



Driving actionable awareness: **FINRA's push for super-secure developers**

FINRA's job in the American financial landscape is an important one: they are the regulators that stand between investors and the broker-dealer industry, ensuring a fair market and stringent compliance. As a not-for-profit organization, the 3500-strong staff cohort plays a crucial role in the financial system, enforcing ethical standards and best practice in what is a complicated and high-risk area of business. Therefore, it stands to reason that software security is also a chief concern, with the industry rapidly digitizing in all areas.

Daniel Keane is a Lead Tester at FINRA, overseeing multiple teams and projects. His process involves hands-on security test strategy and planning, as well as supporting overall security awareness for developers.

He sought to engage his developers in security best practice, planting the seeds of a thriving security culture within the business. Through a fun, gamified tournament, Daniel really got his developers thinking positively on the world of software security.



The Challenge

One of Daniel's 2019 goals was to ensure the wider team was tackling projects with a security-first mindset: "It is vital that our organization is security-focused, and getting our developers in the mindset of security from a coding, build and testing perspective was key to the plan in my department," he said.

With security training sometimes seen as a laborious task by many companies, one that can divert attention from critical project delivery deadlines, a successful awareness campaign was required, fortifying the importance of upskilling on the subject.

Daniel and his team decided to take security awareness to the next level, utilizing an agile, immersive experience that showed developers the fun side of coding securely.

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DANIEL KEANE - LEAD TESTER FINRA

The Implementation

Daniel ran a competitive team tournament, using Secure Code Warrior's platform to pit sixty developers against each other in the ultimate test of real-world security skill. The participants could choose the languages and frameworks they were actively using in their job, rendering the challenges presented during the tournament highly relevant to everyday coding scenarios.

In the lead-up, Daniel ensured the team was well-prepared to defeat vulnerable code: "In order to get people tournament-ready in time for the event, we did some prior hands-on workshops where we were working through some penetration testing exercises, some security tooling, as well as other things from a security development perspective," he said.

FINRA offered great incentives to drive participation and preparation, with lucrative prizes for high-ranking teams. First place received a cool \$1,000, while second and third received \$800 and \$500 respectively. This created a real buzz around what was essentially an extracurricular activity, with the tournament having run on a Saturday: "People were definitely keen to get involved, with most taking time out of their own personal schedules to come and take part," Daniel said.

THE RESULT

FINRA's well-run, exciting tournament was instrumental in driving lasting security awareness within the organization, with developers positively engaged and motivated to keep security front-of-mind.

Another positive upside has been the surfacing of employees who are particularly passionate about security, suggesting they might be deployed as security champions within their team in the future.

"I really do think that people were excited about the event, and the Secure Code Warrior platform had a lot to do with that. It kept a buzz going and many participants are keen to know what's next in terms of our security initiatives," Daniel said.

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METRICS

Time spent training:

120 hours

Challenges Completed:

360

Number of
Security-Aware Developers:

61

* Statistics accurate as at December 2018.



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Warrior Wisdom



The importance of **internal communication** cannot be emphasised enough: Ensure key stakeholders, participants and team leaders know exactly what is happening, the key benefits of the training and projected outcomes.



Be sure there are **adequate support measures** for any questions and troubleshooting, especially during the tournament.



Make it fun! Training doesn't have to be boring, and a gamified platform like Secure Code Warrior is the perfect opportunity to turn such an important task into a memorable event. You will be rewarded with high engagement when you go the extra mile to include prizes, certificates and even a theme – the possibilities are endless.



In addition to upskilling the development team, you will uncover a powerful player in your midst: the **Security Champion**. This individual will be discovered within the platform, and is vital to leading the organization with a security mindset, as well as the skills to keep high-risk threats at bay.

ABOUT SECURE CODE WARRIOR

Secure Code Warrior is the developer-chosen solution for growing powerful secure coding skills. By making security a positive and engaging experience, our human-led approach uncovers the secure developer inside every coder, helping development teams ship quality code faster.

Through inspiring a global community of security-conscious developers to embrace a preventative secure coding approach, our mission is to pioneer a people-first solution to security upskilling, stamping out poor coding patterns for good.