All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

Two wrongs don't make a right – but 3 lefts do!

I watched a fine "Ted talk" by Keren Elazri titled "Hackers: The Internet's immune system", which had as one of its key themes, that attackers (she called hackers) who do wrong things for good causes by revealing vulnerabilities then exploiting them to get them fixed are forcing the repairs of things that are broken (read insecure) and are therefore doing good.

I disagree

There's a surprise. Is there anything I have agreed to lately? Sure, but that's for another day.

As I watched the talk and saw the beautiful long black hair with red colored tips, I wondered what she would do if I had her on stage, asked her to look toward the audience, came up behind her with a pair of scissors, and cut off half the hair on one side of her head.

Now I know that sounds a bit creepy, but I imagine she would complain and be really unhappy with me. And I want to be clear – I am rallying AGAINST doing any such thing. But here's my point. Her hair has a vulnerability. Anybody can come up behind her and cut it off. So if I do this to her, am I not hacking her personal protective system? Would she find it a great benefit if I did it on stage without her knowledge to prove to her and the world that there is hair vulnerability? If lots of hair hackers went out and did it, would we be doing the World a favor, forcing the hair care industry to secure hair better?

Some might even go so far as to say that the "acid in the face" people are hacking the failure to use adequate vale security for womens' faces. Those women (and men) who don't wear veils are insecure against acid attacks!

Use a stronger password! Or Biometrics!! Your login is insecure!!!

Always wear a veil! Or a motorcycle helmet with mask!! Your face is insecure!!!

If you should see something wrong here, perhaps it's that you think faces are less important than computer accounts, or perhaps that breaking into an account is less serious than acid in a face. But then you should be far more concerned about the acid attack than the passwords and demand at least a veil for everyone!

Two wrongs and eternally imperfect security

Here's the thing. There are and always will be insecurities. There is no perfect system other than death. And even then, arguably, you will come back in the form of microbes that will be eaten by bugs that will get eaten by birds that will get eaten by people, and be part of yet another person who dies!

The problem is that there are rocks and windows, and no matter what you do to your window, there is a tough enough rock that can be thrown fast enough to break through it. If we live our lives breaking windows and force all windows to be too thick for today's rocks, we will get bigger rocks, not more secure homes. What we need is a more civil society, not a less civil one. And when we spend our time demonstrating that we can throw rocks through windows, we are likely to get a lot more breaking and entering AND more expensive windows.

Demonstrating that I can cut your hair or throw acid in your face or throw a rock through a window is wrong. Forcing people to focus on and spend resources on stronger hair (or scissor controls), more and better veils (or acid controls), or thicker windows (or the grinding of all rocks into dust), will not help the world move forward. These things are wrong, and two wrongs do not make a right.

What we need is more lefts and fewer wrongs

I beg forgiveness for all the left-handed people out there, my older brother included. Most people are right handed, which is to say by really bad analogy but poetic license in the extreme, that most (right handed) people work (and by bad analogy) think like most other (right handed) people.

The reason we need hackers is not because they can break things, and hackers who break things are called … criminals!

The reason we need hackers is because they think differently than others. It is their original thinking that we want and should embrace. To be clear, I am a hacker, but I have never committed a computer crime to my knowledge (you can never tell that there isn't some law somewhere you haven't violated). You can be smart, inventive, have fun, innovate, and break things, while figuring out how to fix them if you like… or not. And you can do all of this without ever breaking into any actual systems.

- Want to prove a hack? Hack into your own account!! It's the same proof.
  - Want to embarrass somebody into making a change you want? That's wrong!
    - You would think it wrong if I did it to you. Something about the golden rule.
      - If you don't believe me, consider that my first approach may be to start cutting off your family's body parts to prove that you are vulnerable to knives.

Which points something else out. Escalation is what comes from forcing people into things they don't want to be forced into. Something about the "fight / flight" response. Some may use flight, but then others will use fight. You may get some folks to back off, but others will send you to jail or just kill you. And we have seen some "hackers" that have been killed.

So as you escalate from peace, prosperity, and the advancement of the human condition toward cyber war and weapons of mass corruption, perhaps it might be worth considering. The people on the other side will eventually escalate toward guns, bombs, attacks on critical infrastructures, and worse. And it is you and your family as well as mine that will suffer from your innocence and ignorance of the potential indirect consequences of your actions.

Conclusion

We all know about unanticipated consequences. Consider them anticipated. If you continue to escalate the cyber attack and defense process by real world attacks, or if you have been part of it in the past, you should be ready to claim full responsibility for your contribution to the future that you are helping to build and/or push us toward.

Stop wasting your innovation and brilliance on throwing bigger rocks through tougher windows and spend it on something fruitful for the world. Like the next cure for cancer, or the information system that will help prevent the spread of disease, or a more reliable industrial control methodology. Or do something right for the world by turning left 3 times!