

CASE STUDY

How the Fortinet Veterans Program Helped an MSSP Launch New Lines of Business

Four years ago, San Diego-based IT service provider CSCI, Inc. was a company in transition. It had offered systems integration services throughout Southern California for more than three decades, but CEO Rich Tear recognized an opportunity to shift focus and become a managed security services provider (MSSP).

“We saw a space in the market that we could fill,” Tear says. “Many managed security providers at that time were offering only very basic services, such as end-user help desk and antivirus patch management.” CSCI wanted to provide managed firewalls and virtual private network (VPN) support. To do so, Tear needed to bolster the company’s expertise in those areas. “As we began expanding our customer base for managed security services, it was clear we needed to hire someone with deep experience in cybersecurity,” he says.

CSCI is a Fortinet partner, and Tear turned to the Fortinet Veterans Program for assistance. Designed to help military service members transition into civilian jobs, the Fortinet Veterans Program offers educational opportunities through the Fortinet Network Security Expert (NSE) Training Institute, peer-to-peer coaching with a Fortinet employee who is also a veteran, and networking with prospective employers. Honorably discharged veterans, military reservists and National Guard members, and military spouses are eligible to apply.

The Fortinet Veterans Program team creates a “battle card” for each participant—a visual resume that includes the individual’s clearances, commendations, and certifications—which they distribute to partner organizations. When Tear reviewed the battle cards for candidates that might bring cybersecurity expertise to CSCI, a departing Marine captain stood out.

A Match Made in Cyberspace

Chris Armstrong had been teaching cybersecurity to incoming Marines at Camp Pendleton. He was transitioning out of the Marine Corps to pursue a master’s degree at the University of California San Diego (UCSD). He joined the Fortinet Veterans Program to make the transition easier.

“There were very few available programs at the time that offered both cybersecurity training and career guidance to military veterans,” Armstrong says. “Deciding to participate was easy.” He took advantage of the NSE courses to improve his knowledge of Fortinet solutions and earn relevant certifications. He also benefited from the mentorship component of the program.

“The interview preparation was key,” Armstrong says. “You don’t do a lot of interviewing for jobs in the military, and I had been in for nearly a decade. Plus, security teams on the commercial side use different terminology than those in the military, so there was a risk I might use terms that an interviewer would not



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– Rich Tear, CEO, CSCI, Inc.

Details

Fortinet Partner: CSCI, Inc.

Industry: MSSP/Service Provider

Location: San Diego, California

Business Impact

- Launched new MSSP and compliance businesses with guidance from an executive hired via the Fortinet Veterans Program
- Accelerated review of candidate qualifications using the program’s “battle cards”

understand. As part of the Fortinet Veterans Program, I was able to practice interviewing and bounce ideas off of someone who had made the same transition I was going through. Getting that feedback gave me confidence that I would be presenting my ideas in a way that civilians would understand.”

When Tear saw Armstrong’s battle card, he quickly arranged to put those interview skills to work. “The Fortinet Veterans Program’s unique use of battle cards helped us quickly assess the experience level of transitioning military members and enabled us to identify the right person to meet our needs,” Tear says.

Armstrong sees a big benefit for Fortinet partners, as well. “Without the Fortinet Veterans Program, I do not think I would have found CSCI,” he says. “Smaller companies aren’t always as visible to job seekers. They may not have the size of marketing or hiring teams that a lot of bigger companies do. So, the Fortinet Veterans Program is a great way for small companies to get visibility to a targeted set of individuals.”

Security Expertise To Support a Growing Business

Tear hired Armstrong to be CSCI’s director of security and they immediately began building an MSSP practice based on Fortinet solutions. CSCI first introduced a managed firewall utilizing FortiGate next-generation firewalls (NGFWs). “Chris solidified our security offering, helping us build a whole new practice around security,” Tear says. “We slowly and methodically replaced other firewalls throughout our customer base and began managing those assets for our customers. We offer only the latest FortiGate [firewalls] with UTM [Unified Threat Management] and updated warranty and support, so that we can ensure the firewalls are always up-to-date on patching.”

The CSCI team uses the FortiManager centralized management system to streamline firewall monitoring and configuration and to gain visibility into security events and trends. “When you are working with as many clients as we are, you need to manage their environments as efficiently as possible,” Armstrong says. “Without this tool—and the training I received starting with the Fortinet Veterans Program—our small team would not be able to manage such a broad security infrastructure. A lot of times, we find out about a security incident before the client even has a chance to call us, so by the time they reach out, we are already in the midst of planning our response.”

As the security business grew, compliance services presented another growth opportunity. “The government was leaning on defense contractors and healthcare providers to shore up their cybersecurity posture,” Tear says, “so building a compliance practice became critically important for us. Compliance is a challenge many organizations are dealing with, whether they have to meet PCI [Payment Card Industry] requirements for credit card information, abide by HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act] rules for healthcare businesses, or meet NIST [National Institute of Standards and Technology] or CMMC [Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification] to work with the Department of Defense.”

CSCI’s compliance services focus on management, analysis, and reporting on security data logs. Armstrong spearheaded the new line of business.

“We went deeper with Fortinet by introducing a managed service for the FortiSIEM security information and event management tool,” Tear says. “Usually, the MSSPs offering such sophisticated services are much larger than CSCI, but we were able to leverage Chris’ expertise to start down this path.” In fact, Tear sees compliance as an area that military veterans are uniquely prepared to support. “I did not fully understand NIST 800-71 until Chris joined our group,” he says. “Veterans understand what compliance is all about.”

Business Impact (contd.)

- Gained visibility among highly qualified candidates who might not have considered a small business
- Improved communication among ex-military and commercial security staff

Services

- Fortinet Veterans Program

“Transitioning to a new career can be stressful. The support and planning available through the Fortinet Veterans Program made my transition much smoother than it would have been otherwise. My experience with the Fortinet Veterans Program has been exceptional.”

- Chris Armstrong, Director of Security, CSCI, Inc.

“Chris has made a huge difference at CSCI,” Tear continues. “We are a small company, and by leveraging his knowledge, we have been able to become a security-focused Fortinet MSSP Partner. I think a lot of MSSPs could find that veterans are a good strategic fit, and I thank Fortinet for putting together the Fortinet Veterans Program. It is a real win-win for both veterans and employers.”

An Exceptional Experience for Both Veterans and Employers

CSCI has not had any new hires over the past year, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Tear expects to utilize the Fortinet Veterans Program again when he next adds staff. “The discipline and training that transitioning veterans bring to the table sets them apart from other candidates,” he says. “I have owned CSCI since 1985, so I’ve had hundreds and hundreds of employees through the years. But I don’t believe I have ever hired an individual with the same combination of integrity and leadership skills that Chris brought to our organization.

“I would encourage companies like my own to consider the Fortinet Veterans Program in their search criteria for new hires,” he adds. “There is a common denominator amongst these veterans: They have a sense of purpose that is extremely attractive to our industry. We have been impressed with the Fortinet Veterans Program.”

Armstrong has as well. “Transitioning to a new career can be stressful,” he says, “and it is sometimes hard to find solutions to the problems that are inevitable when making major life changes. The support and planning available through the Fortinet Veterans Program made my transition much smoother than it would have been otherwise. In addition, access to specialized training on Fortinet solutions enabled me to reach a higher level of proficiency—which has helped me better serve CSCI. My experience with the Fortinet Veterans Program has been exceptional.”



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