

From Gaming Enthusiast to Cybersecurity Leader: Justin Passero's Inspiring Path in Tech



Justin Passero's love for technology began long before his career in cybersecurity. Growing up in a small Colorado town, he was one of the few kids in the 90s who had a computer—and even built his own. "I've always loved technology and computers," Justin recalls. His fascination deepened as he moved from gaming on systems like the Atari 2600 to computer gaming. "Back then, if you wanted to play a game, you needed certain specs. I learned about computers by upgrading parts myself. This was way before YouTube even existed, so finding a 'how-to' manual was... fun," he laughs. His early experiences taught him the importance of self-learning and adaptability, skills that would become essential in his career.

After high school, Justin served four years in the Marine Corps, including a tour in Iraq, and even there, he was "the tech guy" for his platoon. But when he returned to civilian life, finding a path in tech was anything but straightforward. Justin worked various jobs—Circuit City, insurance sales, and even corrections at the Colorado State Penitentiary. Though he loved his colleagues and the challenge of corrections, his passion for technology never faded.

Education

- Master's in Cybersecurity
- A+ Certification
- Security+
- Cybersecurity Analyst (CySA+)

Career Path

- Started as computer enthusiast and gamer
- Served in Marine Corps
- Worked various jobs including Circuit City, insurance sales, and corrections
- Transitioned to tech through education and certifications
- Joined Pax8 as Solutions Engineer
- Currently at DefensX specializing in zero-trust secure browsing technology

Key Experience

- Marine Corps veteran (including tour in Iraq)
- Solutions Engineer at Pax8
- Led product development initiatives at DefensX
- Launched 10-15 different products at Pax8

Pursuing Education & Seizing Opportunity

Knowing he wanted more, Justin enrolled in college to study criminology, later earning a master's in cybersecurity. But finding a job in tech wasn't easy. "As a guy who has no experience but has the education, it went over like a lead balloon," Justin says. He was determined to break into the field but faced the classic conundrum: "I can't get a job because I don't have experience, and I don't have experience because I can't get a job."

In a pivotal moment, Justin turned to the FEDC TechSTART program, a local leader in the tech community. FEDC introduced Justin to new opportunities and encouraged him to earn his A+ certification, which he did, passing one of the first virtual exams during the pandemic. Although the initial job offer fell through due to a hiring freeze, FEDC's mentorship paid off when they helped Justin secure an interview with Pax8, a cloud distribution company specializing in simplifying IT services for small and medium-sized businesses.

Finding His Place at Pax8 & Rising to Success

At Pax8, Justin was offered a chance to become a Solutions Engineer, a role where he would train partners on specific software. "It sounded like chaos, but organized chaos," Justin laughs. "And that's where I thrive." He studied tirelessly to demo Webroot Security in just a week, impressing his interviewers and landing the role. In his time at Pax8, Justin launched multiple products and established himself as a knowledge base for his team. "I worked directly with vendors and launched 10 to 15 different products," he recalls.

Justin's dedication and expertise didn't go unnoticed. Pax8 created a "People's Choice" award to recognize impactful employees, and Justin was the first to win.

"To be voted on by your peers is one of the greatest feelings," he says. "They thought I was the most influential person that year, and that was incredible."

Transitioning to DefensX: A New Chapter in Cybersecurity

After excelling at Pax8, Justin was approached by DefensX, a cybersecurity company specializing in zero-trust secure browsing technology that isolates threats before they reach endpoint devices—a mission Justin believed in deeply. “As soon as I saw their product, I immediately fell in love with it,” he says.

Working with DefensX offered him a unique opportunity—not only would he be demonstrating the product, but he would also help shape it. “A lot of the features you see in DefensX came from me,” he proudly states. Justin now travels internationally to showcase DefensX’s solutions, a responsibility he finds both humbling and thrilling.

Embracing Community and Staying Local

Throughout his journey, Justin remained rooted in Canon City, Colorado, where he grew up, and has lived in Colorado for most of his life, minus his time in the Marines.

“I didn’t have to go to Silicon Valley or New York,” he explains. “I’m not a big city guy. I like the small-town feel, where everyone knows each other.”

Living in the same town where he grew up has allowed him to stay close to family and maintain strong community ties. “My mom is my next-door neighbor,” he adds with a smile, grateful for the chance to stay local while building a fulfilling career in tech.

Words of Wisdom for Aspiring Tech Professionals

Reflecting on his path, Justin has simple yet powerful advice: “Don’t be afraid to fail.” He encourages others not to shy away from changing careers or exploring new fields, even later in life. “I didn’t know what I wanted to be when I grew up until I was in my mid-30s,” he admits. Justin also emphasizes the importance of certifications, especially in the field of tech and cyber security. “College education is great, but it’s not the end-all. Certifications like A+ and Security+ are huge for getting in the door.”

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“I’m mentally puckerred out, but at the end of the day, I feel good,” he says. “No matter the day, I know I accomplished something.”

“If you love what you do, you will never work a day in your life. It’s true—not because you don’t work, but because you’re happy working there,” Justin reflects. His story is a powerful reminder that it’s never too late to pursue what you love—and sometimes, the journey itself is the most rewarding part.

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