



TECH STAR



David Lineman: Building the Industry of Information Security

[By Akbar Ali]

As president and CEO of Information Shield, Inc., David Lineman has pursued the limits of information security and data privacy. Both aspects are increasingly important in an ever-shrinking technological world where personal and company information can be easily procured. With over two decades of experience in software, security, and information technology, David stands as one of the most sought after industry experts whose accomplishments include patent holder, writer, and frequent speaker.

David affirms that he can trace his passion for science and technology all the way back to his childhood when he would spend hours watching *NOVA* on *PBS* — before the advent of cable and the *Discovery Channel*. “My first real love was astronomy,” he confesses.

His love of science took him to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he studied earth and planetary sciences.

“It was great because it combined everything I loved about science and math into one: geology, astronomy, physics, meteorology, and oceanography,” he observes. He and his fellow students in this specialized field of study were collectively known as “rock jocks,” though there was a lot more to them than the name implied.

While at MIT, David joined a fraternity, Beta Theta Pi, which allowed him to cultivate relationships and friendships that he maintains to this day. He adds, “[Joining the fraternity] was probably my best decision because it exposed me to a lot of different people with different backgrounds in very close quarters. But you had to work as a team.”

He also spent time participating in varsity golf and other intramural sports, including hockey and Lacrosse.

“Few people know that MIT has one of the largest intramural sports programs in the world. Nearly everyone participates,” he reveals.

Apart from the rich social and academic

experience, his time at college afforded him some very important lessons. “What I learned at MIT was the importance of knowing *how* to solve problems and *who* to ask when you needed help. The ‘how’ is what you learn in classes, and the ‘who’ is what you develop in your personal life outside of school or work. They are equally important.”

Of course, MIT isn’t just any school — it’s the world’s leading launching pad for a career in technology, and the ubiquity of technology at the school is impossible to escape. “It was impossible to be there and not be involved with computers — even back in 1982,” he recalls.

David continued his graduate education at MIT, pursuing a master’s degree in geophysics. It was in graduate school that he received his first exposure to software.

“For my graduate thesis, I ended up combining two ‘new’ technologies at the time into one product — artificial intelligence (AI) and speech recognition.,” David says. “It was an exciting time. I learned that software was creative, fun, and extremely difficult. I didn’t know then that creating new products would be a theme for the rest of my life. I also got my first exposure to the “real world” when I worked as an intern at an oil company. The software I wrote for my thesis ended up

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Golf, photography, writing, music, and exercise

Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?

A. None. I am listening to my own personal radio station created on Pandora.com.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. *Business 2.0* — unfortunately their last issue in print!

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *The Big Idea* on CNBC

Q. Who is your role model?

A. Albert Einstein. He embodied both simplicity and complexity in one package.

Q. What makes you laugh?

A. Great old TV shows like *I Love Lucy* and *Sanford and Son*.



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being sold to an oil company. It turned out that I like being a capitalist as much as being a scientist.”

After leaving MIT, David first ventured into the oil and gas industry, working for oil field services provider Schlumberger. He continued for years to write software applications within the industry, though, increasingly, he felt the urge to create his own business centered on his new and exciting ideas for the future. After a few aborted attempts with his own company, he began to work on early web development in 1994-95, when domain names were freely available at no cost. The opportunity to make his mark had come knocking.

“In 1999, I had the opportunity to develop a new software application for a startup in the information security space, he recounts. “I had no knowledge of security, but I knew how to develop applications. It is fun to come cold into a new space because you don’t have any preconceived ideas of how it should be done. The company, Pentasafe Security Technologies, was very energetic and entrepreneurial. They took a risk and allowed me to put some new ideas into action and to create a new product that had never been done before.”

His work at Pentasafe exposed David to many aspects of business.

“In those days, the project managers had to do a lot more than write code. They had to help with all aspects of the product, including marketing and sales,” he says. “It was like a mini course in [running] a technology business.”

With this experience gained, he was poised to begin his own company.

“[Pentasafe] was later bought by another technology company who had a much different culture. ... Information Shield began when we spun out some products that the purchasing company was no longer interested in. It was a small market for a big company, but [it] just right for me,” David says. “... [I]t was an easy transition to buy out an existing business rather than build from scratch. It turns out that I was lucky because I love information security. It is a little geeky, but I think it is a business with a great purpose that is getting more important every year.”

For David, the major achievements of his career have always been driven by vision. “I was always trying to push the envelope and say ‘there has to be a better way.’” But it is an approach which has not been without its pitfalls, sometimes producing more trouble than results.

“A lesson I learned the hard way was that it is easier to find an environment that fits your personality than [it is] to change your personality to fit an environment,” David explains. In some businesses, management doesn’t like young people shaking things up with new ideas. If you like to create, find an environment that rewards creativity and risk-taking. If you are a detailed, focused thinker, find a career that rewards that kind of work.”

David recalls an early positive work experience where he was part of a team of 20 engineers that developed a completely new form of technology on a very limited timeline, which demonstrated for him the value of teamwork.

“It was our own little *Manhattan Project* because it meant a lot to the company. Those types of “skunkworks” projects are great team-builders,” David says. “Years later, I had a similar experience at Pentasafe. It was a team of really smart people working hard on a common goal. It almost doesn’t matter what you are working on! If there is passion, a well-defined mission, and a great team — that is going to produce good results and be a great experience. Employers should try to create these projects all the time, no matter what the product or the industry.”

He also credits several mentors as having guided him to success over the years, including his first boss at Schlumberger who, despite managing a team of 20 engineers, taught David the importance of teamwork and professional trust by isolating employees from corporate politics and allowing them to do their jobs.

The CEO of Pentasafe also contributed to David’s understanding of his own capabilities by creating a work environment conducive to producing optimum results: “He knew the value of having passion and fun at work. He was a “tough love” kind of a guy, and I really responded to that. He also taught me the value of the sales force. Technology doesn’t do much good if nobody buys it.”

Though he laments the dearth of young people pursuing the field of information security, David believes that the field will grow as more corporations and individuals come to prize their privacy. His advice to new tech professionals is threefold:

“First, make sure you are passionate about



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what you do. Don't go into any career because you feel that you should. In the end, you will never be able to compete against the people who really love what they do. Second, try to keep your eyes open for the next new thing. What are people talking about? What are your friends buying? You can be

a software developer for *any* company. You can become a wealthy software developer working for the right company in a hot market. Finally, don't ignore personal relationships. Successful technology businesses are as much about people as they are about cool technology."

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