

Case Study

LifeLabs Develops Robust Cyber-Culture With SANS Security Awareness

LifeLabs is a Canadian-owned company and is the country's largest provider of community laboratory services with over 50 years of experience providing laboratory testing services to help health care providers diagnose, treat, monitor, and prevent disease in patients. Headquartered in Toronto and with over 8,000 employees, LifeLabs is the largest community laboratory in Canada and performs over 112 million laboratory tests annually.

Mike Melo, LifeLabs Chief Information Security Officer and Vice-President of Technology Shared Services, is a cybersecurity leader and technology advisor with over a decade of experience in information technology and security. In his roles at LifeLabs, Melo focuses his efforts on developing the alignment of security programs with business outcomes. Among numerous accolades, Melo was recognized as 2020 CISO of the Year by Siber X and EC-Council.

The challenge

When Melo became CISO at LifeLabs, he saw it as an opportunity to find the right balance between technology and culture in the organization's security posture. LifeLabs had already deployed a best-of-breed approach to fulfilling its technology needs by mapping unique use-case requirements to the MITRE ATT&CK® framework. Once the organization was confident in their defensive capabilities from a technology standpoint, the focus shifted to elevating the defensive strategy through improved cyber-hygiene.

"As we built out our tech stack," explained Melo, "we shifted more emphasis onto our end-user knowledge, awareness, and general risk behavior. Building a strong security posture with technology alone would ultimately be a failure. We needed to bring security culture into the fabric of the organization and align our people to the reason 'why' cybersecurity matters to them and the organization, and the role that everyone has in our journey."

"Role-based courses allow my team to deliver targeted training that is very customizable to each learner."

-Mike Melo, VP Technology Shared Services & CISO – LifeLabs

Capitalizing on this opportunity further, Melo searched security awareness partners that mapped to LifeLabs's current security awareness levels with the ability to grow programs as the organization matured.

"I've found that many security awareness vendors can be too compliance focused," said Melo. "Instead of just another 'watch a video – check a box' solution, I needed something that integrated with the innovative approach I was building when it came to security awareness and culture. For me, it was about changing behavior and SANS was the perfect fit for that."

Why SANS?

Melo was familiar with SANS as a leader in cyber security training and became familiar with the Security Awareness Maturity Model while earning a SANS Security Awareness Professional (SSAP) certification. Through the skills gained in that training, Melo was able to identify LifeLabs's position on the maturity model and chart a roadmap to where he wanted the organization to be in the future.

When evaluating different security awareness vendors, Melo found that SANS delivered security awareness training differently than most, with a focus on the end user and real behavior change.

"The programs available via SANS are very pragmatic and aligned to my overall vision for security awareness and culture," explained Melo. "The modules themselves are grounded without being overly generic. Role-based courses allow my team to deliver targeted training that is very customizable to each learner."

Results

Alignment to SANS certification curriculum has provided a level of confidence in the awareness training that stretches across the functional areas of LifeLabs. Senior leaders in the organization's technology, security, and privacy departments more readily embrace the strategy delivered by SANS Security Awareness programs knowing they were developed by the same experts they turn to when designing their own departmental policies.

In just over two years with the modules, Melo sees that LifeLabs has progressed from a compliance-focused awareness posture towards a more metrics-defined model.

"We've definitely changed the perspective of cyber-culture here," said Melo. "The culture shift has been measurable and noticeable, with even front-line workers with little previous security background being able to speak authoritatively on the topic.

"We were able to deliver on our objectives early out of the gate with a strong partnership with SANS's high-quality platform. We truly have changed our identity in the organization from 'No' to 'Know', and that in my mind, is extremely powerful for our future success."

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Established nearly 30 years ago, SANS Institute was created as cooperative research and education organization that offers programs to over 165,000 security professionals. SANS is the most trusted and largest source for information security training and security certification in the world—leverage our best-in-class Security Awareness solutions to transform your organization's ability to measure and manage human risk.

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