

Privacy + Security Forum

Session:

Technically Right & Powerless

Building political capital as a security or privacy leader

Speakers



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About This Session

Wednesday, May 6, 2026
8:50 – 9:50 AM

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The Problem

Being right is not enough.

Security and privacy leaders are often the most technically competent people in their organizations — and among the least resourced.

The result? Initiatives go unfunded, recommendations sit in queues, and headcount requests come back denied.

The gap between competence and authority is real.

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Key Concepts

- Political Capital
- Informal Authority
- Coalition-Building
- Organizational Influence

Definitions

- **Political capital.** The accumulated trust, credibility, and relational currency that enables a leader to get things done inside an organization beyond their formal authority.
- **Informal authority.** Influence that exists independent of title or reporting line. Built through relationships, demonstrated judgment, and consistent follow-through.
- **Coalition-building.** The deliberate work of aligning stakeholders around a shared goal before a formal decision point arrives.

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What It Looks Like

- Funded initiatives
- Recommendations are implemented
- Teams get resourced appropriately
- Credibility that survives a crisis

When Political Capital Works

The business invests before a crisis, not just in response to one.

Security and privacy leaders with real organizational influence are brought into strategic decisions early. Your input shapes products, not just policies, and your recommendations are acted on.

That position is not granted. You build it through relationships, demonstrated judgment, and the deliberate accumulation of trust over time.

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Discussion Questions

- What made you realize being right wasn't enough?
- How do you reframe influence without feeling like a sellout?
- What does coalition-building look like in practice?
- Where's the biggest difference between leaders who build capital and those who don't?

More Questions

- How do you maintain credibility when you're advocating for something the business doesn't want to hear?
- Does title and reporting line matter more than informal authority?
- What do you tell junior practitioners trying to build influence without burning out?
- What's the one thing you wish someone had told you earlier about how power works inside organizations?

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Key Takeaways

1. **Political capital is not a distraction from the work. It is the work.**
2. **Apolitical is not a virtue. Avoiding influence work has a cost.**
3. **Influence gaps are closeable through deliberate behavior, not luck or title.**
4. **The goal is not to become a politician, but to stop being invisible.**

Apply It Monday

Three questions to ask yourself:

- Who are the three people in my organization whose support would most change my ability to do my job — and when did I last invest in those relationships?
- What is one initiative I have stopped pushing for because it felt too political, and is that actually true?

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Further Reading

Books

- Getting to Yes – Fisher & Ury
- Why Should the Boss Listen to you – Lukaszewski
- Influence Without Authority – Cohen & Bradford

Blogs/Articles

- [The Privacy Professional's Influence Starter Kit](#) – Ensign
- [Why are CISOs Afraid of Power?](#) – Ensign
- [Privacy Needs a Better Story](#) – Ensign

Research & Frameworks

- **Cisco Data and Privacy Benchmark Study**
Annual research connecting privacy investment to business outcomes: cisco.com/go/privacybenchmark
- **Boundary Spanning Leadership — Tushman & Katz** Research on how leaders build influence across organizational boundaries:
<https://www.ccl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/boundary-spanning-leadership-research-paper-center-for-creative-leadership.pdf>
- **The Inference Ladder** – Seven-step process for building communication strategies that change minds and drive action:
<https://discernibleinc.com/blog/why-effective-security-communication-starts-with-strategy-not-translation>

Stay in touch: **Connect with the panelists**

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