people like, All I want to do is pen test, I just want to pen test. But they can't get hired because they don't have experience. And so that's where I try and tell them, like, Try and gain other experience that you can then apply to pen testing if that's really what you want to do. So I think that would be, That'd be my bit of guidance for anyone trying to break in. And then also seek a mentor, seek someone who's been in it for a while because, yeah, it's a little bit about who, but it's far more about what one value add. 'Who' you can get you a job, but it doesn't keep you in cyber. And so a mentor can be someone who can really test the waters with you to see if this is the right career, and then if it is, then can help you figure out where, where your strengths are that you can add.

Ed Gaudet: Yeah, and Associate Risk Assessor is a great way to start because you get that broad visibility into cybersecurity and the business as well. Always good to think about the broad definition of cybersecurity. Most people, like you said, think about more the technical aspects of cybersecurity.

Matt Christensen: If we can get folks to first say, what is the mission of the organization? What does the business want to achieve? Then it's not a matter of saying no, which we love to do in cyber, or no, hard no, right? But it's more tell me what you need and let's find a way to get there.



Ed Gaudet: Excellent way to end our program. Matt, thank you so much for joining us today. This is Ed Gaudet from the Risk Never Sleeps Podcast. And if you're on the front lines protecting patient safety and care delivery, remember to stay vigilant because Risk Never Sleeps.



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