Cyber Security should be a Team Sport

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Historian Joan Druett penned a book titled *Island of the Lost*. It's an interesting story about two ships shipwrecked on the same inhospitable island (Auckland Island). The ships were wrecked 20 miles apart in 1863 – and they did not know about each other. One ship's crew (the Grafton) thrived and all five crew members survived. The other group's (the Invercauld) sojourn was disastrous.

Druett explains how the Grafton's crew worked together to survive. They all pitched in and took turns to carry out duties such as cooking, foraging for food, building shelter or tanning seal leather. The crew members came from different nations, so they taught each other their languages and any skills they had. Two, who were unable to read and write, were taught to do so during the long cold evenings. During their two-year stay, they built a hut, a tannery and a forge, and constructed a boat which three crew members used to sail to New Zealand to summon assistance, ensuring that the remaining crew members were rescued. This group was characterised by good leadership, democracy and unity.

The experiences of the Invercauld's crew, stranded only 20 miles from the Grafton, could not have been more different. They found an old abandoned whaling station so did not have to build shelter. There were 19 of them, but only three survived the experience. The captain and the first mate expected the others to do all the work while they languished indoors. The captain tried to maintain the hierarchy that had existed on board – he commanded and they followed orders. As a consequence, 16 died. The survival of the remaining three is attributed by Druett to the actions of an Australian crew member, who had experience of living off the land.

In cyber security, there is undoubtedly a hierarchy: there are those who make the rules encoded in the information security policies, and then there are those who are expected to "comply". The word "comply" is problematic: with connotations of coercion and possible sanction. If the policy rules are too difficult to follow, or interfere too much with the person's ability to do their job, unhelpful coping behaviours might be engaged in, with shades of the Invercauld's crew members.

What can we learn from the Grafton's success?

1. **There was a sharing of skills, and a deliberate effort to upskill everyone.** This took time and effort, but some were taught to read and write, and new languages. Contrast that with the way we upskill people in cyber security. We "deliver" training in a session, which is usually in the form of a lecture, or require people to complete an online training course. The contrast is stark.
2. **They were all in it together.** The captain did not pull rank and require the other crew members to do as they were told. They pulled together to make a success of their stay. Organisations should reconsider the cyber security hierarchy and foster a more democratic and supportive culture in their organizations.
3. **Local leadership.** The Grafton's captain demonstrated leadership, while the Invercauld's captain thought his crew members were his slaves, to be ordered around. He failed to coordinate efforts for mutual benefit. This might seem to contradict the previous point, but true leadership is not a master-slave relationship, which Captain Musgrave of the Grafton understood.

For too long, we've treated cyber security as a solo game. This story teaches us that working as a team and supporting each other is a much better idea.