



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF TALOS

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Talos







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FUCKER IN CHARGE OF THESE
FUCKING FUCKERS

TALOS

VRT

Industry

FUCKER

A LETTER FROM THE OFFICE OF MATT WATCHINSKI

Some opening thoughts from our Fearless Leader on 10 years of Talos.

When I started with Sourcefire 20-plus years ago, I had an idealism about the world, people, and the companies and communities that serve them. While some may find that idealism cliché in today's political environment, I still hold these personal beliefs. It was the simplicity of the idealistic American dream that working hard would pay off in the end. That drove me to believe an organization could live up to those ideals. To achieve an organization that serves the people who work for it, I set out some specific rules that would govern how it would operate. Those principles would guide decision-making, could be passed on to others as it grew, and could be used to create other organizations by sharing them with others.

They were rather simple:

1. **What you are capable of doing is far more important than how the world sees you.** Build an organization that is based on capability, and it will have the best people you can possibly find. It will be diverse in ideas, thoughts, talents, personality and every other difference.
2. **Always take care of your people.** Know them, know what motivates them, know where they are in life, and help them with their journey, not just their work. The bail fund is not a joke. It exists, it's been used, and we've gotten our people home.
3. **Accountability is a two-way street.** It exists up and down the organization. Everyone eats it when something goes wrong, and everyone celebrates when something goes right.
4. **Have a clear target and a common goal.** Overcoming fear, uncertainty and doubt drives us to new ideas, allows us to take better risks, and pushes us to accomplish things that seem impossibly difficult.
5. **Don't be an asshole.** No matter how smart and capable you are, if you can't be part of the group, you aren't useful to it.

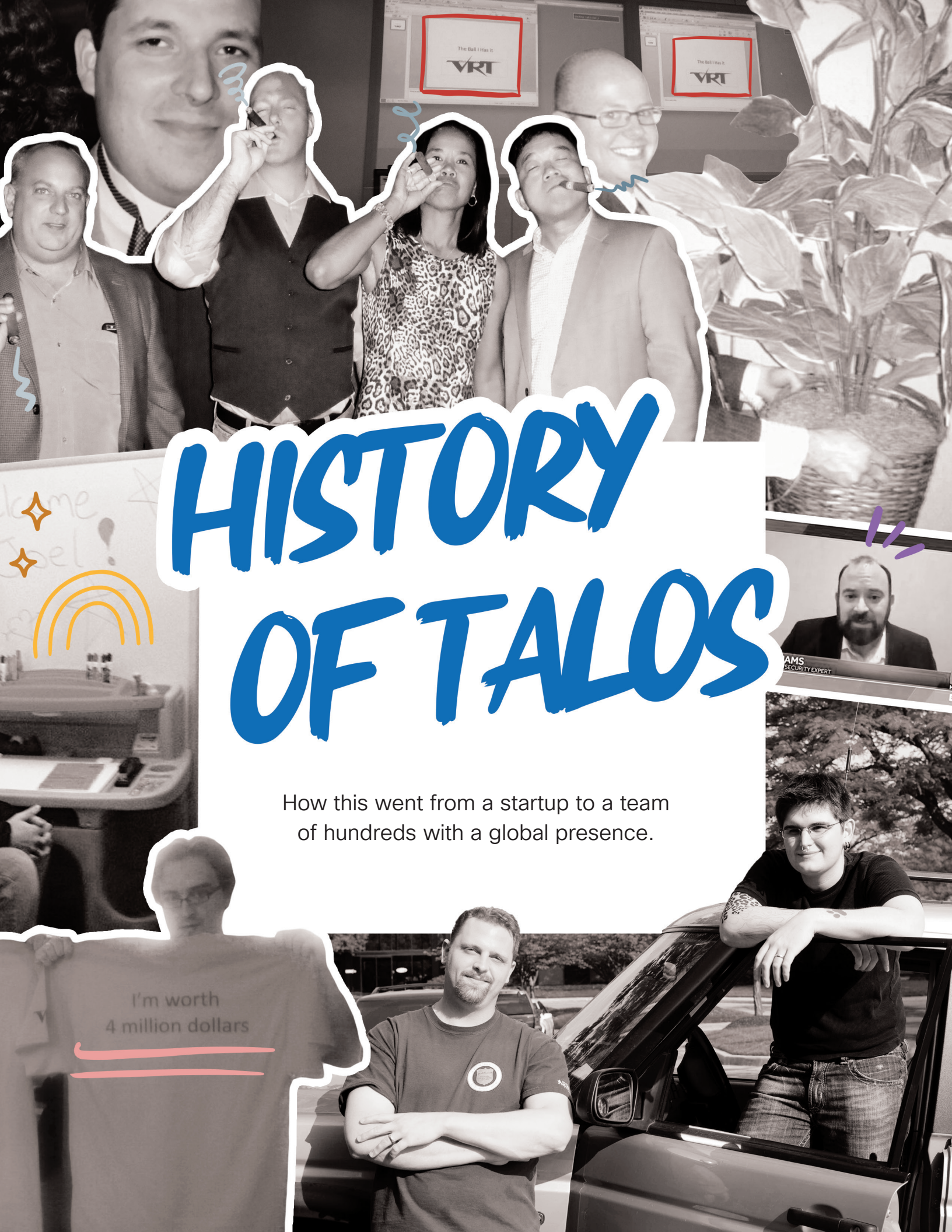
There is one thing I didn't understand then that I understand now. These principles don't build a company, they form a philosophy that, in time, people internalize and rationalize with how they see the world. This means Talos is not an organization, it's an expression of a set of values that operate beyond the bounds of any commercial entity. It brings people together who share these values and focuses on a common enemy of the existential "bad guy." While we can never eliminate evil, we can overwhelm it, contain it, build defenses against it, and protect others from it. We embody this ideal every day, protecting our customers, sharing with competitors, getting involved in global scale events like Ukraine and Israel, working to track down ransomware gangs, and putting customers back together when things go wrong.

As Talos, we have been involved in every major Cisco internal event, every major cybersecurity event, and we will continue to be involved in many more. We are the defenders of the shore, we carry that weight of overcoming evil, and we try and make the world a better place every single day. That is Talos.



Matt Watchinski





HISTORY OF TALOS

How this went from a startup to a team
of hundreds with a global presence.

Talos by the Numbers



Cisco Talos is a proven and trusted threat intelligence research team comprised of world-class researchers, analysts and engineers. Over the past 10 years, the organization has grown, welcoming in new teams, ideas and functions. Here's how Talos stacks up today.



**JUST
ONE**

Talos
organization

Seven

Fearless leaders

500+

Talos employees



25

Total countries where
Taloz has employees.

40+

Number of languages
spoken by our
employees.

60+

Government and
law enforcement
partnerships, including
CTA, JDCD, CISA

1,804

Vulnerabilities the Talos
Vulnerability Research
Team discovered and
helped to patch.

~2,350

Number of
blogs published.



8,500+

Number of tweets



115

YouTube videos



~5M

Podcast downloads

327+

Podcast episodes





2001

Martin Roesch,
the creator of Snort,
founds Sourcefire.

A (SOMEWHAT) COMPLETE TIMELINE OF TALOS' HISTORY

A lot has happened in Talos' 10 years of existence. To help jog your memory, or even fill in some of our newer friends about our history, here's an overview of some of the major events, cyber attacks, research breakthroughs and more that truly make Talos Talos. We hope this walk down memory lane inspires good times reminiscing, second-hand embarrassment, or PTSD from those late nights.



SOURCEfire®

July 2013

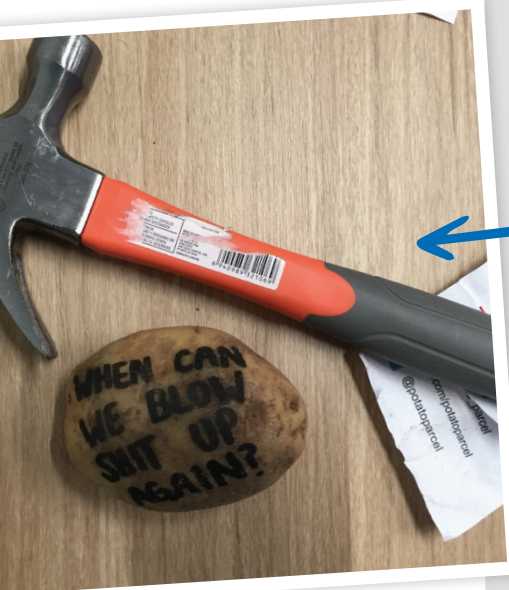
Cisco Systems
announces an
agreement to buy
Sourcefire for
\$2.7 billion.

April 2014

Stakeholders from Sourcefire, Cisco
Threat Research, Analysis and
Communications (TRAC), and Security
Applications (SecApps) start meeting
to discuss the formation of Talos –
including what the name would be!

August 2014

Talos is formally launched at the Black Hat cybersecurity conference.

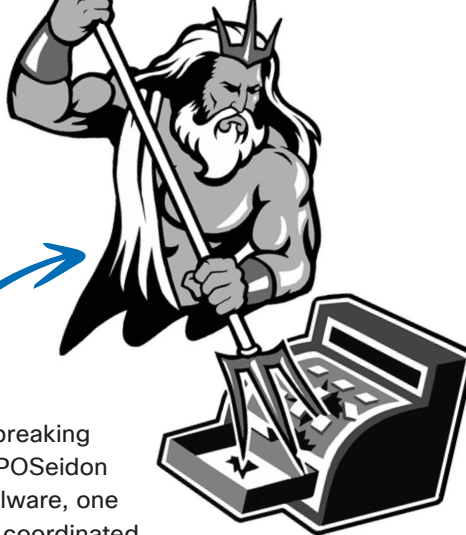


April 2016

- French adware company attempts to sue Matt Olney for \$6M. Cisco's lawyers, tired of dealing with boring contracts, respond with their full force of boredom. And Olney learns how to work with Fitz.
- Talos publishes a blog about a JBoss vulnerability after disclosing it to the company in advance. We get an email after the fact requesting that we remove the blog, apologize for its contents, followed by the infamous line, "Who are you, the Internet Police?" Internet Police becomes a permanent Talos meme, a plaque and the name of our softball team. The blog was not deleted.

March 2015

Talos publishes breaking research on the POSeidon point-of-sale malware, one of the first major coordinated cyber attacks found under the Talos banner.



August 2015

A potato with "When can we blow shit up again?" written on it lands on Matt Watchinski's desk. To this date, no one has claimed responsibility.

October 2015

Talos helped to shut down the Angler exploit kit by cutting off access for customers by updating Cisco products to stop redirects to the Angler proxy servers, and releasing new Snort rules to detect and block checks from the exploit kit. At the time, we estimated that Angler was targeting more than 90,000 users a day and generating \$30 million annually.



August 2016

Olney breaks his ankle trying to kick Craig Williams.



September 2016

The “Advanced Persistent Thirst” kegerator makes its debut in the wild at DerbyCon. The device would go on to make several stops at security conferences. If an attendee could hack the kegerator in a way that would force it to dispense beer, we offered them a job interview.

January 2017

Several Talosians get kicked off the Renton Pond by “The Constable.”

March 2017

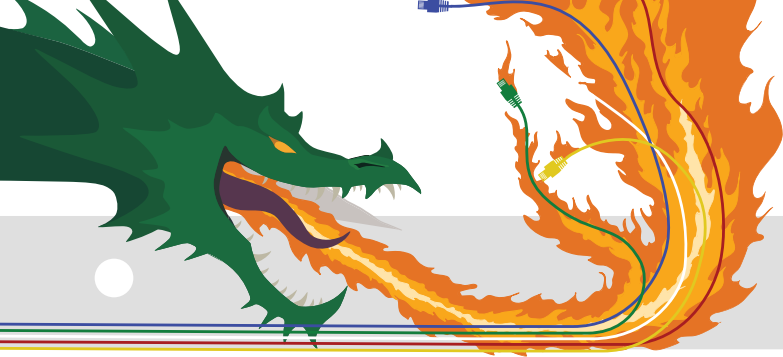
A fileless malware called “DNSMessenger,” which ironically called Sourcefire out by name in its code, spreads via DNS queries to carry out malicious PowerShell commands. Needless to say, the idea to call out Sourcefire didn’t end well for the creators.



May 2017

- WannaCry, which to this day is one of the largest ransomware attacks ever, hits several notable victims, including FedEx and the National Health Service in the U.K. Attackers exploited the NSA-created EternalBlue exploit.
- The first ever episode of Beers with Talos goes live, paving the way for Matt Olney’s internet stardom, and eventually the infamous “Juiceboxes with Talos” episode that David Ulevitch so kindly let us make at the SBG all-hands meeting.





June 2017

- EternalBlue pops up again, this time with the Nyetya ransomware attack (still a much better name than Not Petya, maintains Mitch). The attackers primarily deployed the malware via a fake update to the Ukrainian-made MeDoc tax software.

SOLAT IN THE SWEN

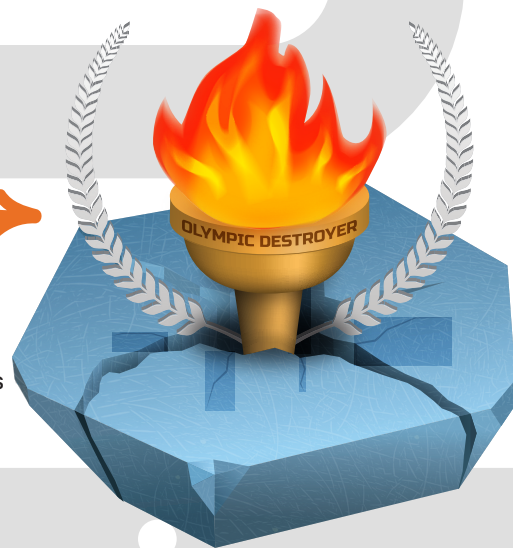
- A team of Talosians comes first in the Fake News Challenge after creating a tool that uses advanced machine learning and artificial intelligence technology to detect fake headlines and misleading “facts.”

November 2017

To pay for a Spam Masterclass, Talos used Connected Recognition to purchase Amazon gift cards to buy Bitcoin. Cisco Lawyers got scared and told us that the Bitcoin was worth \$1.2 million and we should “never tell the FBI” before we told them it was, in fact, just \$200 at the time.

February 2018

Talos’ first foray into the Olympic Games goes about as you’d expect – we found samples of malware used to disrupt various technologies at the games, including ticket-taking operations during the Opening Ceremony. OlympicDestroyer would have ripple effects for months as we tried to figure out who exactly was (or wasn’t) behind the attack.



April 2018

Talos feels the pain of dealing with a replacement FBI guy called Chad whilst our usual contact is on vacation. We respond by creating a T-shirt with “Fuck Chad” in Russian on it but got the translation wrong. So very, very wrong.



May 2018

After several months of research, communication and teamwork with multiple government agencies, Talos publishes our findings on VPNFilter, a massive malware campaign from Russian state-sponsored actors. At the time of publishing, we estimated that VPNFilter affected more than 500,000 internet-connected devices. We encouraged users to throw their outdated routers off a tall building.

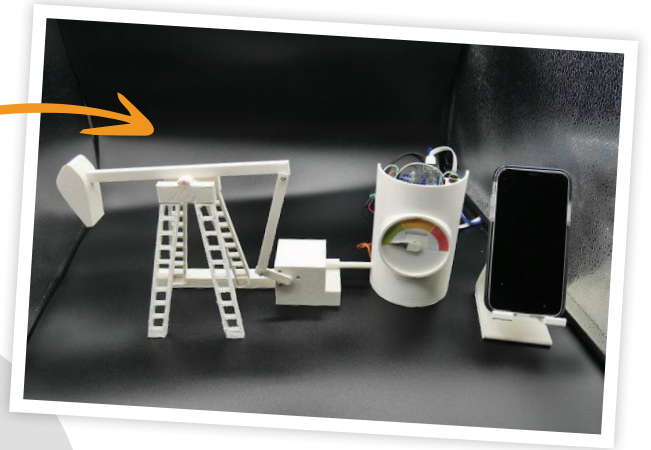


November 2018

DNSpionage, a previously undiscovered malware, makes headlines for targeting a Lebanese airline and companies in the United Arab Emirates. Adversaries set up fake job application phishing pages hoping to infect targets with malicious Microsoft Word applications.

February 2019

Talos releases our 3-D printed model of an oil pumpjack into the wild to demonstrate how an attacker could overload it if it exploits the human-machine interface the pump relies on. It's quickly a hit at conferences, and the video of it "exploding" is still popular on social media today.



September 2019

The first product goes live using the Talos Anaheim architecture, an intelligence delivery architecture that significantly modernized and enhanced the way Cisco Security products consume Talos threat intelligence, under the Tomorrowland program.

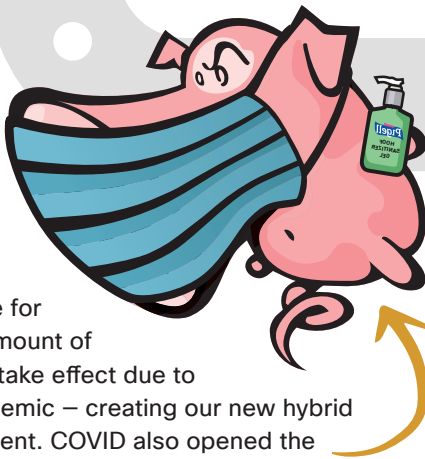


October 2019

- Talos is awarded the Péter Szőr Award at Virus Bulletin for their work on the blog "DNS Hijacking Abuses Trust in Core Internet Service."
- Cisco Talos Incident Response is officially launched on Cisco TV. Merging Incident Response from Cisco's CX organization with Talos' threat intelligence, Talos IR offers proactive and reactive assistance to customers around the world.

March 2020

We're all sent home for an undetermined amount of time as lockdowns take effect due to the COVID-19 pandemic – creating our new hybrid work-first environment. COVID also opened the doors for adversaries to carry out all sorts of scams, from fake COVID relief payments to spam related to the virus, disinformation about treatments, and more.



May 2020

Talos' Vulnerability Research team takes part in the Microsoft Azure Sphere Research Challenge, eventually discovering 16 security vulnerabilities in the popular application platform. Talos was one of only a handful of teams selected for the challenge. Specifically, a vulnerability the team discovered made headlines for potentially allowing an adversary to acquire Azure Sphere Capabilities, the most valuable Linux normal-world permissions in the Azure Sphere context.

September 2020

Threat Intelligence Platform (TIP) acquired by Talos from the Security & Trust Organization

October 2020

Talos launches a series of whitepapers called “What to Expect When You’re Electing,” covering all things disinformation and election security. To this day, Matt Olney is very proud of this name.

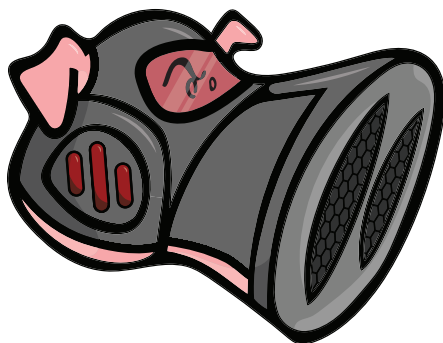


November 2020

The infamous “pig couch” goes viral after a fake Craigslist ad for it spreads on social media. This somehow ended up with the Snort Twitter account also going viral, and Marty Roesch making it into The New York Times.

December 2020

Capping off a string of major supply chain attacks, adversaries compromise the legitimate SolarWinds Orion IT management software to deploy malware via a fake software update. Thus, panic ensues around patching.



January 2021

- Snort 3, the first major release for Snort in more than a decade, goes open-source.
- Talos disclosed more vulnerabilities than any other company that does not buy them, according to studies commissioned by ZDI covering 2018 - 2021.

November 2021

Threat Detection & Response team's Research & Efficacy Team (RET) moves into Talos.



December 2021

- Just days before the annual winter shutdown, the internet nearly catches on fire with the infamous Log4shell vulnerability in Log4j. This spawns emergency response teams, livestreams, podcast recordings, and more.
- The Talos Analytics Platform (TAP) went into production.



February 2022

The Russian military launches an offensive assault against Ukraine. Talos immediately responds to assist Ukraine, capitalizing on yearslong partnerships to help keep critical infrastructure online and users protected from a barrage of cyber attacks. We would also assist Talos teammates in staying protected, supporting them in moving to other countries. Multiple Talos team members even opt to enlist in the Ukrainian military. Slava Ukraini!

March 2022

Umbrella's Threat Research and Engineering teams move into Talos



May 2022

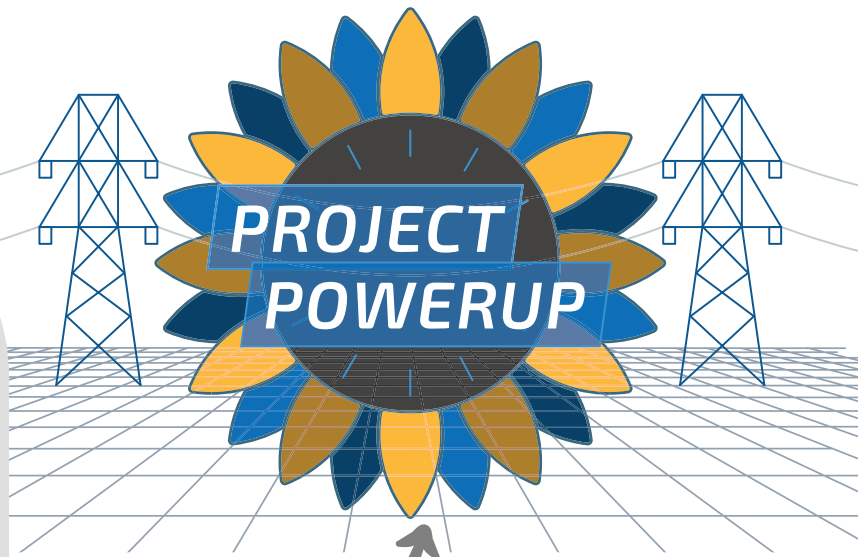
ClamAV, Sourcefire's original anti-virus detection solution, turns 20 (and will finally go 1.0 a few months later!)

April 2023

Cisco and Talos help to launch the Network Resilience Coalition, a group of technology companies working to ensure users and companies upgrade and update their network infrastructure. The effort was launched after the discovery of JaguarTooth, a massive campaign targeting unpatched wireless routers.

May 2023

Talos enters the world of private sector offensive actors (PSOAs) by disclosing new technical details about the Predator spyware and its creator, Intellexa. Spyware from these so-called “mercenary groups” is still spreading, often being used to target potentially sensitive users like journalists, activists and politicians.

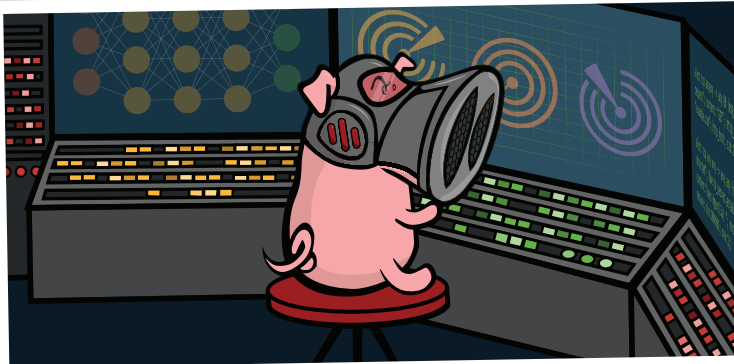


December 2023

After months of work, Talos is finally able to discuss the details of Project PowerUp, a cross-team effort to help protect Ukraine's power grid and the GPS positioning it relies on. Spearheaded by Joe Marshall, the multi-national, multi-company global team of power grid security practitioners, who had never worked together before, built a device to help Ukraine keep the lights on.

March 2024

Talos releases SnortML, a machine learning-based detection engine for the Snort Intrusion prevention system.



April 2024

Secure Firewall begins their 7.6 IFT/Beta that incorporates the long-awaited Talos Enrichment Service, a new cloud service that provides enhanced context behind our convictions.

August 2024

Talos celebrates its 10th anniversary – cheers to many more!



The History of Talos

OR

HOW WE TRICKED A
FORTUNE 500 COMPANY
INTO BUILDING THE
EXPERTISE TO GO PLACES
AND FIX THINGS.



The Yearbook team sat down with the Talos leadership team including Matt Watchinski, Luci Lagrimas, Lee Jones, Matt Olney, Amy Henderson, Lurene Grenier, Liz Cooperrider, Chris Marshall and Brad Garnett.

This is the story of how Talos was formed, from all different angles. How a four-page email led Matt Watchinski to an initial gathering in San Jose where Luci showed off her guns. How no business school class would ever design a company like Talos. And how Talos became a haven for smart weirdos to do amazing shit in an understanding space.





The Sourcefire years

Matt Watchinski: What I remember most from the early years of Sourcefire was all of us being crowded into a minuscule meeting room. We spent our days discussing huge, complicated shit. There was a discrepancy between the size of the room and the loftiness of our goals. Some people lost in that room, and some people won. But there was so much mutual respect and understanding for what we set out to achieve.



Lurene Grenier: The Sourcefire goal was to build the best and most open product we could. At the time, all the rules had to be written by hand, without any guidance. We had no contracts with any companies. The biggest thing on the map at that point was Microsoft [Patch] Tuesday bugs, and they were all remote root bugs. Every month, 15 - 20 of those bugs would get dropped. It was my job to grab the patches, patch the systems, reverse engineer the patches, and write an exploit for the bug. And then I would pass that exploit to Patrick Mullen or Matt Olney and they would write the rules. We would write the documentation, package everything up and send that to QA. And then at some time, around 3 or 4 in the morning, we would ship it and go home.



Chris Marshall: We all collectively believed that we could be the best security team on the planet. We were so passionately driven to achieve things together. And we went out of our way to take care of each other to make sure those two other things happened.

Watchinski: That created a very tight-knit executive group that could change priorities on a dime, and then actually execute on them – without anybody coming back and saying, “The dumbest decision in the entire world was just made in that tiny room. Now we have to go and do stupid shit.” Everybody came back from that room and said, “Alright, this is the thing that’s going to make Sourcefire the most successful, and so that’s the direction we’re going to march in.”

Lurene: We significantly changed the security posture and behaviour of Fortune 50 companies on the regular, with about 30 people. We were doing things that the industry said was impossible. And my favorite part was we had executives from those Fortune 50 companies coming out to buy us lunch, begging us to stop telling the public the truth.

Pictured: A collection of photos from the early days of Sourcefire.



WWWD

The acquisition of Sourcefire

Marshall: I came to Sourcefire from the U.S. military. I had no idea what being acquired meant.

Watchinski: We had been in negotiations with Cisco for about six months. I couldn't tell anyone about that though. Twenty-four hours before the deal closed, we were sent details of our compensation, titles, etc. It wasn't good enough, frankly. Our people were the most important thing about Sourcefire, and losing any one of them would have been devastating. So those final negotiations went on until 4 a.m. We didn't stop until we had reached a deal that meant all our people would be able to stay on board and would end up in the places that they wanted to be, and where they felt that they will be most successful. At 4:30 a.m., I sent a text to my directs, telling them that something big was happening, and they should come into the office at 7 a.m.

Marshall: At the time, I ran the response work. And Watchinski didn't tell me if there was a problem. So, my instincts told me something was really wrong. "Who else do I need to call? How bad is the situation?" And he just replied, "I just need you there first thing in the morning." So, the next morning Watchinski walked in, and me, Olney and Nigel [Houghton, former director of Talos Operations] are standing around anxiously. Watchinski is carrying two brown paper bags. He puts the bags on the table and starts pulling out bottles – Bloody Mary mixes and all this other stuff. And then he pulls out alcohol and said, "Cisco just bought us. We're not working today."

Watchinski: I had asked everyone to bring their teams in. I wanted us all to be together so that I could talk through the acquisition, have that interaction with everybody, and answer anyone's questions. I'm sure most of us were tanked halfway through the presentation that started at 9 a.m.

Chris,

Over the last several weeks I've had the opportunity to work directly with the leaders and individual contributors on the TRAC, TRIAD, SRO/IPS Signature teams, and several other departments that are working on threat related activities. Throughout all of our discussions and collaborations, one thing is very clear, the missions of all of these groups are intertwined but they are not aligned. This seems to have resulted in pockets of execution, overlapping resources, and a general lack of a cohesive threat intelligence mission.

When I look back at the success of ISS XForce and the VRT the overriding principles that made those organizations successful, in the Cyber Security realm, were alignment of mission, a maniacal focus on Threat detection, efficiency through centralized resources, and a consistent culture. Without this alignment, organizations like TippingPoint went from the darling of the analyst community to the back of the industry when they produced a 17% detection result at NSS due to their split signature creation teams and research arms. ISS experienced a similar decline when IBM changed the performance metrics from including threat detection to one that was solely focused on revenue generation.

I believe Cisco has the opportunity to build the most effective Threat organization in the industry by consolidating a number of teams and groups under a single banner, with a single mission, and a single culture. This group would give SBG and thus Cisco the following advantages.

1. A single location responsible for Threat Detection. One throat to choke if our products do not protect our customers against the threats they were designed to catch.
2. A single location responsible for Threat Intelligence storage, analysis, and dissemination.
3. An aligned detection strategy, where all products receive the same response content to detect threats resulting in consistency across all products.
4. An aligned mission around threat research and how to detect the "next" threat.
5. An aligned organization that can better compete against established competitors like Mandiant who are already aligned, and upstarts like FireEye who are following aligned models.
6. A single banner under which to build a focused culture that understands threat.

I believe this aligned group could dominate the security industry and aligns with Cisco's strategy of being the #1 Security partner for our Customers. Without this alignment I fear we will not be well positioned to compete effectively against the large incumbents in this space and the many startups who threaten our mindshare.

Cheers,
-matt



*Matt Watchinski's
original email to Chris Young.*

Three teams coming together

Watchinski: For the first year after the acquisition, Sourcefire continued as the VRT (Vulnerability Research Team). During that time, we met various people across Cisco and tried to figure out what they all did. What I observed was that there were a lot of people simply not working together.

One night, I wrote a four-page email and sent it to the leader of SBG at the time, Chris Young. It was along the lines of, "This is so fucking dumb. You have all these random threat assets strewn throughout the organization under no aligned leadership." The solution I offered was to "Give all of this shit to me and I'll fix it."

I didn't really expect a response. And I never actually heard back from Chris. I did hear from John Stewart though [the leader of the Security Trust Organization at the time]. John told me that I had a choice: "If that's what you want to do, you could either come over to my team and we can build what you want to build. Or, you can go to Mike Furman's [VP of Engineering] team and build what you want to build over there. But I think you should come to my team."

"GIVE ALL OF THIS SHIT
TO ME AND I'LL FIX IT."



Luci's photo from her original slide deck
at the first Talos meeting.

I chose Mike's team. That was mostly because, during my time getting to know everyone on Mike's team, I had met Luci. And I really liked Luci. She could see the same problems I was seeing. So, we started hatching a plan on how we could be successful together.

I gave a presentation to what was then three different groups – VRT, Cisco Threat Research, Analysis and Communications (TRAC), and Security Applications (SecApps). I proposed bringing together a singular set of services, a singular threat research and intelligence team, a singular understanding of our data, and a singular voice of how we talk about security.

Luci Lagrimas: That was a day I'll always remember. We all gave presentations about who we were and who our teams were. I put three pictures on an

"About Me" slide, and one of them was me playing field hockey, wearing a T-shirt that definitely showed off my guns. Olney leans over to Marshall and says, "Dude, she can kick our ass!"

Marshall: My first impression of Luci was that slide. That set the tone for these teams coming together, because here's this badass lady with a field hockey stick causing carnage on the field, and that's what we were going to bring into our group. That's how Chinski kept Olney in line, knowing at any moment he could get a hockey stick to the head.

Luci: I learned afterward that Matt [Watchinski] had said to them beforehand, "I really like Luci and she's going to work great on our team." That's why they started joking around with me. They trusted Matt. They're a tough group, but for me to be accepted from the get-go was great.



The Talos brand is born



Matt Olney: Up until that meeting in San Jose, those of us in the VRT had consciously created a bubble around ourselves. We didn't want anything to change from the Sourcefire days. And we wanted to protect ourselves from whatever big company bullshit they were about to inflict on us. A lot of us had worked for big companies before and knew that when you start abstracting people from being human beings and turning them into employee IDs, everything changes. So, every chance we had to deflect, we took. But then, Matt explained that he had this idea to bring us together with Luci's team and the data science team. That's when he told us we needed to drop the VRT brand (and to an extent, the bubble).

Watchinski: I knew that having three different brands and messages wouldn't work. We needed the branding to reflect on who we were as a new team coming together. That was a point of unity — giving up what the VRT had built from a brand perspective for over 10 years. And asking the others to do the same.

Lee Jones: My first exposure to Matt [Watchinski] was a cultural definition point, because Matt came in and did what he's great at, which is coalesce things. It was incredible to watch how he started forming the vision of what Talos was going to be.

Watchinski: I believe that to have an effective team, you need three things: a mission that everybody understands, a culture that everybody can work in, and some type of icon that people can rally behind. Al [Huger] would always say, "This is how you build a cult!" And I would reply, "Yeah, kinda...but the good kind of cult."

Luci: Between April and August 2014, the team leaders all threw different ideas into the ring about what we would be called and what sort of brand could represent who we were becoming.

Watchinski: If I remember it right, it was Olney who came up with Talos, protector of the shores. That one resonated most with everyone, because it aligned with our main mission of protecting our customers.

Olney: It came about because we wanted something big to represent us. We were now part of a team that was focussed on much more than vulnerabilities. We wanted to have a larger voice as an organization, and a larger role in security consciousness.

Luci: Talos was officially chosen, and we launched at Black Hat in 2014.



Photos from Black Hat 2014, where the Talos brand was launched.



The team grows



Liz Cooperrider: Luci hired me to be her sole Program Manager in 2013. About 10 months later, SecApps merged with the VRT to become Talos. Initially, I was intimidated by people in the VRT. As were many of my peers. My perception was that the VRT was like the wild frontier. It was only in 2019, five years later, that I really got to know everyone properly. This is when I started reporting directly to Matt [Watchinski]. He elevated the Project Management Office (PMO) and the value of what we brought to the organization. I then realised that these are people that care. They really, really care.

Since 2019, we've been able to grow and become such an integral part of Talos, mainly because I was given a lot of independence and autonomy from Matt [Watchinski] and the team. I had the ability to expand my team based on my judgement, and I received support every single step of the way. Never, at any time, did someone say to me, "That's not a good enough justification. I don't see a need for that." And that comes from the strong partnership that we have. Marshall saw what was happening within Luci's organization and the PMO and how much we were scaling upwards, and he said, "OK, yeah, I could do with some of that."

Lee: After Talos was formed, I ended up moving to Marty Roesch's team who was chief architect of security at the time. I was working across the Cisco portfolio, helping them to design products from a security perspective. That went on for several years, and then around 2018, Marty exited and that left a transition. I was looking for the next place to go.

So, I came back home to Talos. 2018 was a transition point for Talos at that time, too. It had a very good sense of self, but it lacked partnerships with product engineers. In coming back, my role was to focus on working with Luci to transition the architectural aspect of Talos, and get it to a trusted product partner level,

global in scope and scale, beyond the core competency of the security mission.

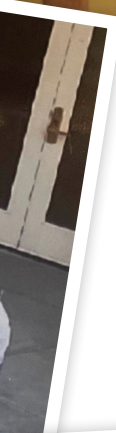
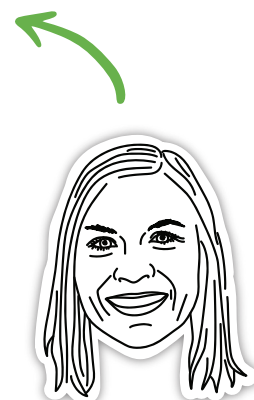
Lee: We created a service delivery architecture called "Tomorrowland," and we partnered with the right parts and pieces within SBG. Tomorrowland was a big turning point in the maturity of the engineering organization, which then gave maturity to the Talos organization. It didn't change our security capabilities themselves, but our ability to project our power went up.

Luci: If we didn't do what we did five years ago to modernize all the major things that the security products use today, we would be in a world of hurt. That was key for us to scale our services globally.

Lee: At a lot of other places, rank and hierarchy matter. Titles matter, and there can be a top-down approach sometimes. But at Talos, there's a culture of asking questions and pushing back to see, "Do I really believe this and want to incorporate this to my mission?" That was very energizing. I sat back and thought, "This is where I want to be. I'm happy. This is what I was hoping for."

Amy Henderson: I was a portfolio manager in the CX organisations in Cisco, and at that time (October 2019), one of our key services was Incident Response. The IR team worked very closely with Talos, sharing intelligence, understanding what's going on at a customer site when things go down, etc. We eventually came to the decision that Incident Response should be Talos Incident Response, bringing those teams under one umbrella.

I got to know Chinski and Olney and really enjoyed working with them. But there was a moment during the transition that the Talos team pulled back. They said they wanted to pause things because it wasn't being done in the right way. Not being part of Talos at that point, I really appreciated their honesty and integrity. Because when you're working towards delivering on a priority, sometimes you end up just pushing the ball down the road without necessarily getting





Brad Garnett appearing live on Cisco TV to announce the launch of Talos IR.

the outcome that you want. It's important to take stock and think about, "Is this actually what we want to achieve?"

I pinged Olney and said how much I respected their decision. Because it showed the character of the Talos team. They're not going to rubber stamp everything and say it's OK when it's not.

After that, Olney sent me a message because he knew I wasn't happy in CX and asked if I wanted to come over to Talos. "Let's talk!" I said. He had me speak to everyone on his team because he said, "Listen, if you're going to come work for me, you better know what working for me is like."

Brad Garnett: I was another Talos transplant. I was running the Incident Response team on the CX side, and as Amy mentioned it just made sense to bring us into Talos. Response and intelligence are like peanut butter and jelly, it just goes together.

We gathered in London in the fall of 2019 – Olney, Matthew, Pierre, Amy and I, and we talked about what IR might look like inside of Talos? Our brand, reputation, integration, intelligence services etc. I still have that agenda from nearly five years ago.

When we were ready to officially launch Talos IR, I was due to fly out to San Jose

to appear on Cisco TV. Just before I left for the airport some Talos IR swag arrived, so I got to wear this awesome gear whilst I appeared on Cisco TV. I was so proud to represent the incredible work our team does.

I'll always cherish that memory. I still remember our first three customers, and now in 2024 we've expanded to have over 500 active IR contracts.

That helps me bring perspective – no matter how challenging things get, we've hugely grown in scale. Customers need us more than ever. And our mission has grown to not just helping customers on an individual level, but to use that experience to protect all of our customers. "Never let a good incident go to waste," as I frequently say to my team. "Take what we're seeing and go help more people."

The mission

Olney: When people ask me what I do I say, "Well, I tricked a Fortune 500 company into allowing me to build the expertise that allows me to go places and fix things." I'm most proud of the work that we do that makes no sense from a corporate or financial perspective – the election security work, the Ukraine work, the NGO work. The stuff that doesn't turn a dollar but makes the world a better place. To do all that within a capitalistic entity is pretty remarkable.

There is no Harvard Business School class that would ever sit down and design Talos. But that's what makes me so proud of this team. We don't approach security problems the way corporate entities do. They want problems they can solve problems quickly and profitably. We approach it as, "How can I positively affect the most amount of people?"

Luci: Whenever I see Talos in the news, I just feel really proud to be a part of an organization that isn't out there just for the money. We're out there to make the world a better place.



Amy: What's common amongst the folks that we hire is they know that sometimes they'll need to drop everything and pivot to a rapid response effort. I hope they know that our leadership team fights to give them air cover to a) keep them sane during those times, and b) makes sure that they have what they need. As a leadership team we fight for budgets and time and resources that can help them, because our people have such an innate sense of doing the right thing. We know that the lengths that people go to, and that's one of the many reasons why we will protect them every single day.

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Talos challenges

Liz: There's this perpetual myth that Talos is a "black hole." A secretive organization where no one really understands what we're doing and we're just all off doing our own thing. Bullshit. That is such an old story. I think people are surprised to find out how much regimented process there within Talos, which enables us to deliver on the level that we do.

Lurene: We are necessary to make all of the security products at Cisco run. Without us, there's no intelligence for them to consume and act upon. There's no connection from the engineering to the ecosystem of the internet without us. And that's actually a great deal of work. And it takes a lot of people. Conveying that we need support, and we need resources in order to support new things that come into the group is a little challenging. In fact, explaining the world of security, which is a world of costs to people who are profit centric, is extremely difficult.

Watchinski: Oftentimes, people upstream don't understand the complexity of the question that they're asking us as Talos. And it's difficult to go back to somebody and say, "You have asked a very generic question. And I can give you a very generic ChatGPT answer. And it may sound great on paper, but it will not actually help you accomplish anything." And so, there's always a disconnect between that generic question and what somebody is actually trying to accomplish. That can take a long time to suss out.

Marshall: We have a lot of very smart people that do true innovation. Look at Yves' team [Vulnerability Research]. Every time they find a new zero-day, they find something that's never been seen before. We continually need the technology to be built to have the features and capabilities that will allow us to truly excel and be the tip of the spear that we want to be. But we'll always keep tying ourselves to things that protect our customers. So, we have to ride out the wave of AI and whatever comes after that, just like we did for NFTs and blockchain.

Brad: In security, sure, you've got to be agile and pivot...but regardless of whatever buzzword that other people/companies start throwing resources at, you have to be disciplined enough to stay close to the problem. I always tell my folks that we are customer facing. If you stay close to the customer, you will always know what problems we need to solve.

Olney: There are things we have to do. There's no getting around that. But when Talos is at our best...it's not when we're doing the things we have to do. It's when we ask bold questions, "What if this could work?" "What if we tried this?" There was an all-hands call, and at one point I said, "Go fuck up. Go make mistakes." I know Lurene says very similar things to her team.

What we mean is...every time that we have astonished ourselves is when we have pursued things that we have been passionate about outside of the corporate interest. And then Matt and the leadership team's job is to make sure that the thing that you've done does, in fact, serve the corporate interest.



Clockwise from top left: A Team Atlas team outing to Looney's in June 2023; Members of the DRT out to dinner at the Detection Summit in November 2022; A collection of Talosians in the West Coast office watching an all-hands meeting; A team photo from the Hunter Hoedown in 2023; A team photo from one of Matt Watchinski's leadership offsite in 2022.

"WE WANT
TALOS BE A
THING THAT'S
WORTH BEING
YOURSELF
WITH."





Our culture

Lurene: In the early days of Sourcefire, there was no situation that came up where we couldn't sit down together and come up with a plan to solve it. We would make it work, and in so doing, we would make a change in the industry. We were given the space to do that. Matt [Watchinski] would say, "Go figure this out, come up with some plans, give me three options, and then we're gonna pick one of them and do it."

When I came back to Talos two years ago, I was so pleased to see that everybody had protected that culture. I know how hard everyone must have fought to do that, and to pass on our culture to new leaders in the group. I'm really proud of that.

It's our job to make people feel comfortable who might not feel comfortable elsewhere. Developing a space for people who are extremely valuable team members but might

have trouble thriving in an extremely generic environment. I am one of those people, so I know I can say that.

Olney: We want Talos be a thing that's worth being yourself with. Our culture is very conscious. Dropping F bombs on all hands is a conscious decision. Matt showing up in khakis and ratty tennis shoes and hair that has never seen a comb a day of his life, is a conscious decision. We didn't do a survey and figure out, "Employees are 2.5% more engaged if you give them free drinks." No. You get to define who you are, and who you want to be at Talos. And you get to define what you want your experience at Talos to be like.

Lurene: Talos is a haven for smart weirdos to get their shit done in understanding space. It's a place where you come to work, do something you really love doing, and be a human being. People are free to be themselves.

Liz: In other teams and other organizations, there can be a culture of retribution. I've seen it. If a team doesn't make their deliverable, there's a "rip them up one side and down the other" response. There's zero compassion and no understanding – "Why did that fail?" Within Talos, we can fail and fail fast because there is so much clear transparency. If any of our teams are struggling or having issues, I want to hear about them now, not 2 – 3 months from now where the issue has grown from peanut sized to walnut sized. That's completely a part of the culture.

Marshall: It really is. Until I myself attain perfection, it's unfair for me to expect perfection from anyone else.

Olney: We ask so much of our people. We ask them to move fast and make tough decisions, sometimes without all the necessary information. If we were set the tone that every time someone screwed up, it was a job threatening situation, then people



would be far more hesitant. They would work inside of smaller boxes. They would think smaller, and they would act less boldly. They would fade into the background more often. That's the exact opposite of what we want.

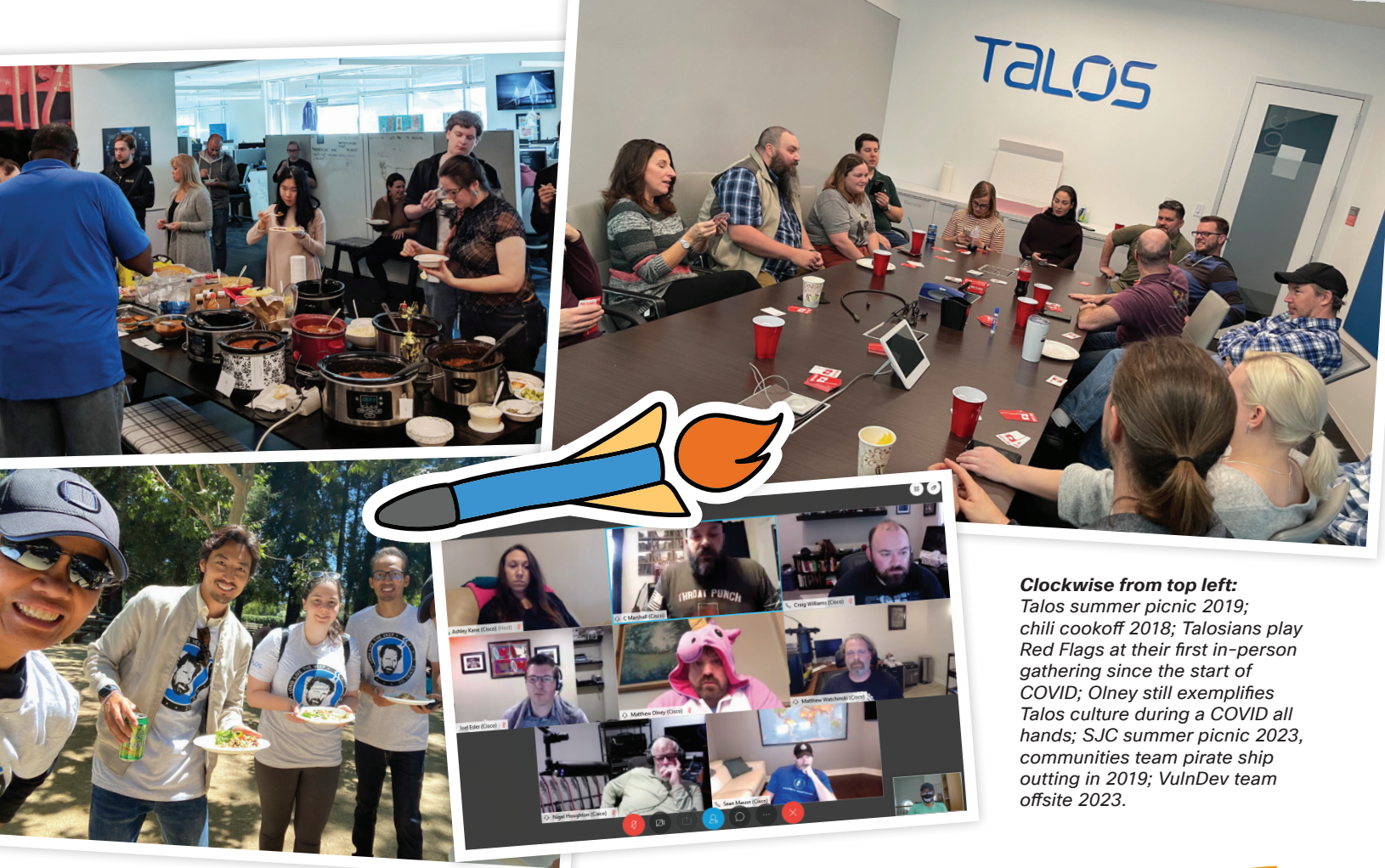
We want every part of you that is you. I don't want Joe Marshall to be a corporate shell for security. I want Joe Marshall to be every part of who Joe Marshall is. The crazy idioms, the unexpected charisma, the warmth...all of that is every bit as valuable as any technical accomplishment. There's no OKR for Joe to build relationships with the Ukrainians and then come up with a solution that helps them keep the lights on. It's just what we do...it's just what we, as Talos, do.

Amy: We build our teams on shared experiences – and while yes, some of those shared experiences are incredibly difficult because of the nature of our work, the shared experiences

we have in the downtime are very special too. The darts in the office (although they're now foam for...reasons...), Richard Harman bringing in morning doughnuts and scheduling regular lunches, Colin setting up a Pets Positivity group because sometimes, you just need to stare at cat pictures for a while. Marshall's cookouts! Marshall's cookouts are amazing.

Marshall: I love to cook for everyone. I pour a lot of my heart into those days. I learn what people like, what they don't like, and I create a menu for 130-plus people. Luci has adopted that over on the West Coast now, too. It means so much to me and to so many others to just get together, enjoy each other's company, and catch up.

Olney: We don't centralize so much in the office since COVID. But there are still lots of incredible moments when we do get together. Last year's white elephant gift exchange Christmas party where essentially 40 people partook in



Clockwise from top left:
Talos summer picnic 2019;
chili cookoff 2018; Talosians play
Red Flags at their first in-person
gathering since the start of
COVID; Olney still exemplifies
Talos culture during a COVID all
hands; SJC summer picnic 2023,
communities team pirate ship
outing in 2019; VulnDev team
offsite 2023.

**"TALOS IS A HAVEN FOR SMART WEIRDOS TO GET
THEIR SHIT DONE IN UNDERSTANDING SPACE."**

utter nonsense. It was the most beautiful nonsense you can imagine. And the best part is knowing that, if needed, all these ridiculous people would turn around in an instant and execute at the absolute highest level of whatever it was that they do.

Watchinski: Our culture is the thing I'm most proud of, of all the things Talos has achieved over the past 10 years.

Liz: Talos is also very family-first. I remember once I was caring for my father. He had had a hip replacement, and I was to take care of him when he came home from the hospital. I thought I could do it by myself – be his 24-hour nurse and do my job at the same time. I showed up to a sync with Chinski, and he immediately knew something was wrong. He wasn't interested in any of the business side of things. He simply said, "Go. Go take care of your father."

Marshall: I stand by the idea that if I take care of my people,

my people take care of me. That's something I ask of all my managers – just take care of your people. The No. 2 thing I ask is to meet the needs of the business.

Watchinski: A lot of people in this organization have been with me for 5,10,15 even 20 years. They've gone from junior analyst to senior director inside a Fortune 500 company. And even when you look at all the folks that have left the organization over the years, they've all gone on to do great things.

Marshall: No matter what, I want people to be better for their time spent with us. And if they exit tomorrow but they've accomplished that, then we've done our job.

Brad: People who have moved on from Talos have said to me, "The Talos years are some of the best years of my career." To me, that's worth protecting. And it's worth defending.



THE GHOSTS OF TALOS LEADERSHIP PAST

You've heard from the current leadership team for Cisco Talos. Now, it's time to hear from some of our former colleagues, who were just as instrumental as the creation and growth of Talos. The Yearbook team spoke with previous Talos leaders **Craig Williams**, **Joel Esler** and **Nigel Houghton** to get their take on some of Talos' stand out memories. You can take the leader out of Talos, but never the Talos out of the leader.



The Sourcefire acquisition

Joel Esler: Chinski called me at 6 a.m. and told me to come into the office. I had a feeling that meant that the Cisco deal had finally gone through. During my 90-minute car ride I began to think about the opportunities this was a chance for us to change the security industry, to change the game. We have a lot of really smart people and we're going to come into one of the largest networking and security companies in the world and we're going to see what

difference we can make. By the time I arrived at the office, I was feeling really optimistic.

Nigel Houghton: I was on PTO, and Chinski called me at home. I had two thoughts. The first one was, "Oh, God. Are we giving up?" And the second was, "Oh, awesome. We'll get paid more."

Craig Williams: I was at Cisco when they were considering acquiring yet another company. My role involved writing signatures and finding bugs in code so they told me, "We're looking at Sourcefire. We want you to go over there and make sure everything's as it's supposed to be."



Early memories

Nigel: It was a bit of a rough birth, to be honest. We came out head-first, but then we got one shoulder stuck. But then we ended up turning around and coming out with our feet.

I remember the discussions about what we were going to be called. We knew we didn't want an acronym. We asked Cisco marketing for help, and of course got nothing back at all. We said, "Alright nobody's coming to help. So we'll do it." We all started brainstorming, writing lists of names that we liked. I was putting down names like "Larry and David" and stuff like that. I've been helpful since the start.

Joel: Tetra was one of the names that people liked until somebody got on a call and said, "Have you tried to do the SEO around the word 'Tetra,' because you know it's a fish, right?"

Nigel: Of course, Olney came up with the name Talos because he was playing some game at the time with Grecian gods in it or whatever. You know how he is.

Craig: I think the funnier story is where "Pissing off the bad guys" came from. We wanted to have a slogan, but it couldn't be, "Talos, Cisco's security team" because nobody would care about that. We wanted our customers to understand what we were doing and why it was different. We all agreed that we liked "Pissing off the bad guys" most, but we also agreed that Cisco were never going to let that fly.

Joel and I went to Mark Soloman's office with a list of slogans. We were going to open with "Pissing off the bad guys" as a bit of a throwaway joke. And then we had two backups. Joel set the stage for two minutes and then pitched, "So, really, we're all about pissing off the bad guys." With no hesitation whatsoever, Mark proclaimed that he loved it, and I carefully slid the list of other slogans back into my pocket.

Standout memories

Joel: The Kyle and Stan work stands out for me. Richard Harman found this piece of malware that used domain names that were all South Park related. I started looking at the samples and they had a very specific structure at the end of it. I wrote a Clam AV signature that caught millions of pieces of malware in under 24 hours. It was the largest kind of signature that had ever been written at the time. It caught so much malware, we began to think it was a false

Clockwise from top left, Joel, Olney, Nigel, Ryan Pentney and Alain Zidouemba; Nigel, Olney and Joel; Craig, Alex McDonnell and Joel; Craig appears on CNBC.



"WATCHING THIS TEAM OF PEOPLE GROW FROM THE RELATIVELY SMALL TEAM AT SOURCEFIRE, TO GROWING INTO THIS NEW THING AT CISCO WHICH IS INCREDIBLY SUCCESSFUL... I'M JUST REALLY PROUD TO HAVE WITNESSED THAT."

- Craig Williams

positive until Alain [Zidouemba] and I sat down and verified everything. We basically annihilated this entire family of malware with one ClamAV signature.

Craig: I remember when we decided we were going to specialize in looking for APT and high-level crimeware that no one had ever found before. I said, "We should find one a week." I didn't really think it would be possible. You tell somebody, "Find me 50 APTs a year," and they're going to laugh in your face and say, "Maybe we can do 12?" But we did it. Because we were able to hire the right people.

Anyone can put a piece of threat research out there and use the right buzzwords that position it in a way that's interesting to that crowd. That's trivial. The hard part is doing it repeatedly in a way that's appealing to everyone. We did that over and over and over again.

Joel: The thing that that really took us from zero to 60 was the Angler Exploit kit. We coordinated with a hosting provider, and I think Olney got hold of one of the servers where the Angler kit was being hosted and got a hard drive dump. We started tearing it apart and we wrote this whole blog post where Melissa made the Angler fish with the light over its head. The graphic was one of the first times that we had custom design work attached a blog post.

Nigel: For me, the standout memories all involved people, and watching people grow their careers. We were always being mindful about burnout though. We set a lot of things up at the start of Talos to make sure that whilst we were doing all this intensive work, our people were taken care of. I love and miss the people of Talos dearly.



Top and bottom right, Nigel, Craig and Joel were valued members of the Beers with Talos crew during their tenure at Talos. Bottom left, Talos leadership at Black Hat in 2014.

People and culture

Craig: If I had to explain the Talos culture, it's effectively like having the freedom of a hacker, with relentlessly high expectations. Absolutely no puff pieces were tolerated. Not only were they not tolerated, they were met with outright hostility. But here's the key – it was loving hostility with a smile. No one would tell you that a piece was “fucking terrible, what were you thinking? Go rewrite it.” You'd say, “Hey, I really fucking hate this. Let me help you fix it.” That's the secret to Talos, right? Everyone had everything butchered, but everyone was happy about it. It's very weird, but very special. Talos is fun, but it doesn't tolerate anything but the best.

Joel: Phrases like “good enough for government work” were not phrases we accepted. It was a case of do it right – all the way – or you don't do it at all.

Nigel: We had to find things that we could do that would allow us to blow off steam, keep our heads in the game, and keep building our relationships with others. We certainly did a lot of stuff that increased the power of our nerve endings.

The pigs...yeah...the stuff we did to the pigs...launching them into space was probably one of the tamest activities we did. We put rockets on pretty much everything we could think of – from cars to aircraft. It was all about getting

stuff to move as fast as possible. We gradually had to stop setting so many things on fire though. Something to do with property managers and the proximity to other offices.

Joel: Probably the most significant cultural aspect from the VRT that we brought to Talos was the goat question. You'd be having an interview with Talos, and we'd sit you in the middle of a room with thirty or forty people staring at you and say, “So you're in the desert...” The only wrong answer was a refusal to answer. And you had to vigorously defend your position. That was one of the best hiring tactics we ever had.

Craig: One of the biggest reasons for Talos' success is how thoughtful a leader Watchinski is, and his ability to pick people that he knows will grow into good leaders. If you look at the leaders he surrounds himself with, they're fantastic people, and others want to build their careers with them. Watching this team of people grow from the relatively small team at Sourcefire, to growing into this new thing at Cisco which is incredibly successful...I'm just really proud to have witnessed that.

Joel: Proud is definitely the word. I was proud to work at Talos. I was proud to be part of it all. I'm not going to lie, there are still regrets I have about leaving. I loved building what we built, with the people that we built it with.

Ashley spills the tea



Executive Assistant and general Do-it-All'er Ashley Kane shares her most memorable moments at Talos, from dick confetti to scorpion venom, and Lurene's reaction to her gag gift...

How did you first get your job at Talos?

I started at Sourcefire on April 1, 2013. When they asked me to start on that date, I was more convinced than ever that it was all a big joke. I began as a receptionist, and after six months I got to spend more time in other departments. I became friends with a lot of the people in HR and ultimately decided I wanted to pursue a career there. That's when Cisco bought us, and the HR path wasn't an option anymore.

I was wondering where I would go next, and there were four leaders who needed executive assistants, including Matt Watchinski. Around the time of the Cisco deal closing, there was a board room meeting. The board room was close to my desk, and once the meeting was finished, Matt came out with a cigarette in his mouth, crazy unbrushed hair, and he just seemed cool AF. The most chilled out guy in the room. I also knew that everybody absolutely loved Matt, and his team was about to triple in size. So, he needed some help. I thought, "Screw it, I'm going to walk over to his office and ask him if he would be interested in me working as his admin." He replied, "Yeah, let's do it." I didn't realize it at the time, but he gave me an opportunity that changed my life. I will forever be grateful for that.

Just after the acquisition, Chris Marshall pulled me into his office. He said, "I want you to prove everybody wrong." I thought, "Damn, people are doubting me already?" But apparently my previous manager had said, "I wouldn't last a year with them [the VRT]." And here I am 10 years later.

What are your earliest Talos memories?

In Matt [Watchinski]'s office he has a red flag with his face on it, and at some point, that flag got put onto hockey sticks with people carrying them around the office. My first thought was, "What the fuck is going on right now?" Quickly

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followed by, “I’m kind of into it though.”

I do have a favorite memory. It was my first year working for Matt, and the office was infested with fruit flies. And so, the facilities people decided to do one of those insect-bombing things. Matt said, “Alright, can you send a message out to everyone that they’re gonna do this bombing thing over the weekend?” Knowing that the team rarely read their email, I decided to title the email “Office bombing.” Everyone’s going to open that right?

Well, following a complaint, HR reprimanded me and gave me a little slap on the wrist. I told Matt, and Matt called HR and said, “Don’t ever contact my employee again. You reach out to me first.” That’s when I really knew Matt had my back, no matter what.

Tell us about some of those early pranks

Oh man, the pranks. I remember the offices getting decorated more than once. There was the time when

Matt Olney’s office became a whole Mexican fiesta with pinatas and everything. There was the time when the guys painted Chinski’s whole office pink. Then there was the time where they decorated his office with a bunch of dicks. There were dicks sagging from the ceiling and dick confetti everywhere. There was always dick confetti everywhere...

What memory makes you laugh the most?

There are many things I could pick for this. But I’m going to go with the first time I met Lurene. Lurene had just left when I came to work at Sourcefire, so we just missed each other. For years, I was told about how cool and funny Lurene was. When Talos did our Threat Research summit in Orlando, Lurene was our keynote speaker, and I was in charge of ordering speaker gifts. For Lurene, even though I’d never met her, I decided to get her a gag gift. I bought her a whip.

We had all gathered around when I

handed Lurene her gift, and I said something along the lines of, “We all deeply appreciate you doing this for us, and here’s a little token.” She opened it and said, “So do I use this on you?” Everyone cracked up. Immediately from that moment, Lurene and I hit it off. She always has me laughing, I love her energy, and I’m so happy she’s part of the team again.

What can you tell us about a San Francisco bar and scorpion venom?

Matt [Watchinski] had the keynote presentation at RSA. It went so well, and afterwards we all wanted to go out and celebrate. We went to this tiny hole in the wall bar in Chinatown. Loads of us were there – Talos and old Sourcefire people. There was also a group of four guys in the bar who weren’t with us.

I went to the bathroom, which was down a flight of stairs in the cellar. I got a weird sense that someone was following me, so I ran into the women’s bathroom and locked the door. This guy starts banging on the door, saying, “Hey, I just want to talk to you.” “Oh hell,” I thought. “What am I going to do?” Eventually, I unlocked the door and barged past him and ran back up the stairs. And I immediately went to Matt and told him what happened.

Matt got really upset, as did everyone else. J.J. [Cummings], Chris Marshall, all these ex-military guys...I really thought this guy was about to get killed. Needless to say, the four guys left very swiftly. And then we all did shots of scorpion venom “UngaPay.”

What is your favorite thing about the people of Talos?

That everyone can be themselves.

The Talos Brand

We talked earlier how we got the name Talos. But what about the design? Here's some of the history and key developments behind the beloved Talos brand.

The first logo

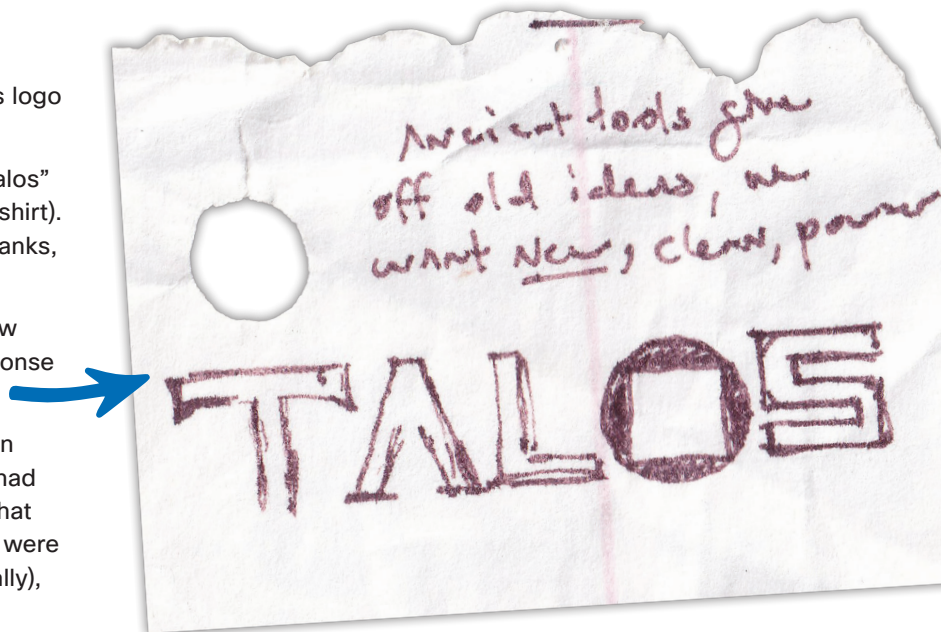
The person we all need to thank for the original Talos logo is Kevin Brooks.

He designed a sword going through the letters of "Talos" (you can still find this logo on the front of the goat T-shirt). Joel Esler's response to this idea was a swift, "No thanks, it's too busy, but thanks for your input."

Kevin came back the next day and showed Joel a new design he drew on a little scrap of paper. Joel's response was, "Yes. This."

Joel handed the paper to Melissa Taylor's web design team and asked them to draw up Kevin's idea. They had conversations about wanting the logo to feel somewhat uncomfortable – if you really paid attention to it, you were supposed to notice that it was a little off (symmetrically), and that was the point.

The logo was created in a few color options: red and a green, blue and a yellow, and another blue. Joel sent it out to the leadership team, and everyone replied, "The blue one."





Wendy comes on board

In 2016 Wendy Bishop was hired into Talos, initially to help with (actual quote) “visual things.” At the time, there weren’t formal guidelines to the way things were designed from a graphics point of view, and the ticketing system was a figment of a future imagination. Wendy worked with Melissa to continue building on the initial foundation, and, in 2018, Joel Esler, who oversaw them at the time, split Wendy off onto her own team to solely focus on the Talos brand and visual communications.

Wendy took it upon herself to start looking at everything that might have an external presence.

Trust from leadership and teams around the organization was built over time, and this allowed Wendy to build a more intentional brand strategy for Talos. A big part of that was the development of stronger creative guidelines; helping people across Talos with their creative needs in a far more process-driven and proactive way.

Growing the team

Over the years, Wendy expanded her team to

include Jessie Hall, Jon Munshaw and Paige Hutton. With the team’s combined efforts, Talos became aligned under a strong brand identity across all our material, including web copy, video, social media, illustration artwork and presentations. The creative team fiercely protects the Talos brand internally and externally and are a vital part of ensuring that everything that Talosians love about our brand and our culture continues to stay true to it.

A closer alignment with Cisco

Up until 2018/2019, the Talos brand made no mention of Cisco whatsoever. A concerted effort began to include Cisco more, aligned with the work that Luci Lagrimas’ team was doing to mature Talos and level it up within the broader Cisco organization.

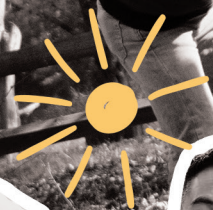
Wendy also took the opportunity to clean up the “uncomfortable eccentricities” of the original logo which allowed it to balance better. “Talos had matured, so our logo needed to as well,” said Wendy.





FOCUS ON CULTURE

Sure, our intelligence is world-class.
But the people are truly what makes
the Talos difference.



Talos Memory Box



“Back in the day, we required our interviewees bring us a ‘treebute.’ They’d get this confused look and say, ‘tribute?’ And we’d repeat, ‘treebute.’ Those who figured it out realized they had to steal a plastic tree from somewhere in the building and add it to our collection.”

– Patrick Mullen

“That was always Nigel’s line: ‘I requiiiiire a shrubbery!’ ‘Bring meee a treebute!’”

– Kevin Miklavcic

“I think the last time we did this was with Kevin Lin, by which time we owned pretty much all the trees, and Kevin had to negotiate with the woman protecting it. Eventually, he was granted a 72-hour lease on the tree, after which he promised to return it.”

– Matt Olney



When I first joined Talos, I was given the royal treatment, complete with a visit to the Swag Closet in the Fulton office. Pens, Snortys, hoodies, hats – you name it, we probably have it. There are even a few old “goat question” shirts lying around. On my shopping spree, I picked up one of the blue circular Talos “O” hat boxes that were used for a previous swag box before I joined. I wasn’t sure what I’d use it for, if anything, other than getting my newly acquired Talos wardrobe back home. But after receiving a challenge coin and handwritten note from Matt Olney, I decided that hat box would be my “Talos Memory Box.” It’s now come to hold some new t-shirts, stickers and conference badges. To collect other’s Talos memories, I started the Talos Memory Box Webex space, which has made this whole yearbook possible. From sharing memories, photos and reminiscing on the good times, the Talos Memory Box has brought us numerous laughs and reminded us why we keep doing what we’re doing. Please enjoy these memories and thank you for sharing. Long live the Talos Memory Box.



– Madison Burns

"My first week of working here, Wendy enlisted me to 'help' with this video project we were working on for the SBG all-hands. The SVP at the time, Dave Ulevitch (who is the CEO of OpenDNS now, who knew?) was kind of a wet blanket. Instead of Beers with Talos, the BWT crew was going to host "Juiceboxes with Talos" at the all-hands, and we shot a video to promote the live appearance. Getting this video included, but was not limited to, going into the woods to tape Joel fake hunting with a Nerf gun, Marcos [Rodriguez] getting a massage out in the middle of the office, Sammi dressing up as a 'hacker' while I did foley work banging on the cabinets, and Nigel painting his face in Liverpool colors in front of a green screen. Wendy even had to custom-build a 'trophy' that lit up when Ulevitch was about to fire everyone on BWT for being too inappropriate, and we had to drive to UPS to bubble wrap that trophy and ensure it arrived in one piece. I went home at the end of that week to my now-wife and was just like, 'Holy shit, I can't believe I work here now.'"

- Jon Munshaw

"Years ago, there was an obstacle course race that had a bunch of Talos people participate. After that, a group signed up for a Tough Mudder race ... and only the toughest mudder actually showed up for race day. Here he is, thanking the person who helped him make it through for all their support."

- Dave Raynor



"So many weird stories about writing blogs. There's the time a reporter got on a call about a flash zero-day (my first press interview) and claimed they had evidence it was discovered by Google Project Zero and sold to the actors and wanted comment. The time I got misquoted as saying that malicious ads were the fault of online advertisers, which almost got us sued. Finally, the time I did get sued because I wrote a blog about Apache Struts that was used in the Expedia hack, claiming I was involved somehow. Basically, my time with Talos has been marked with having weird-ass conversations with lawyers while people threaten us as a result of things me or my team published. Can't forget the whole internet police thing, from one of the times we got sued as well."

- Nick Biasini

“Another fun memory is when we used to do the 'The Vuln Report.' I have fond memories of the outtakes. You see the final product and it's amateur at best, but making the videos would take us a full day, sometimes more recording than editing. Fun times.”

- Alain Zidouemba

"In the old old building, they created clear glass foyers around the doors to keep out the cold and winds. But the glass was too clear. One day, an unfortunate soul went to walk out of the building and didn't see the glass and walked straight into it. She literally broke her nose. The very next day, there were giant, frosted Snort stickers on those panels so people could see them."

- Patrick Mullen

"For Kevin Miklavcic's bad memory and everyone else's education.
Sorry John [Arneson].

The last holiday party we had, which was at the Renaissance in the Inner Harbor of Baltimore, there was a photo booth set up. Given the large amount of drinks and presence of significant others, shenanigans were definitely going to happen. Old school photobooths dispense their photos on site only. New ones print them there and also put them online so people can see what pictures others had, very popular for weddings, so the couple can see their guests having fun.

Enter John, who showed up to the holiday party with TWO dates. One, his at-the-time GF, and I believe her step-sister. At the time, we were ribbing John about his GF, and nicknamed her 'It's Complicated' after the Facebook relationship status. When her step-sister showed up at the party, either Ryan Pentney or Andrew Blunck dubbed the step-sister, 'The Plot Thickens.'

Fast forward to the drinking and photobooth time, and John and his two dates take some rather saucy, though fully clothed, pictures, in the booth, thinking they would get some funny pictures for just the three of them.

Monday (or whatever) morning after the party, an email goes out to the whole company with a link to the photo booth site with ALL the pictures everyone took. We had a lot of fun watching how red John could get. I remember it fondly as The Plot Thickens was very nice and hung out with me because my intended date for the evening had said 'no' to my invitation."

- Alex McDonnell



(not the alleged booth photo but what sparked the memory)

"There were a bunch of us that for the July 4 weekend, Nigel who is a British National from Liverpool originally, we 'tea-bagged' his office by making garlands out of tea bags. And it was not good tea, it was just Lipton, but we stapled them together to make long chains for a long holiday weekend. There were also eagles, and (American) flags, and memes printed, and it was decorated on a Friday. Nigel took an extra day off to extend the weekend. So, his office with a shut door had the whole weekend to just steep in tea, so he came back and opened his door and the tea smell just hit him, and he just stopped and stared. He put his bag down, he didn't even go in, he just turned around and was like 'fix it' and walked off."

- Dave Raynor



"I remember the time we were standing around the kitchen in 9780, and suddenly there was a loud boom. Kambis dropped a piece of super frozen putty into boiling water and it exploded. Our resident scientist and blow-shit-up expert."

- Kevin Miklavcic

“Another time where Talos was responsible for ‘new regulations and policies.’

Surprisingly for Maryland, we had very cold temperatures for a couple weeks and it was decided that the pond at the end of the Fulton parking lot was likely sufficiently frozen to allow skating. So people from Massachusetts, upstate New York, and Montreal headed over to give it a look. It was determined to be safe, and I put on my skates while the others went back to get theirs from the office. Unfortunately, as they were walking back through the parking lot after retrieving their skates, the person henceforth known as ‘The Constanceable’ yelled at them and told them the pond was unsafe and they were going to die if they went onto it. Meanwhile, I was on the pond, hidden by the hill, skating on it with nary a single sound of cracking. This incident is also why that body of water is known as ‘The Renton Pond.’”

– Patrick Mullen

“I remember how she chastised me like I was her child for like five minutes while I did my best to draw her attention away from Patrick Mullen already on the pond skating. I don't remember exactly what she said, but she tried to pull the ‘I am from New York’ card (to which I replied, I was as well and have been skating on ponds like that my whole life) and she told me that if I skated on there I would get ‘sucked into the drain.’ And then we just went down the street and skated elsewhere.”

– Paul Frank

Re: Your guys are attempting to skate in my water **Renton pond**



Chris Marshall (marshal1)

To Constance Robinson

Cc Yolanda Proctor -X (yproctor - CBRE, Inc. at Cisco);

John Hensch -X (jhensch - CBRE, Inc. at Cisco)



1/10/2017

Acknowledged, will inquire. Am currently in Texas.

– Marshall

> On Jan 10, 2017, at 9:34 AM, Constance Robinson <CRobinson@sipi.com> wrote:

>

> Chris

> This is absolutely not an option. Please make it stop immediately.

>

> Constance Robinson

> St. John Properties

> 301-318-8911



“ Me, Olney,
Mitch, Deb
[Mitch's wife]

and my Matt [Ashley's husband] rented scooters. We are heading to the San Diego Zoo on these Lime scooters and Olney is in front of us and he eats shit into the fucking pavement, and I'm like ‘oh my god!’ He went down hard, we were like, ‘Are you ok?’ He rolled out of it like some sort of ninja and rolls out of it like ‘I'm fine, I'm fine.’ I was like, ‘Do you still want to go to the zoo?’ And he's like, ‘We're going to the Zoo.’”

– Ashley Kane

SO YOU'RE IN A DESERT...

What started as a way to differentiate candidates during interviews quickly came to be a beloved Talos tradition.

Back in 2011 and 2012, when Sourcefire was interviewing hundreds of candidates, they all started to blur together. Interview-induced delirium and testing to see if candidates might be a good culture fit, Ryan Pentney created the infamous **“Goat Question.”**

“Initially, the question was, ‘You’re in the middle of the desert, right? There’s no civilization around you for 200 miles in any direction. But once a week, a caravan comes through with tons of people, goods, sundries, that sort of thing. In some versions it’s a bus, but the nature of the caravan kind of changes. You have nothing, no personal belongings and nothing to your name, but a goat with a chronic diarrhea problem.’ And the initial question was, ‘How do you make money?’ But over time, I’m guessing just because it led to more of a variety of answers, it turned into, ‘How do you get out of the desert?’” Pentney shares.

While he can’t recall the specific person he was interviewing that sparked the Goat Question, he remembers the question being an immediate hit.

“People really latched onto it, Chinski in particular loved it. As the interviews continued, I found over time, not a lot of time, the initial question of what did you think of the candidate got replaced with the initial question of what was their answer to the goat question? That was the primary interest. So, at that point, I think I realized it was no longer my question.”

The Goat Question even inspired a Talos shirt that featured a pixel art goat in the style of the video game “Legend of Dungeon,” a particular favorite among Talosians at the time.

Over time, the interview process intensified to feature stage lights and a dramatic questioning by Matt Watchinski, and new rules to the Goat Question applied.

“So, we started to hear some of the same answers, answers that didn’t require a lot of thinking, a new rule got imposed and that was: Your answer may not match any previous answer. So as candidates would hit on similarities of another, we would inform them and then they’d have to rethink what they were doing,” Pentney said.

The Goat Question was a staple up until 2017/2018 when the organization got so big, it was more difficult to include it in the interview process. But to keep the tradition alive, new hires would be rounded up every few months and asked the question as a group. Now, the Goat Question lives on in stories shared over drinks at Black Hat and team dinners.



Some legendary answers to the Goat Question include:

Training the goat to play dead to distract the caravan and then pickpocket them.

Using the goat as a distraction to mess with their bus and then sell their services to fix it.

Using the goat to make and sell quality hand-crafted excrement pottery.

Forgetting the goat altogether, their body was the only thing they needed to make a sale.

Making and selling glass out of the sand.

Robbing the caravan by slinging the goat over their shoulder, facing it backward, and using it as a bazooka and holding the people at gunpoint.

Kill the goat, use its skull and their clothing for a makeshift grappling hook, attempt to throw it at the bus, and hope for the best.

Using the goat's fur to make high-quality mittens to be traded for a ride out of the desert.

And now, a word from the Council of Elder Talosians

It's no secret that Talos is a unique place to work. The people that make up our organization are one of the key elements to the special culture Talos has cultivated over the years. To commemorate Talos' 10 years, we spoke with some of the folks that have been here from the beginning to talk Talos' culture, reminisce on the good old days and try to describe Talos in one word.

"Talos' culture is very much predicated on, 'You get your shit done, and you do what you need to to get it done.' If that means if you want to work really long hours, then that's great, but if you can get your shit done and you're really efficient and organized with it and you're in the parking lot kicking balls up on the roof because you've done all your shit and getting closer to your colleagues, then that's works too. It's very much an 'ends justifies the means,' we accept how people are and how they want to get things done. As long as people are willing to collaborate and listen, we take all kinds."

- Alex McDonnell



On Talos Culture

"Work hard play hard, because pressure can come at any time. Attacks and vulnerabilities can be disclosed or discovered at any point in time. There is no promise of a day off even when the Cisco calendar says it. But, because we have good leadership that recognizes that we cannot only be under pressure all the time, there is always a plan for relieving that stress in a constructive way. It means there is some silliness, some fun, something to recharge the batteries to keep us going."

- Dave Raynor



“It’s just an amazing place to work culturally. Pretty much everybody gets along with everybody. It’s an amazing place to work where input is valued across the board at all levels of the organization and despite the fact that we are a part of this giant company, it doesn’t feel that big. We are this uniquely insulated, highly capable and cohesive team of 500-some people. Maybe it feels giant to other people, but it does not to me.”

- J.J. Cummings

“‘Serious fun’ is how I would describe our culture. Often times the cyber criminals and incidents we investigate are quite dangerous. We have disrupted well-financed campaigns conducted by large nation-states and organized criminal gangs. However, behind the scenes, we all really enjoy our work and we have a lot of fun and camaraderie.

I love the work that we do. I’ve been around since before Talos was a thing and I’ve seen a lot of changes over time, but the one thing that’s definitely made me stick around is the breadth of data we have access to, which makes chasing down some of the cyber criminals that we’re chasing that much easier, and that much more pleasurable of an activity.”

- Jaeson Schultz

“Questions like this often remind me of something Nigel used to say when we would be discussing potential candidates who had recently been interviewed: ‘We don’t tolerate mediocrity.’ Every day, I’m reminded of the fact that I am surrounded by people who know more than I do in every single niche of cybersecurity. ML experts – got them. Endpoint threat vector experts – got them. Email threat vector experts – got them. Offensive security experts – got them. For any question I could ever have on any security topic, it is almost guaranteed there is someone inside Talos that is a SME on it.

And with that mountain of experience, members of Talos are some of the best mentors I’ve encountered in my career. They’re also some of the most sarcastic assholes I have come to know and love! Talos personnel are empathetic mentors to you when you ask for guidance or information. Talos personnel are also unabashedly, uh, honest (yeah, we’ll say honest here) in their criticism should you ever propose something they feel is monumentally stupid.

So, what does Talos mean to me? It’s a place I call home with a bunch of people I’ve known and worked with for 10-16 years who love to troll others. Talos to me means excelling excelling at your job, excelling at mentoring others, excelling at keeping the mission to protect our customers first and foremost in our minds.”

- Andrew Blunck



“Take great care of our people and not being afraid to fight the good fight to protect our customers.”

- Michael Shen

“ Talos is a lot of fun... We don't have corporate stuffiness that I've seen in other places in Cisco and other companies. We allow ourselves to have fun ... we have picnics, barbecues, beer bashes, we have Nerf gun fights, all kinds of cool stuff. We're able to blow off steam, most of the time, without getting into trouble.”

- Don Owens



“I had heard of Snort, I was using Snort rules at the company I was working for at the time, yet I had no idea it was just a group of less than 10 people. So, when I showed up and saw the culture, saw the hacking culture behind the work output I very much wanted to be a part of it. I knew that I was going to be able to learn a lot while having fun at the same time and it turned out to be exactly that. It didn't even take me a second to think that I was going to accept the offer once I got it, I was ecstatic.”

-Alain Zidouemba

“For Talos culture, defining it, it's really about a driven curiosity, deep curiosity for understanding technology. It means diving into details to understand technologies and vulnerabilities often times more than the engineers that built them. It means developing expertise in everything under the sun in order to protect our customers.

I think the culture means we get away with things that are not the norm for most businesses, and it's because we are a group of tight-knit people who are able to have a little fun. We need to welcome all walks of life to find the expertise needed for the things that we do. I think that was really a driving factor in my decisions, just seeing this unique batch of individuals that were starkly different from the folks I had been around in college and growing up there was something uniquely exciting about that.”

- Kevin Miklavcic

“ You know, Talos is an interesting place to work, also I like our mission statement. Being a part of actually helping to provide safety and security for our customers and then the broader sense, everyone, I think that is a mission statement that I feel like you can actually have some passion around and want to support.”

- Michael Peterson

Talos Memories

“Going back to RSA, when we all use to go, before budgets sucked, we used to go to this little Chinese bar late at night called Li Po and it was at the time it was one of the senior leader’s birthday, not a Talos leader but another, so we’d always go there to celebrate. I don’t know how to spell it, and I can’t find a reference to this shit anywhere on the internet, but I know what it’s called and I know what the bartender did when you told him to go get it. They called it IngaPay or UngaPay. You better be good and wasted by the time you tasted it, it’s that foul, but it was like a rite of passage. It started out as just, like, three of us that were going and then there was about 5 years into this a whole crew, we’ve taken over the bar kind of thing. It wasn’t uncommon for people to get lost after this, like going back to their hotel. I actually made my way back to my hotel and wake up to a phone call and I’m like, ‘Hey what’s up?’ and they were like ‘Where am I?’ and I’m like ‘What do you mean where are you? We put you in a cab and sent you back to your hotel.’ And we did, specifically I remember that. Evidently, this individual got out of the cab and turned right instead of left kind of thing and ended up at the hotel across the street and had no idea where they were, just threw out a bunch of credit cards and got a hotel room. Then on the phone they’re like, ‘Where am I?’ and I’m like ‘I don’t know, look out the window,’ and they were like, ‘Oh my hotel is across the street!’ and this was at like noon. Oh, that UngaPay is horrible stuff, it’s just the worst.”

- J.J. Cummings

"In 2014, as we were launching the Talos name, we didn’t even have an official logo yet, but we wanted something to be distinctive. And we’ve done Talos shirts in bright colors, we’ve pushed forward the Talos brand, the Talos logo, so it’s all been about...bringing together that team spirit. The shirts across the years have been a favorite memory for me because every shirt has an inside joke, something you need to know. Many of them relate back to a Talos achievement, a Talos discovery, not all of them things we can publicly disclose but within the team talk about what the code on the shirt might do.”

- Dave Raynor

“ I still remember when I interviewed, in early 2008. And at the end of the interview, we were standing in front of the building, Nigel was there having a smoke as well as Watchinski, and to this day I remember thinking, ‘Even if I don’t get the job, I want to come back and hang out with these guys cause they’re cool.’ And it’s been 16 years at this point.”

- Alain Zidouemba





“Taking over part of the Aurora Bar at the Luxor in Las Vegas during Black Hat and DefCon. Twenty-four hours a day you’d go by there and there’s someone there you can stop by and chat with. And people were in and out of the conferences all day long, but you’re not on your own there. So again, it’s kind of that mix of work and personal life because you can go by and just have fun, it’s not a stuffy corporate atmosphere.”

– Don Owens

“Alex Kambis found this Styrofoam plane that you would hold in your hand and launch, but relatively large, like three-foot wingspan. He cut a little hole in and stuck a rocket into and taped it on there, the goal was to just launch the plane. Well, there were a lot of underestimations and so the rocket went in at a diagonal to help it get air, and it was on a ramp. We have this foam airplane rocket contraption, when it launched instead of going straight it went up, and kept going up and around, and it went up and around over the building and landed in a tree on the other side. We go over there and we’re like, ‘Ummm, someone’s gonna have to get that down’ and then we notice there’s smoke, and Styrofoam melting and dripping onto the ground, so we’re scrambling. I go run inside and find the fire extinguisher, Patrick Mullen is trying to climb up the tree. Meanwhile, we hand him the fire extinguisher and he goes to use it and nothing comes out, it was completely empty.”

– Kevin Miklavcic

There are so many great memories, but as a remote employee who splits time between Ecuador and South Lake Tahoe, my favorite Talos memories have been all the times we get together and see each other in person. The security conferences have been incredible, from Cisco Live events in Europe, LATAM, Australia and the U.S., to Botconf in France, to Defcon/Black Hat and Talos taking over the bar in the Luxor. Hanging out with Craig Williams at Cisco Live U.S., and we both got these big fishbowl margaritas in San Diego, that was incredible.”

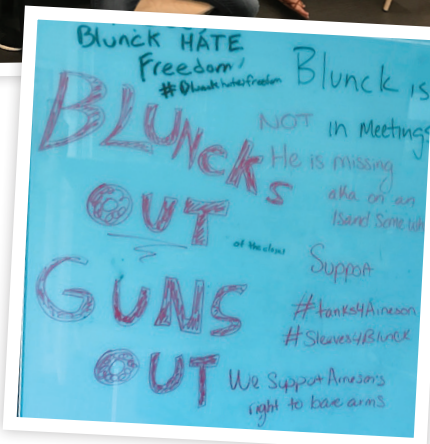
– Jaeson Schultz





"Back when I was still a team lead in what was at the time the Detection Response Team [now Network Threat Detection & Response], there were really only two rules I tried to enforce: Be in by no later than 10 a.m. (per a directive from Marshall) and no sleeveless shirts (my own rule). I knew Talos wasn't a bank and we didn't have to wear suits, but I didn't really think it was THAT much of an ask to wear a shirt with sleeves. Well, this drew the ire of one of my team members, John Arneson, who, at the time, wore nothing but A-shirts and his constant poking at the rules drew the attention of the team, my manager (Alan Smith) and my director (Marshall). I left the country for a week to attend the wedding of my sister-in-law and her now-husband, and a few months after I returned, sitting on my desk was a calendar with the title, 'Blunck's Out, Guns Out.' For each month of the calendar, there was a picture of various members of the team with the sleeves on their shirts ripped off in rather hilarious poses. It became a recurring holiday. Up until the pandemic, each year, when I took my birthday PTO, 'Blunck's Out, Guns Out' would go into effect and the team would collectively all wear sleeveless shirts...Fucking trolls – I love you all."

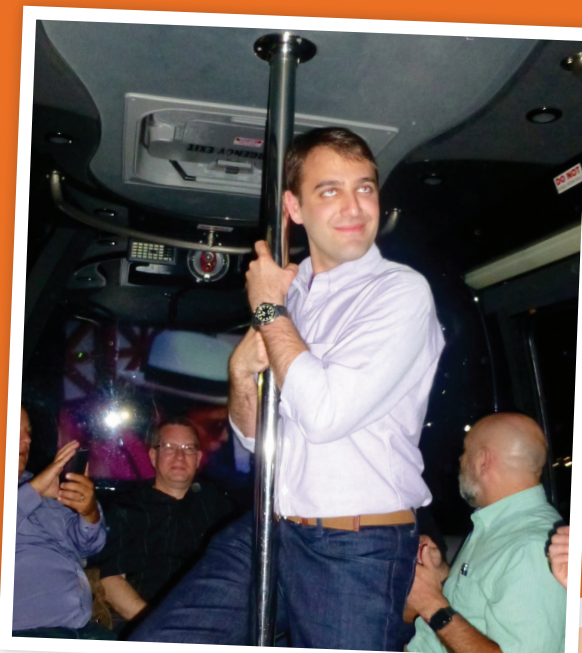
- Andrew Blunck



"One memory that comes to mind, was the first time we met Matt [Watchinski]. He came out here to California and we went to bocce ball as a group event. He went up to the bar and said, 'Who wants a drink?' and he seemed very open, very approachable. I've never turned down a free drink, so I was probably the first person up there. Matt's really easy to get along with."

We used to do a giant outing to Vegas for Defcon and Black Hat. I remember we were trying to get a taxi from some event to another, regardless, we couldn't get a taxi, couldn't hire a limo. Finally, we hired a party bus to take us across town. It had a dancing pole, and the lights, and Brett who worked up in the San Francisco office was dancing, and there was music blasting."

- Michael Peterson



Talos in a word...
or a couple few

Mischief
Work-family
Frolleagues
Tight-knit

Shenanigans
Integrity
Loyalty
Work hard,
play hard

Family
Excellence
Friends
Experts
Trust

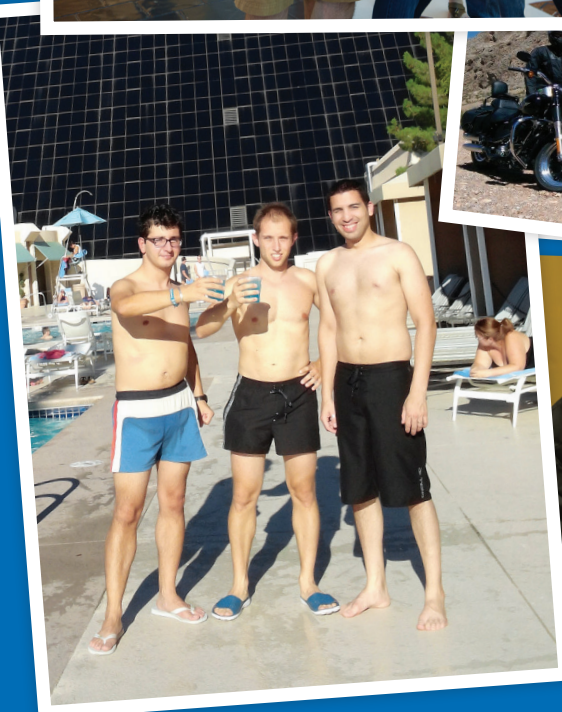
VIVA LAS BLACK HAT



Hacker Summer Camp

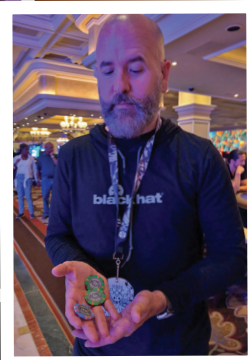
Outside of being a yearly pilgrimage to share research, and learn, network and reconnect with friends, “Hacker Summer Camp,” aka Black Hat and Defcon, holds a special place on Talosian’s calendars. Officially launched at Black Hat in 2014, Talos has had a presence each year since. From humble beginnings at the Luxor, to the Threat Researcher Appreciation events at the Bellagio, we look back on Black Hats and Defcons past.

2014

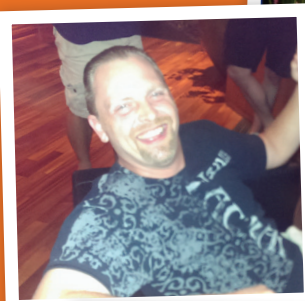


VIVA LAS BLACK HAT

2016



2015





2017



2018



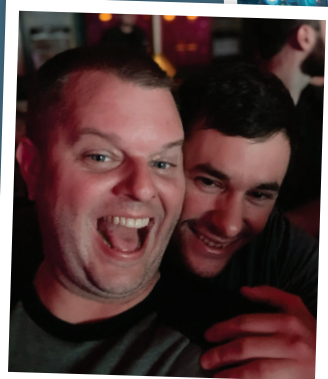
VIVA LAS BLACK HAT

2019



Let's Talk a
Threats

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2022



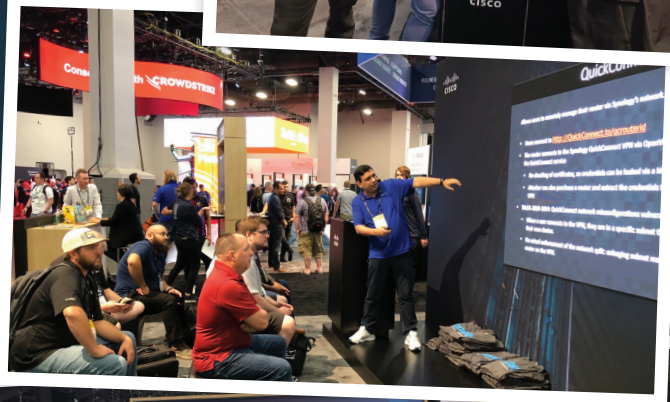
2020
& 2021

[Redacted:
We all stayed
home because
of a global
pandemic.]





2023



Juice Boxes with Talos



Cisco's Security Business Group surely had no idea what they were asking for when they asked the hosts of Beers with Talos to host their quarterly award All Hands in San Jose back in 2018. Matt Olney, Mitch Neff and Sammi Seaman reminisce on the absurdity that was "Juice Boxes with Talos."

The Start

Mitch Neff: Mary Caragio asked if we, as a podcast, would want to do the quarterly SBG Business awards. And these are the normal kind of awards you'd have in any business group – you'd get the little plaques and people vote on them and it's all a big to-do. They asked us, a podcast, and we were relatively, like a year or two old at the time.

Matt Olney: Long enough that they should have known better.

Sammi Seaman: We all questioned it – like, do they really want this?

MN: So, we went through the meeting process to do it, and actually I feel, to this day we set up one hell of a fucking show.

The Promotional Videos

MN: They gave us guidelines, there was going to be an award presentation, had to talk with the executive and let him do his piece, various things we had to do, people we had to talk to. We planned it out and we got to the point where they wanted us to do promotional videos for it and that's where I think they started asking questions, cause we did the promo videos and Matt kind of took over on the promo video side.

MO: We expensed it all! And not only did we expense it all...

SS: Every. Single. Piece of it...

"WE ALL
QUESTIONED
IT - LIKE,
DO THEY
REALLY
WANT
THIS?"



MO: It went through without a fucking single question. We had face paint, we had two extra large robes, we had a massage table, we had six trophies that were no less than six feet tall!

SS: Six trophies that were taller than me, I also had to buy 125 train whistles [Edit: 450 train whistles] and juiceboxes, all sorts of random stuff to include in our presentation.

The Juice Boxes

MN: There was one specific thing that was maybe a little over-the-top. I selfishly, I did request...

SS: THIS was the super "over the top" part.

MN: I super selfishly wanted to have

the Oprah moment where we got to tell everybody in the audience, "You get a juice box, and you get a juice box, and you get a juice box!" Oh! We need to get into why we had juice boxes in the first place.

We got through shooting the videos, the promotional videos for this, and we sent them over to Mary. I think that's when she initially got really worried, because Olney was on the massage table, Joel was out in the woods with a Nerf gun, Nigel coming in from "In Field," I was literally skydiving, so we had all this going on to make this grand entrance into the awards.

And she's like, "Guys, we need to talk about what you're going to do at this show," because we were making fun of that in the video if I recall. So, we

were like "OK, here's what we want to do," but she was like, "You can't have any beers – like no drinking." We hadn't even thought about it, I don't think any of had even thought about having beers or, like, a keg, it wasn't even discussed.

MO: But once we weren't allowed, then we were mad about it.

SS: We had a giant Beers with Talos banner made so that we could then also make a giant Juice Boxes with Talos banner that we would then drop the Beers with Talos one and it would have the "Juices Boxes with Talos."

MO: We did the whole bit of "Oh, hey guys we can't do this" and it dropped during the show. You would not believe how much we put into this show.

The Tower of Fired

SS: This started out as a joke, because we were like, “Have they listened to this?” Everything was just like, “How fired are we gonna get?” Wik [Jaime Filson] was like, “I’m gonna make this huge thing.” He 3-D printed the whole thing.

MN: Yeah, I was like wait, we need a “Tower of Fired.” It just needs to have a button that leads up to “fired,” if something can blow up at the top that would be even cooler, but they told us specifically we couldn’t do fireworks, so we had to nix that.

SS: I think Ashley [Kane] sent out the Tower to San Jose and something didn’t work when it got there.

MN: Oh yeah, that thing was such a pain, Colin Louie had to put it together.

SS: Yea, he came down, and we were like, “Who has a toolbox?”

MO: No, what he had was the mischief kit that we had sent to San Jose to invite them into Talos. And it was full of all kinds of crazy shit, circuits and rocket motors and all kinds of stuff that cause problems. But also, the stuff to repair this thing, as it worked out.

The Trophies


MN: Instead of little, tiny acrylic statuettes we were gonna have proper ass trophies, six-foot trophies made for everybody. And then it dawns on us that these teams are international, they’re someplace else outside of the U.S. We figured once they win that award, it’s not our problem anymore.

SS: I do think ordering those trophies was my favorite task that’s ever been given to me at Talos. I was told, “Go see how you can buy a trophy.” We had decided that we wanted [the] top to just be ridiculous. So I was like, “What’s the most ridiculous plastic emblem I can get for these?” There was a cheerleader, a school bus, I think there was a baby crawling. At the base of all those trophies, you can’t see what they say, but





I WAS JUST THINKING IN MY HEAD THAT THESE WERE AWESOME SURPRISES FOR EVERYBODY. IT HADN'T EVEN DAWNED ON ME THAT THERE MIGHT BE AN SVP WHO IS UPSET BY SOME OF THIS.



there's a placard on it. And we decided to put on the placards in parentheses, "Intentionally left blank" for everyone so we could give whatever trophy to whoever.

The "No Surprises" Main Event

MN: We put in an immense amount of planning and thought. We kept Mary informed, but she became very concerned as we got to the end about the whole thing. I don't think Mary thought this was extremely funny, but to her credit, she believed that I did and that was good enough for her at that point in time.

So we get there, we're setting these things up. We've repaired the Tower of Fired. Matt and I are off to the side, Sammi was there, the three of us were standing there, and David Ulevitch approached us.

MO: No, Mary came over, because Mary looked like she was in the middle of a complete breakdown. Like she was just barley holding it together, she's like "I really need to talk to you guys," and we were like, "What's up?" and she's like, "David hates surprises." So, like, that doesn't register as a normal human sentence. She's like, "He does not like to be surprised. You really need to show him the closet." So, I say, "Mary, if we show David the closet, will it make you feel better?" And she's like, "Yes," so I'm like, "OK, let's show him the closet then."

MN: And that's when he came over and he's like, "I have fired or broken up with every single person who has ever surprised me."

OK, well let's go look at the fucking closet then Dave, let's not get violent like that, this is gonna be fine. Honestly, until Mary came up, until we had this conversation, I hadn't even thought of surprising our SVP at this point. I was just thinking in my head that these were awesome surprises for everybody. So, we went and looked at all the things, we had all these juice boxes, they were all over the floor getting ready to go under chairs and the train whistles, he had one in his hand. There's the trophies, we're explaining the intentionally left blank, it's all right in front of him, and he's like, "So... this is funny?"

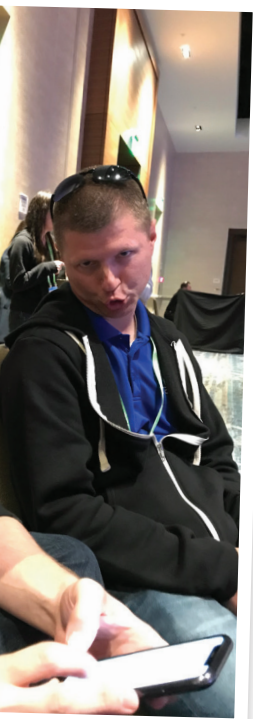
MO: I think I said, "We certainly think it's funny Dave." Like I didn't even know what to say to him at this point.


MN: And then we all went out, there were no more surprises, we weren't going to get fired. And that was like the hour before we go on, literally an hour before this this is supposed to start we have our senior most, senior executive directly threatening to fire us if we do something funny that he's not aware of.

SS: Don't look into it or anything, but I'm pretty sure this was the most well-attended and enjoyed all-hands.

MN: One hundred percent. The point was, we did go into this wanting to do the thing that was funniest for us, that was our intent. I don't know if we said it out loud or if it was implied, but we never wanted to be asked to do this again.

MO: We weren't wholly successful, but they definitely never asked us to do another all hands meeting.



patch this to 9.4.4.14... 

ally in the code reviews and testing

y to my outburst - haha.

The making of Talos Threat Research Summit

The Talos Threat Research Summit all started when Joel Esler wanted to create a conference for analysts, by analysts. The goal was a security conference for security practitioners. But without the help of Ashley Kane, Wendy Bishop and Sammi Seaman, (three self-proclaimed non-cybersecurity professionals), it may never actually have happened.

“When he [Joel] first brought it up and was pitching it to get funding for it, he came over to me and was like, ‘Hey, I’m just putting together some stuff for a pitch, can you make me a threat research summit logo?’ And he gave me, like, 30 minutes to do it. So, I think we didn’t know it was going to happen until it just suddenly was funded, and it was happening,” Wendy recalls.

Sammi declared Ashley not the unsung, but sung, hero of the event because she “literally made it happen.”

As Ashley recalls: “The funding

was insane because Talos, with our budget, we were not able to fund the whole thing ourselves. So, we had to go to other groups to ask them to basically fund our event. It came down to the wire, we needed to secure the money within a day before Cisco Live marketing shut it down. So, I called around to all these people in different departments, somehow or another secure the money. I call [Matt] Watchinski, he was with Joel in Tennessee on a hunting trip and I’m like, ‘Guys, I got the money,’ and they were like, ‘You did?’ and I was, like, ‘Yeah, we’re going to move forward with the event.’ It was insane.”



2018

2019





Although the start may have been rocky, Sammi knew one thing for sure: “Anytime that you get to work with Ashley and Wendy, I’m like yep, it’s going to be good, I know shit’s gonna get done. It’s gonna be a well-oiled machine, there will be no issues.”

Thanks to their creativity and sheer determination of the trio and others, TTRS occurred alongside Cisco Live in 2018 in Orlando for a one-day summit and ran for a second year in 2019 in San Diego as an expanded two-day summit and sold out within hours of registration going live. A favorite aspect of Sammi’s and Ashley’s was the ability to interact and network with so many great speakers and people internally and externally.

“Each year we had wonderful speakers, wonderful presenters. Liz Warton was the keynote the second year, Lurene Grenier brought down the house the first year, that was a tough act to follow,” Sammi reminisced.

Ashley added that the reception afterward was particularly memorable to her because “so many people wanted to meet one another and talk to speakers, and make connections there, it was really beneficial.”

No Talos event is truly complete without a few shenanigans.

Ashley shared, “There was one funny moment, in San Diego, Sammi got to pick the music for when a speaker would go up on stage. It was J.J., Pierre and Brad about to go up on stage and give a talk. I was like, ‘Can we please do ‘Save a Horse Ride a Cowboy?’” and Sammi was like ‘Oh we’re doing it.’ So, J.J., Brad and Pierre had no idea, and they start playing it as they start walking on stage and I see J.J. turn around and he’s just like, ‘F*** you guys.’”

“It was beautiful,” Sammi agreed.

“Speed Dating” with Talosians from every corner of the office

It's the episode they never planned to make, but gloriously stumbled upon. Beers with Talos host Mitch Neff and Matt Olney descended on the Fulton office in December 2023 to rapid fire interview different Talosians who happened to be in office. We've collected some of the quotes shared on what makes Talos a special place to work and how things haven't really changed that much in the past 10 years.

On working at Talos

“The people here are in it for the right reasons. They want the right outcomes. They're doing it for the good that it will be and they're not going to take a sub-optimal outcome from things.”

- Amy Henderson

“Smothered, covered, chunked threat intelligence. Let's go boys. We're a hard fighting bunch of cybersecurity nerds. Yep. We got big hearts.”

- Joe Marshall

“So what I like about working at Talos is I have a lot of opportunities to do the kinds of things that I want to do to learn the things that I want to learn, and to stop doing things that I'm failing at and start doing things that I'm succeeding at and just sort of pivot as much as I can. There's a lot of freedom.” -

- Alex Palson

“Everybody here kind of has their own, like unique, both inside and outside of work, niche expertise. And we're all bringing that to the table to make this thing run.”

- Wendy Bishop

“Every day is different. Every day is fun. We have a great, great group of people here.”

- Kaitlin Acharya

“I knew it was going to be fun. I knew it was going to be weird. And I knew it was going to be different from day to day. And all those things have been right. What I've really, really picked up is just how good the people are, both at their jobs technically, but how kind everyone is. How thoughtful everyone is. It's really a great work environment. It's a wonderful team that the folks here have built, and I'm just happy to be a part of it. It's wonderful.”

- Neil Jenkins

On Talos over the last 10 years...

“The other thing that I think resonates with me that everyone has said, this is a family I never thought I was going to have. And to have that in the workplace is just, I come to every day, knowing I'm safe here and at home.”

– **Luci Lagrimas**

“It's actually refreshing to work with a team that doesn't settle for the BS and demands a higher level result. That's what drew me here, that is the reputation of this organization and it has been for years. And it bleeds into everything this team does, whether it's the way we take care of our people, the way we talk to each other, and the way that we think about our customers as well – everything leads with protecting our customers.”

– **Amy Henderson**

“You're definitely seeing a lot of growth in Talos, a lot of groups are coming into Talos. But one thing I like about Talos is the culture never changed. Our top leadership made sure our Talos culture remained the same, even though we have a lot of people. And we could all speak to any leadership teams in here any leadership personnel and Matt [Watchinski's] door is always open. And same for every director, and every leader.”

– **Prasanth Bondalapatil**

“It's amazing seeing how they're growing. That means that the work you're doing has a high demand, and then also the goal, final goal of Talos is to kick the bad guys in the butt. And to contribute to something good, to make this world a little bit better place day by day. That was just awesome.”

– Laszlo Danielisz

“A long time ago, more than 10 years ago, there was a gentleman that was having an issue with his bank. And he was not able to make the rent for his family in a given week. And he came into the leadership meeting we were having and let us know that he was having some problems, and he might not be around to support everybody on the team in the way that he wanted. And Matt Watchinski opened his checkbook right then and there, and wrote him a check to cover everything he needed, and said, ‘You take care of your family.’ And to me, that set the standard of the same way that we treat our people today, the entire time I've been here, that outlook has not changed. And I stand incredibly proud of that.”

– Chris Marshall

“My parting shot is, if you are part of Talos and you're listening to this, I love you and I'm so happy to work with you.”

– Matt Olney

Talos Superlatives

A Talos twist on the classic “Senior Superlatives” seen in traditional yearbooks. You won’t find “Best Smile” or “Most Likely to Be President” here. Talosians recognize their favorites from across the organization, from “Best Laugh” to “Talosian of the Decade,” complete with heartfelt write-ins and iconic Talos memories.

**TALOSIAN
OF THE DECADE**

Matt Watchinski





BEST WORKPLACE

Jimmy Hester
& Madison Burns



DYNAMIC DUO

Matt Olney & Lurene Grenier

MOST SPIRITED

Geri Reynolds



& Marla
Mingee-Earl



LIFE OF THE PARTY

Sammi Seaman



**BIGGEST
PRANKSTER**

Kevin Miklavcic



**MOST LIKELY TO WIN
"WHAT WOULD WIK DO?"**

Jacob Stanfill & Jaime Filson

MOST LIKELY TO BE BAILED OUT OF JAIL

Azim Khodjibaev & Eric Kuhla

MOST LIKELY TO BAIL YOU OUT OF JAIL

Andrew Blunck & Neil Jenkins



**MOST LIKELY
TO ALWAYS HAVE
YOUR BACK**

Chris
Marshall



MOST LIKELY TO LIGHT SHIT ON FIRE

J.J. Cumming & Patrick Mullen

MOST STYLISH

Alain Zidouemba
& Kaitlin Acharya



Wildcards

MOST LIKELY TO STEAL YOUR POTTED PLANTS AND RESCUE THEM

Brittany Lawler

TALOS IS MOST LUCKY TO HAVE

Luci Lagrimas

MOST TALKATIVE

Dave Raynor

COOLEST NEW YORK RANGER FAN I'VE EVER WORKED WITH

Paul Frank

MOST "MINDFUL"

Liz Cooperrider

BEST COMMUNICATOR

Gretchen Schiffer

BEST AVENGER

Andrew Blunck

LITTLE MARY SUNSHINE

Sammi Seaman

THE BEST GAME MASTER

Melissa Taylor

BIGGEST GOLDEN RETRIEVER ENERGY

Dalton Schaadt

BEST LAUGH

J.J. Cummings

UNSUNG HERO OF TALOS

Ashley Kane

MOST LIKELY TO PULL TALOS BACK FROM THE BRINK OF AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT

Joe Marshall

MOST LIKELY TO RUN TALOS' SHADOW GOVERNMENT

Ashley Kane, Kaitlin Acharya
& Madison Burns

MOST LIKELY TO WEAR SWAG EACH DAY

Nicolette Verbeck

MOST SUPPORTIVE

Luci Lagrimas

KINDEST TALOSIANS

Paul Frank & Alain
Zidouemba

The nominees for “Most Authentic Talos Moment” (because we couldn’t pick a winner):



Cisco Security
All Hands 2018,
with Juiceboxes
with Talos.

Having beer brewed at the Sourcefire office
in Columbia by Patrick DeSantis then by Joe
Marshall in Fulton.

The day Richard
Harman and
Alexander
Chiu got saran
wrapped,
back-to-back,
to each other
in the Fulton
office.

Team lunch
dates to Mikey
and Mel's with
a visit to the
pickle bar and a
black and white
cookie to go.



When the ICS vuln
team created
an ICS controlled
kegerator and
brought it to
conferences.



When Blunck almost threw up from eating a cheesecake jello shot. The shot was too bougie for Talos.



Friday “Golf” outings

The few times we got 10+ people in a stretch SUV limo during Vegas trips for DEFCON, got crazy music playlists queued up, had a big hype fest ride to Fremont Street, then we'd explore, party, and buy stupid trinkets, costume pieces, or pay scantily clad entertainers all for the sake of the Talos/VRT traditional "you buy it, they wear it" tradition.

Joe Marshall being a beast in Ukraine with Project PowerUp.



All of TI&I getting stuck in Vermont and scrambling to get home.

The Talos White Elephant gift exchange in December 2023 in San Jose, folks (Kevin Flood and Anthony Paredes) fought over the jumbo wine glass that could fit a whole wine bottle.



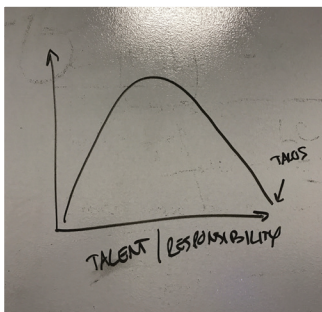
When Matt Olney received a rude email asking if he was the “Internet Police,” thus spawning the name of the short-lived Talos softball team.

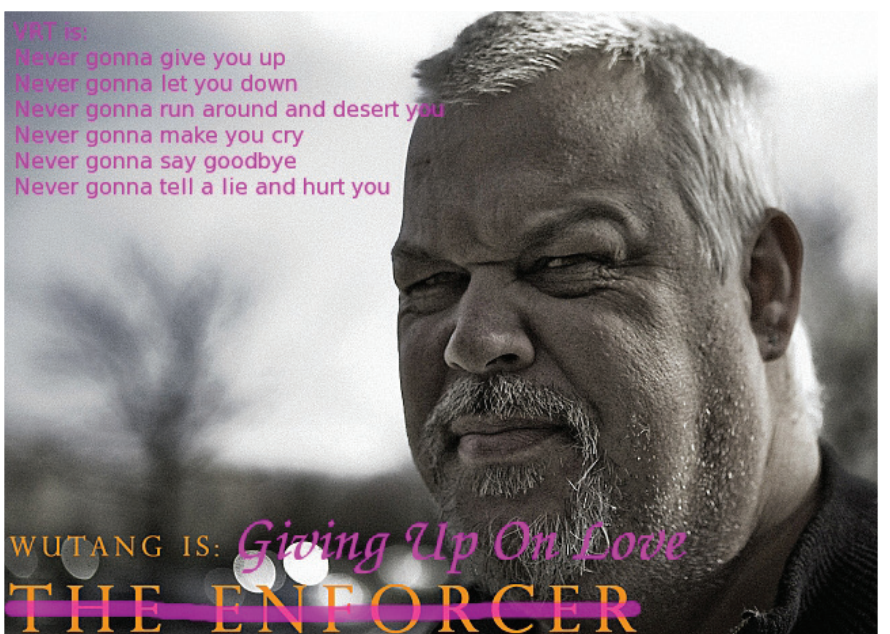
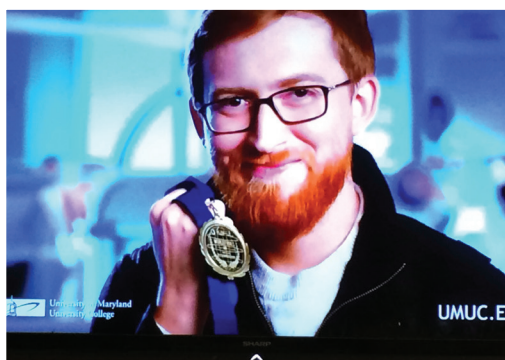
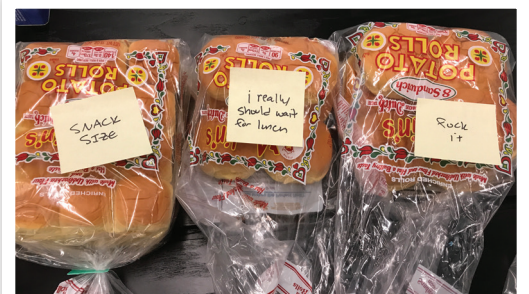
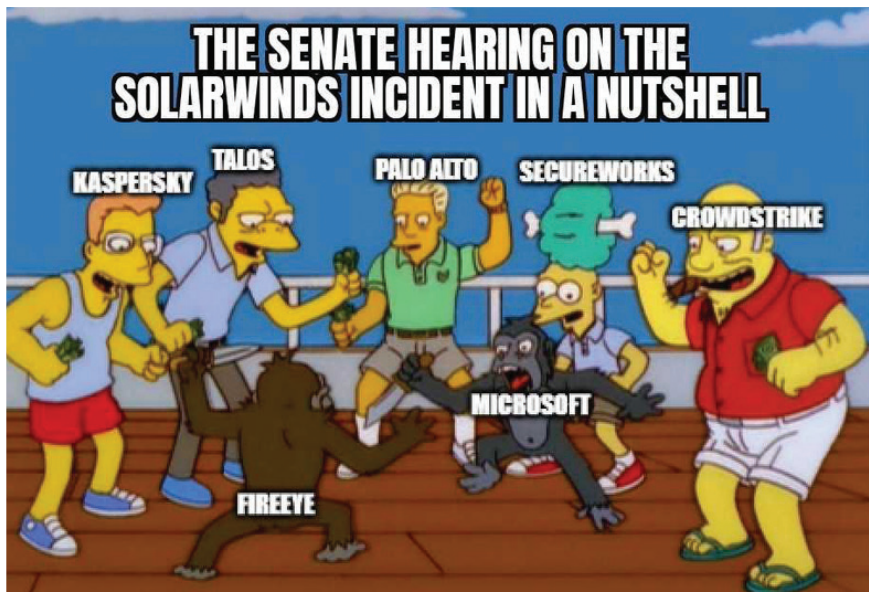


What do you meme?



If you know, you know. If not, it's OK to giggle along, too. From team inside jokes, to outrageous allegations and everything in between, these are some of Talos' favorite memes through the years.







CLUBS & PROGRAMS

Talos works hard and plays hard. These are the unique groups that help us get through even the toughest days.

How Cisco Talos Incident Response came to be

The Cisco Talos Incident Response (Talos IR) team has been part of Talos since 2019, and is now 45 members strong across 13 countries. Whether they're on call, handling an emergency response, or engaging with customers, the people truly make Talos IR different. **The Yearbook team sat down with Pierre Cadieux to talk about how Talos IR has grown from its inception.**



What were the reasons behind bringing Incident Response into Talos?

At the time I was working in Cisco as a consultant focussed on strategic security development. I really wanted to get back into IR as that's my background. When I first talked to folks in the IR team as it was back then [part of the Customer Experience team (aka Advanced Services)], I asked them how they were integrated with our threat intelligence team, Talos. The answer was, "We're not."

I was very disappointed – and concerned. There's an obvious link between the things that IR discovers during investigations, and the things that are found within threat telemetry. The nexus between the two are where we can be in a better position to help our customers.

The IR team at that point also wasn't global – they had a few disparate teams around the world, but none of them worked together. That disappointed me, too, because security is a global problem and having responders and consultants who can speak the language and understand the culture and geolocation is super important.

The answer was fairly clear in my mind – we needed a much stronger link between IR and threat intelligence, and that's how we started talking to Talos.

Members of the IR team at the time and Talos leadership gathered in London

"Everybody has each other's backs. It's very refreshing, there's not a lot of focus on 'Let's look at what you did wrong and try to fix that.' Everybody tries to stay positive, and that goes a long way when you're trying to keep your temperament cool, calm and collected."

– Heather Couk

"An organization is nothing more than your employees. I have amazing colleagues whom I enjoy working with and learning from. If you don't have that, it can be very tough [in incident response]."

– Giannis Tziakouris

"To me, Incident Response means a team sport that makes the world a safer place. We do Incident Response because we love it and we're passionate about seeing our customers succeed."

– Nate Pors



to talk through what might be possible and how we could leverage each other's strengths. We also talked about wanting to become more of a global presence and creating a unified marketing and branding approach.

How has Talos IR grown since the 2019 launch?

The team itself has grown considerably, and we have more of a presence in Europe and the Middle East than we've ever had before. We continue to offer more services because customer needs evolve, or we find a way to do things better. The latest one is the Log Architecture Assessment which gives customers more context about their logs (or lack thereof).

That's a really important aspect of our culture – the team is encouraged (and is given time) to come up with new

ideas that will make our customers' lives better. There's nothing worse than having an ivory tower who tells you, "You need to do this new thing." And then you look at it and go, "I don't even know what this is." I've been there professionally and it's horrible. We wanted to create an environment where everyone could assist with the development of new services and be part of their implementation.

Are there any incidents that stand out to you?

There was one incident that really brought home just how well the integration between IR and threat intelligence was working. We had dealt reactively with a ransomware incident with one customer. Shortly afterwards, another customer called us – they were a healthcare organization and they were seeing some deployment

of the same malicious tools that we had seen with the previous incident. However, the organization wasn't fully encrypted with ransomware yet. We were able to talk them through what was happening, secured their backups, and we stopped the encryption from taking hold.

How would you describe the team culture at Talos IR?

When you work in high stakes situations, you need to know that your team members have your back. And I know my team 100% have my back, just as I have theirs. We've been through some stressful situations, but we've built a strong bond based on collaboration and trust. Plus – there are no assholes. If we ask a question which someone has an expertise in, they are always willing to give the time to answer it.

Snort Rules!

You can't walk through a Talos office without spotting, or possibly getting hit by a large snouted foam pig. Snort, and the beloved mascot Snorty, have been a pivotal part of Talos from the early days.

Originally created as a free, open-source network intrusion detection system (IDS) and intrusion prevention system (IPS) by Marty Roesch, Snort has grown to be a team of 24 Talosians who work on Snort every day, turning it into the most widely deployed IPS in the world.

Through the years, the Talos team has continued to evolve Snort's open-source offerings, releasing Snort 3 on Jan. 19, 2021, and announcing Snort ML, a machine learning-based detection engine, on March 15, 2024.

Snort, but more specifically Snorty, has become a cult favorite within the open-source community. Each year, new colors of Snortys are given out at Black Hat and other security events, with collectors claiming Snortys by the handful. The Talos Creative team has led an all-Talos-designed Snort Calendar since 2017, where 25,000 calendars are printed annually and claimed within minutes. The love for Snort knows no bounds, from Harley Davidson giveaways, foreign race cars, tattoos inked in the name of Snort, and plenty set aflame. As we celebrate 10 years of Talos, we couldn't do so without reminiscing on Snort through the years.





Chris Jacob and Swami got Snort tattoos one year at Black Hat, paid for by Jennifer "Sunshine" Steffans in a "I'll pay if you get the tattoo" sort of thing.



In the early days, circa 2003 - 2004, Marty and Wayne thought it would be a good idea to have a race car advertise Snort the painted porsche was the result. The whereabouts of the car are unknown but believed to have occurred in Germany.



MITCH



Beer, threats & no silver bullets

The story behind Beers with Talos,
as told by Matt, Mitch and Lurene

Beers with Talos episodes have been downloaded over 4 million times. This is up there alongside Generative AI, Bitcoin and Blockchain as things we don't understand.

It's particularly confusing when you realize that we don't do Beers with Talos for the audience – we do it because it gives us an excuse to get together and hang out for a few hours twice a week.

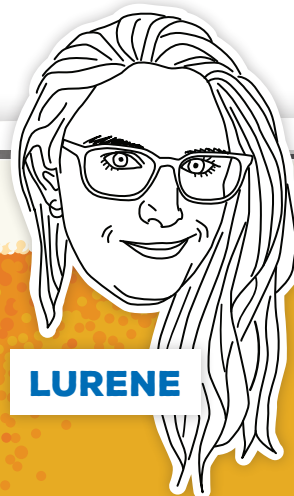
That was always the concept – that the audience wasn't listening to some kind of performance, or an episode of "Talos explains things." We wanted the podcast to be approachable and to make the audience feel like they're hanging out with a group of friends. And sometimes we talked about security...but only the things we gave a shit about.

We started Beers with Talos in 2017. The original lineup (Mitch, Matt, Nigel Houghton, Craig Williams and Joel Esler) was all middle-aged white dudes...of course we were going to start a podcast.

Over the years, the lineup has changed as various people have left Talos, but what hasn't changed is the fact that we are all genuinely great friends who love spending time together. It feels effortless. In fact, so little effort goes into our recordings. Our editor, Hazel, spends infinitely more time on Beers with Talos than anyone else does. We make her deal with our various meanderings, and she makes us sound good when inevitably one of us forgets to wear headphones or records on the wrong track.

We have a bit of a ritual before we start recording the show. Mitch is required to reference the run sheet – a mythical management device that would ideally have all the information we need to run the show. But we know this doesn't exist because when we ask Mitch what episode it is so we can label our recordings, he inevitably doesn't know.

LURENE



NIGEL



CRAIG



The pre-show is basically a decompression period to help our brains adjust from being in Webex meetings all day. We start talking as though the podcast is recording until the flow starts to appear, and then we press “record.”

Another part of running the show that people don’t typically know about is the amount of spam we receive related to the podcast. The beerswithtalos@cisco.com mailer easily gets some of the strangest spam you’ve ever seen.

The best of them was the investor who contacted us inquiring how he might purchase Talos because he wanted to put his experience into our success. Matt sent a Webex message to SBG legal asking if we were allowed to sell Talos. Elena’s wise response was a GIF of an auctioneer banging a hammer and yelling “SOLD.”

In the beginning, we would get a weekly email from someone who took offense at the fact that we had “Beer” in our name. We spent a while trying to figure out who this guy was and discovered that he was a racist fundamentalist cult leader who was on a mission to stamp out “obscenity” with his very own blocklist of terms.

Often, we set out to record one thing, and something else, much more beautiful happens instead. A recent example is when we had gathered in the Fulton office to record a rare in-person episode, when Matt and Lurene were called into some critical meetings. So, we decided to turn it into the “speed dating” episode where we brought people in from all over Talos to talk about their work and how they feel about working here. Nobody had time to prep. Everyone

gave their raw, gut response about working together. It was amazing. And listening back to it made us all cry.

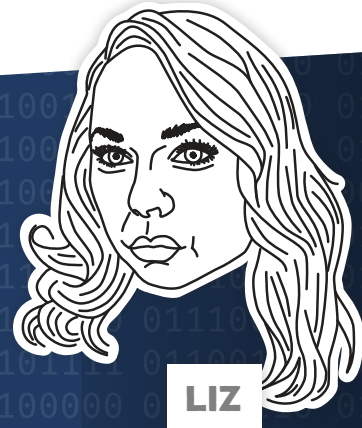
The friendship component that comes across in the show is real, to the point that to this day there is a Signal group chat that consists of everyone who has been a full-time host. It is the best kind of insane chat, and everyone is roughly the same as on the podcast.

This collection of people – Mitch, Nigel, Craig, Matt, Joel, Liz Waddell and Lurene Grenier – have each helped build the informal, yet deeply informed (at least on security matters) podcast that is Beers With Talos. Each host is so unique that listeners developed favorites – to this day Matt’s sister-in-law mourns the departure of Nigel.

But it isn’t just the hosts that helped BWT be successful. It’s also the guests. Whether it was the party-based wisdom of Michelle Denney, the bizarre drink choices of Wendy Nather or the deep lore of “Turkey Lurkey Man” that was introduced by David Liebenberg, the guests contributed their own charm to BWT. Also, J.J. was on a couple of times.

So that’s Beers with Talos. The success, like so much real-world success, was an accident. But as it happens, what we were able to build (which is largely a reflection of how Talos itself was built) appealed to a lot of people.

Be sure to subscribe to the YouTube feed of Beers With Talos for extra content. And there’s always something special for our Patreon subscribers.



The Short Tale of Talos Takes

Curious about where Talos' short-form podcast came from? Jon Munshaw, the show's primary host and producer, walks through the history of this show and some of his favorite episodes and quotes from its four-plus years of existence.

When we first decided that we wanted to launch a new podcast to go alongside Beers with Talos, it was mainly a question of what space were we trying to fill? Every security-minded person on Twitter with more than a few hundred followers already had their own podcast, but the problem was, they were all too long.

I truthfully can't remember who first came up for the idea for Talos Takes, but it was certainly a combination of myself, Mitch Neff, Joel Esler, my former boss, and Craig Williams. We first set off to make a podcast that was 10 minutes or less, summarizing one topic a week that was relevant to the current goings-on in cybersecurity. When developing episode ideas, I essentially asked myself, "Would my mom understand this?" While I can't say she can grasp everything we eventually would talk about on the show, I do always keep that in mind as I try to take complicated security topics and dissect them in 10 minutes or less.

After kicking around several names (Talos in Ten, Hot Takes with Talos), we settled

on "Talos Takes," largely based off Craig's penchant for spouting off hot takes on robots and Canadian APTs.

We launched the first few episodes as part of the Beers with Talos feed with Nick Biasini and Earl Carter serving as the initial hosts, and I eventually took over as full-time host at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (mainly because I was the only one with a good-quality microphone at my house).

Working on Talos Takes is always the highlight of my week. I love talking to researchers from every corner of Talos and Cisco about a full range of topics – in my time as host and producer, I've covered everything from ransomware soap operas to back-to-school tips for parents who were still dealing with their children bringing laptops home for remote learning.

I appreciate everyone who has taken time out of their schedule to talk to me for the show and answer my "explain like I'm 5" questions. And I appreciate Joel and Craig at the time for embracing my vision and helping me launch what is now more than 180 episodes long.



Here are some of my favorite episodes and quotables from the show:

Talos Takes Ep. #73 (Oct. 15, 2021): Fight back against the phish with Jaeson Schultz

"Ultimately, if you're dealing with email, you have to realize the person who's sending the email is the one setting the tone and the subject. Anyone can send you an email pretending to be your bank."

Talos Takes Ep. #102 (July 8, 2022): Unmasking ransomware groups on the dark web with Paul Eubanks

"In the case of favicon matching, you're matching a page element there, it's a unique element that you're trying to match from the dark web to a page on the public internet. In this case, it was a branding icon the ransomware group chose for itself to appear more legitimate."

Talos Takes Ep. #32 (Aug. 28, 2020): How to keep your children safe while they attend school online with Craig Williams

"The worst thing is we're shoving all these teachers into a position where they're supposed to be experts and they didn't receive any prior training. I can tell you with certainty they got to work with these tools for about a week before they had to use them. The real risks here come from everyone not knowing what's normal."

TALOS TAKES BY THE NUMBERS

31,226

Downloads of the most popular episode: #22: "Snort 101"

+1 million

Total downloads since launch

176

Number of episodes

53

Number of unique guests

7%

Percentage of listeners from the U.K., the most popular country outside of the U.S.

35%

Percentage of downloads originating from Apple Podcasts

Talos Sportsball



When asked what, exactly, Talos “Sportsball” is, Ashley Kane and Alex McDonnell think back to the good old days. Ashley remembers, “I think it was, like, go outside and whatever ball was out there start playing. Soccer was always one I saw, and then they had kickballs that would literally always end up on the roof. There was probably, like, 10 kickballs on the roof. And that was just, like, the big thing that was their break, 3 o’clock every day. They would all go out and I’d be like, ‘Where’s everybody at?’ and then I’d look out back, and it looked like a prison, honestly. There was gym equipment and they would just go out for their outdoor time.”

“There has been different iterations,” Alex McDonnell shared. “When I started there was just ‘Tea Time,’ and at 3 p.m. we would just go into the office kitchen back at the old office and we would hang around. Everyone would have tea and then eventually some people brought in little balls and at first it was kind of just like tossing around. And then someone brought in agility balls, where you can’t predict where they bounce that. People started bouncing that around, and there’d be messes all the time. It got to the point where we were 20-plus people and the kitchen was just not big enough. So especially when it was nice outside, we would just go outside, and it started off we would throw balls at each other. We’d just have a couple of dodgeballs basically and

it’d be us in a circle, pretty juvenile, and eventually, we’d just start kicking them against the walls or something and then people would miss and it’d go on the roof. We implemented a debt system where if you kicked on ball on the roof you had to buy two. And then once a year the landlords would come by with the facilities guy and get on top and drop like 30 balls, and we’d be like ‘Ok thank you!’ It was kind of really just team building slash stress relieving exercise and I don’t know who started it, but it was a wonderful thing and as long as we were able to do it, it was a lot of fun.”

In memory of the lost kickballs and adult recess breaks we’ve pulled together some Talos classics in honor of the organization’s beloved pastimes.



“McBee nailed a runner hauling up the first-base line in the side of the head. The Sean Baird one is my No. 2.”

– Chris Marshall

“Friendly reminder that Baird hit that lady twice. In the belly, twice. In successive practice pitches. She finally moved. Also, poor László ruining his ankle during batting practice, maybe on his first pitch. To be fair to Baird, both of his strikes were like, high-as-fuck pop-ups which had everyone else scattering for cover, even her friend/spouse moved. But she was like, ‘I’m good.’”

– Adrian Breeman

“Also never winning.”

– Matt Olney



Softball memories remain:

- Multiple injuries.
- Accidental bat to the umpire’s head.
- Practice foul ball lobbing toward a pregnant lady (Sean Baird).
- The stubborn ref and subsequent letter by our team manager.
- Outfield’s enthusiasm at calling out switch hitters.
- Some of our best dingers getting picked off by the U.S. Army team.

– Chris Marczewski

“That may have been the last time I saw Watchinski run outside of a gym.”

– Chris Marshall





"I'm wearing the completely wrong shoes for sportsball, but I'm in."

- Dave Raynor



“As Spenser learned, there are no innocent bystanders in sportsball. And rather than help the guy up, Talos snaps a pic.

- Patrick DeSantis II



“Sportsball was brutal those days. In Spenser's case, he was sitting down vaping in between a soccer ball passing group. Someone winged a kick hard and left, because we're all stellar athletes here in Talos.

- Joe Marshall



"My kicks and chicken wing shots may have lost us many soccer balls on the roof, but the windshield incident still makes me laugh."

-Chris Marczewski



"I do miss the midday sportsball."

-Chris Marshall



Read The Freakin' Cookbook

Talosians can often be found connecting at the lunch table, over a drink, or team dinners so, when Marla Mingee-Earl wanted to bring Talos together over a cookbook the Employee Committee was all for it.

“I ended up kind of pitching it like, ‘Hey, wouldn’t it be great if we could do this?’ So, we devised a way of gathering recipes,” Marla recalls. “We ended up gathering them [recipes] for, I don’t know, a couple of months or whatever, and then we had a series of people in the background. Each person would walk through the recipes, make sure there weren’t any questions while you were reading it. We did a lot of QA. We had a drop-dead date so at the end of the calendar year, it would be one of those things we could push out right before the holidays.”

With a culinary Snorty from Wendy Bishop, and Alexis Childers offering up a nod to the Red Team Field Manual, The Talos Family Cookbook titled, “RTFCC: Read the Freakin’ Cookbook,” came into existence on Dec. 16, 2021 and consists of recipes for drinks, appetizers, soups, side dishes, main courses and desserts and is a collective of Talos’ teammates’ beloved recipes. When asked about her favorite recipe, Marla’s quick to pick the “Pumpkin Stuff,” not only because it’s delicious and quick, but because it can be modified to fit dietary restrictions and it’s her aunt’s secret recipe... that she just happened to share with a few hundred of her closest friends.

Included below are just a sampling of the recipes found in the cookbook. Find the full cookbook in the Talos Family Cookbook Webex room, which can be accessed under the Talos Team tab in WebEx.





Pierre's Chicken Soup

Contributor: Pierre Cadieux

Servings: 6+ | **Prep Time:** 1 hour | **Cook Time:** 3.5 hours

Ingredients

- 1 large leek
- 1 whole chicken (4-5 pounds)
- 4 chicken legs
- 1 large onion, peeled
- 2 whole carrots, peeled
- 4 carrots, sliced into ¼ inch slices
- 1½ tablespoons of salt
- 1 teaspoon of fresh dill (or dried if fresh is not an option)
- 1 bag of frozen peas
- 5 whole cloves
- ½ teaspoon of whole peppercorns
- 3 parsnips

Recipe Steps

1. Trim the bottom of the leek at the roots and cut it in half lengthwise. Separate the layers and wash very well on all sides under water.
2. Place the leek in a stockpot along with the whole chicken (remove giblets), chicken legs (optional), onion (embedded with at least 5 whole cloves), peppercorns, and the two peeled carrots.
3. Add water to cover the chicken and bring to a boil on HIGH heat.
4. Reduce the heat to MEDIUM-LOW and simmer for 2 hours and 15 minutes. Skim off any scummy foam that forms as it cooks.
5. Using a large slotted spoon, remove the chicken, chicken parts, and vegetables from the broth. Set the chicken aside to cool and remove the skin and bones. Discard the skin and bones, save the meat to return to the soup at a later step. Discard the whole vegetables (onion and carrots).
6. Coarsely chop the meat.
7. Use the slotted spoon or the colander to gather any remaining bits left in the soup, discard.
8. Add the sliced carrots, parsnips, salt, and dill to the stock.
9. Bring to a boil over HIGH heat, then return to LOW, simmer for 30 minutes.
10. Increase heat to MEDIUM, then add the frozen peas and chicken meat. Simmer for about 8 minutes. Add more salt if needed.

Pumpkin Stuff

Contributor: Marla Earle

Servings: 10

Prep Time: 30 mins

Cook Time: 60 mins

Ingredients

- 1 29-ounce can of pumpkin
- 4 eggs
- 1½ cups of white sugar
- 2 teaspoons of cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon of nutmeg
- 1 12-ounce can of evaporated milk
- 1 15.29-ounce box of yellow cake mix (use half the box)
- 1 cup of melted butter
- 1 cup of chopped nuts (1/2 cup if finely chopped; walnuts recommended)

Recipe Steps

1. Preheat oven to 350°.
2. Grease a 15"x10"x1" pan.
3. Mix the pumpkin, eggs, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and evaporated milk until smooth.
4. Pour the mix into the greased pan.
5. Sprinkle the dry cake mix over the mix.
6. Pour the butter evenly over the mix.
7. Cover the mix with chopped nuts.
8. Bake uncovered for 1 hour.



Stella
Alain Zidouemba



Mac & Stella
Patrick Mullen & Alain Zidouemba



Poogie
Paige Hutton

Pets of Talos

Our yearbook wouldn't be complete without a nod to our furry coworkers. Whether you remember the days of doggos in the office or spend your days working from home with your furry friends, our pets of Talos are near and dear to all our hearts.

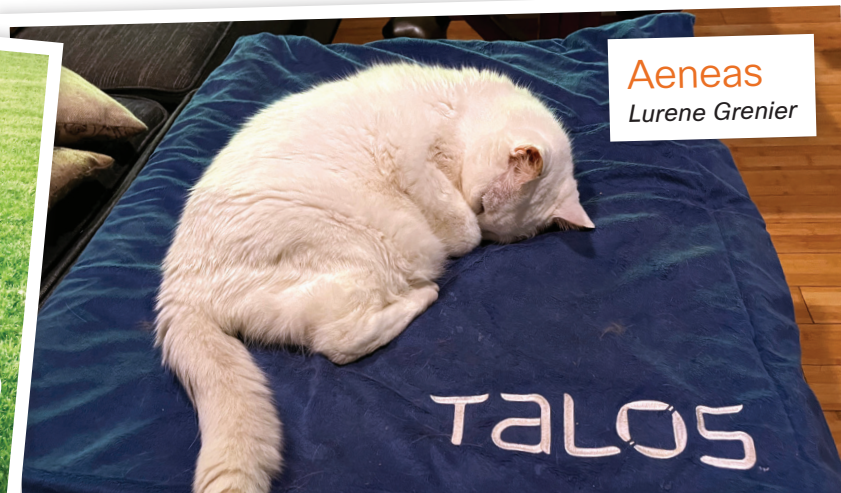
Alain Zidouemba shares what it meant to have pets allowed in the office: "Later on in the Sourcefire days, something that was really neat was that pets were allowed at the office. This allowed many of us to adopt puppies, which would have otherwise been impossible if we couldn't bring them to the office and care for them throughout the day. My wife and I got our pet back in 2012. She's 12 years old now, older than our three kids, and it's great to think about all the memories we've formed along the way."

Jen Stromberg's pup Fiona has a special connection to Talos, as well, "Dave [Jen's husband] and I adopted Fiona as a puppy from Martijn De Boer [a previous manager at Sourcefire] who was fostering her with his wife. Dave worked at Sourcefire before I did and would bring Fiona to work every day with him her first year, she's going to be 12 this year."

Are you a dog lover? Cat lover? Don't miss out on the "pawsitivity" and cuteness overload in the Pets of Talos Webex space.



A dog named
Talos



Aeneas
Lurene Grenier

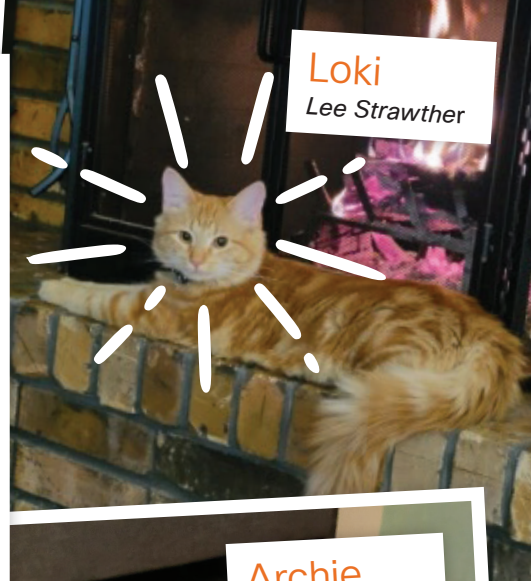




Freya
Terryn Valikodath



Luna
Colin Grady



Loki
Lee Strawther



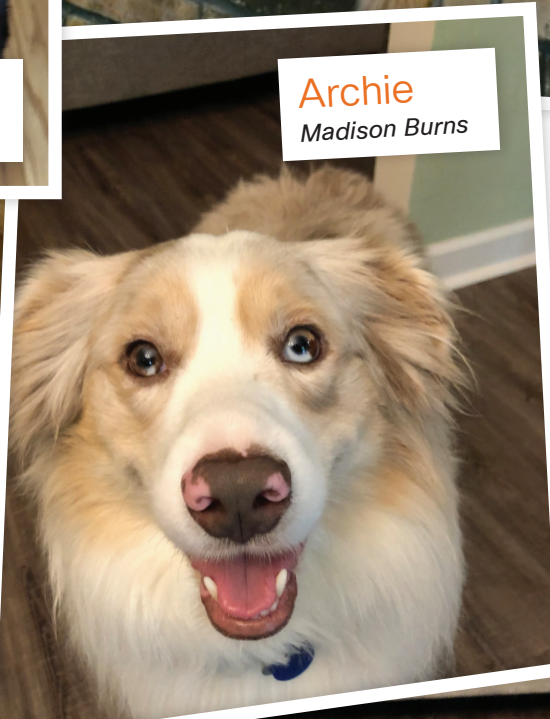
Murphy
Patrick DeSantis II



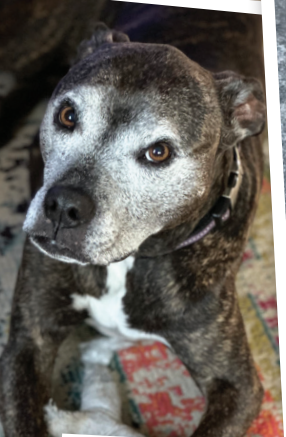
Vernie
Luci Lagrimas



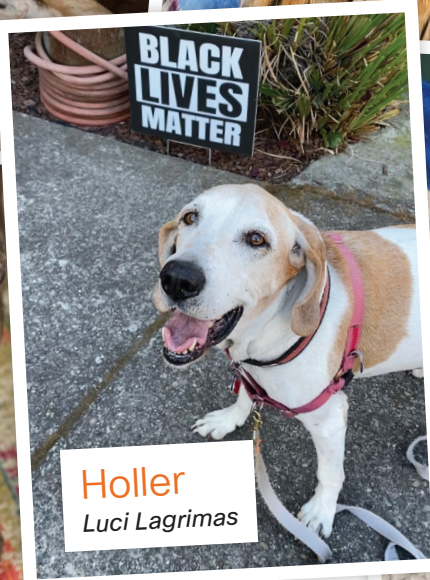
Gracie
Luci Lagrimas



Archie
Madison Burns



Fiona
Jen Stromberg



Holler
Luci Lagrimas



Fitz
Madison Burns



Maple
Madison Burns

Talos Webex “Clubs”



It's the virtual equivalent of high school clubs! Whether you're in or near a main office or fully remote, Talosians connect through Webex spaces on a wide range of topics. From personal hobbies to pure random Talos chaos, there's a way for everyone to connect.

3D Printing and CNC: A space for all printing, engraving, and lasering questions, brags and general nerding out.

Animal Hunting: Not to be confused with Threat Hunting, this channel is all about the outdoor tradition.

BBQ'ing (tips and tricks): Bring your questions or your BBQ brags.

Bikes and Boards and Skis and Surfboards: Outdoorsy sports!

Coding and Dev Talk: --self--explanatory--

Cooking- #FoodPorn: Where you go to brag about that delicious meal you made and connect with Talos foodies.

Email Jokes (Pictures): Email memes, jokes and puns.

Friends of Caffeine: From full barista set ups, to homemade latte art and all things caffeine.

Gym Fit Life: Connect with Talosians over different forms of exercise.

Hall of (Bad) Parking: All things automotive with an emphasis for especially bad parking jobs.

Hardware Hacking: Hacking, but of the hardware variety.

Hiking: Whether you're an avid hiker, looking for new spots to explore or generally enjoy the outdoors the [Social] Hiking space is just for you. Also see Fulton-Hiking.

History Nerds (or Geeks): If you think about the Roman Empire daily, this is your space.



In WebEx, click on left hand column “Teams” icon, click on Talos, left hand column includes all Talos Rooms. [Social] indicates specifically social rooms to interact with fellow Talosians.

Hockey fans and players: Players, news, tickets, and more.

Homebrewing: Fellow Talosians fermenting things at home!

iRule: The general catch-all office bullshit channel.

MUSIC is the drug: From sharing your favorite album, talking through the latest music news, or looking for someone to catch a show, MUSIC is the drug is the space for all music lovers.

Movie Talk: Calling all cinephiles, it’s all in the title. Also see Movies, Movies, Movies—what have you seen lately?

#NeverTurnLeft- Dash Cam Video Fridays: Car makes left hand turn ==> car crash ==> we lol

Off-road, Overland, and 4x4: Whether you have a bucket of bolts or a tricked-out Tacoma, all off-road enthusiasts are welcome.

Pets of Talos: Keeping it pawsitive, one cute pet pic at a time.

Ping Pong Sing Song: Fulton’s very own ping pong club, up for singles and doubles. Less running than pickleball.

Puzzlers: Wordle and other daily web games.

Sports Talk: For the love of all things sports.

Talos AV Club: Audio, video, sounds and pictures. This space is for questions, answers and gear porn for anything A/V related.

Talos Garage Sale- Buy, Sell, Trade: Just like Craigslist and Facebook Marketplace but with people you work with.

Talos Games Unplugged: Board Games! D&D! Dice Stuff!

Talos in/near: Fulton, SJC19, Austin, RTP, and Toronto allow for Talosians in and near those offices to stay connected and up to date on office and regional happenings.

Talos Swifties: Dear Reader, You need to calm down. It’s not a blank space, it’s a Webex space.

Talos Winter Sports [Skiing]

[Snowboarding] [Tubing]: However, you enjoy the winter months connect with other Talosians as they share their favorite spots, tips and sights from the slopes.

Unofficial Book Club, thekitchen!:

Whether you’re an avid reader, looking for recommendations or just need to share your literary hot takes, all are welcome!

Vacation Brags: Share your vacation photos in 10 photos or less, all the excitement of sharing, none of the guilt.

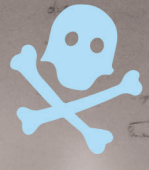
Video Games!: For the love of all things video games.

~~~~~ Call of Duty ~~~~~: The home of “Teamkill Marty Monday.” Bonus points for creativity.

Volunteering: With Cisco providing us Time2Give connect with other Talosians to find or share opportunities to give back.



DRINK TILL






Notes & Autographs



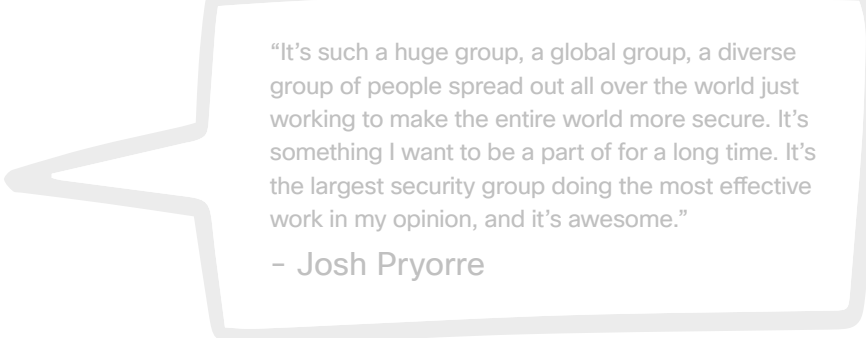
“There have been all sorts of hijinks.”

–Dave Raynor



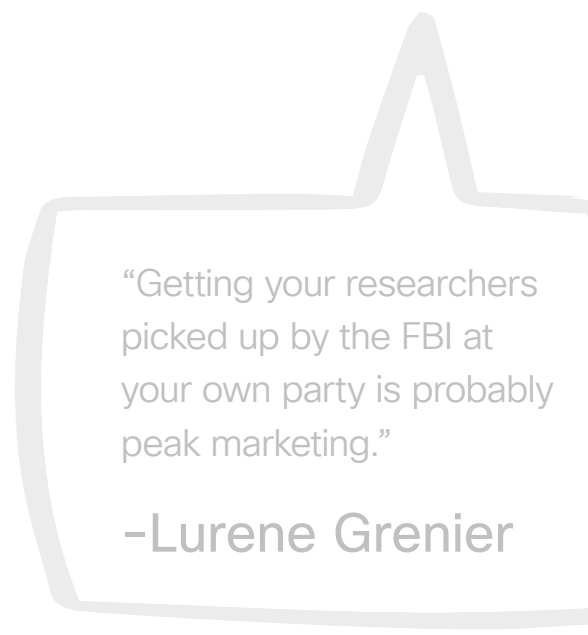
“What do I like about Talos? Every day is a challenge. Something new. What do I hate? Every day is a challenge, something new.”

–Rich Snyder



“It’s such a huge group, a global group, a diverse group of people spread out all over the world just working to make the entire world more secure. It’s something I want to be a part of for a long time. It’s the largest security group doing the most effective work in my opinion, and it’s awesome.”

– Josh Pryorre



“Getting your researchers picked up by the FBI at your own party is probably peak marketing.”

–Lurene Grenier

Notes & Autographs

Behind the Book

Thank you to everyone who took the time to submit photos or stories to be included in the Talos 10 Yearbook. Without your submissions and willingness, this book would not have been possible. Thank you to our leaders who saw our vision for a physical piece of Talos history to unite us all in celebrating 10 years of Talos, especially Matt Watchinski, Amy Henderson and Jen Stomberg. We hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we did creating it.

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Jen Stromberg and
Mitch Neff

Faculty Sponsors

Amy Henderson and
Matt Watchinski

"Having started my working career in the VRT and Talos has I think destroyed me for any other career, just because of how unique the team, and the group, and the culture is."

- Kevin Miklavcic