



**FORTINET**

# Becoming a Fortinet NSE 8

Profiling the journeys of  
cybersecurity's top experts

**NSE 8  
10th  
Anniversary**

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Profiling the journeys of  
cybersecurity's top experts

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## Preface

This book, based on original research, profiles how these professionals navigated their journey in cybersecurity to become Fortinet NSE 8s. Fortinet NSE 8 is the highest level of Fortinet certification, held by fewer than 400 people worldwide at the time of this publication. The professionals profiled here come from different countries, regions, and backgrounds, and each of them took a unique path to achieving the expert level of NSE 8.

We hope that the stories shared by these experts act as a guide, inspiring those of you working in cybersecurity to progress in your career and strive for high-level certifications, and motivating those who are not already in the field to explore opportunities and a career in cybersecurity.

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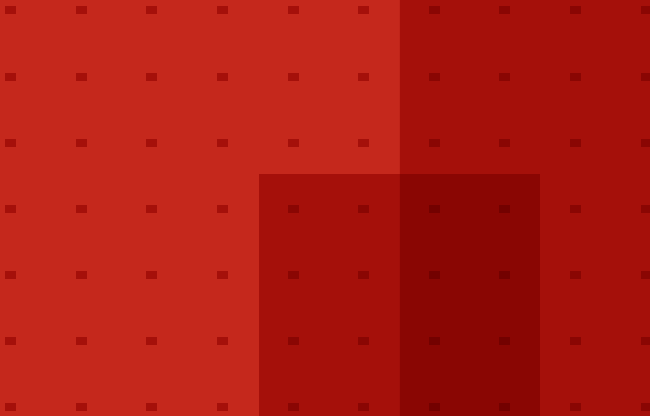
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CHAPTER 1

# Introducing the NSE 8 Certification



## Cybersecurity experts lead the way

One of the most compelling lessons learned from our research with the NSE 8s profiled in this book is that trained and experienced people are the key to getting the most out of cybersecurity technology. NSE 8 is the highest level of Fortinet certification. It was designed to identify elite technical experts in the industry who can design, deploy, and troubleshoot advanced Fortinet networks, products, and solutions. The broad knowledge that comes from achieving NSE 8 certification creates professionals who can be leaders and chart a roadmap to achieve the best security posture for organizations.

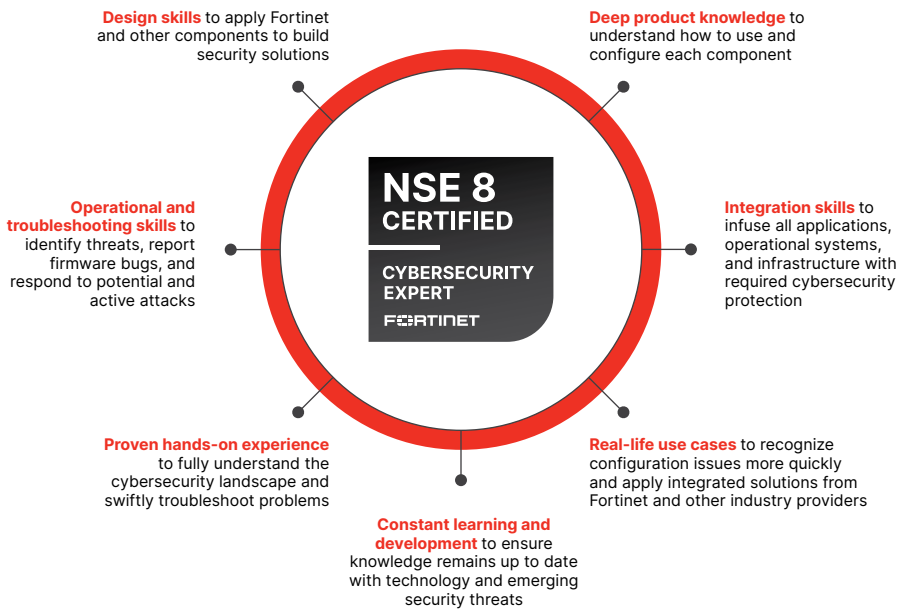
While conducting the interviews with the NSE 8s, it became clear that hands-on experience is the essential ingredient for achieving expertise. That said, each NSE 8's path to becoming an expert is unique. Some started their careers with university degrees. Others began with jobs in junior positions at resellers or system integrators. What unifies their stories is their real-world experience, drive to keep learning, and use of the Fortinet Training Institute certifications to expand and deepen their cybersecurity knowledge.

Note: All NSE 8s featured in this book held valid NSE 8 certifications at the time of their interviews.

# Summary of the skills required to be a cybersecurity expert

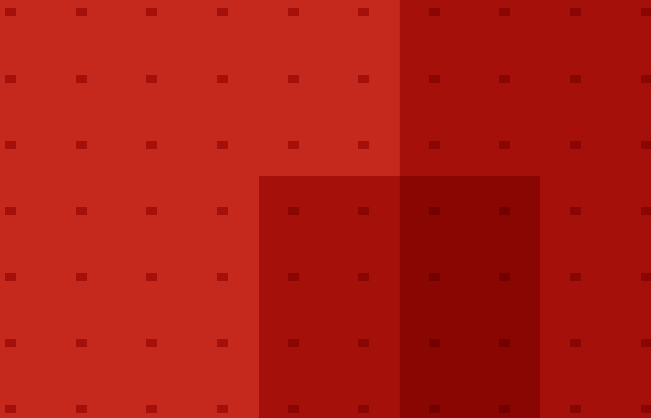
## The whole package:

The cybersecurity landscape is fiendishly complex. The skill set required to build, operate, and maintain a portfolio of defenses is both broad and deep. The NSE 8 certification provides a clear pathway to such expertise, defined by the following elements:



CHAPTER 2

# Lessons Learned: Key Principles to Guide Your Journey Toward Becoming an NSE 8



The NSE 8s we interviewed shared many insights, recommendations, and observations that are invaluable to those pursuing, or interested in pursuing, a successful career in cybersecurity. The following pages summarize these lessons.

There are multiple pathways to expertise



**My time learning with Fortinet showed me that there are many pathways into a cybersecurity career. I rose up in my career with certifications and dedication. Certifications must be renewed frequently to ensure that professionals stay on top of the changes in the field and the newest threats.”**

**Luke Titmus, NSE 8**

Director of Engineering Services  
Switchshop, United Kingdom

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Each NSE 8 followed their own path to achieving top-level status, but every path involved some combination of theoretical knowledge, certifications, and hands-on experience.

- With a growing skills gap and demand for cybersecurity experts, companies must embrace multiple pathways to expertise. The NSE 8s profiled here highlight that successful careers are founded on real-world experience and detailed knowledge of networking and operating systems. Certifications augment that hands-on experience, making true mastery achievable.
- Post-secondary education can act as an entryway into the profession, but because of the rapidly changing technology and industry standards, professionals must continue learning throughout their careers to become and remain cybersecurity experts.
- The NSE 8 certification validates that a professional has comprehensive expertise about products and solutions, enhanced problem-solving skills, and the ability to understand cybersecurity completely. The certification is proof that professionals have gained that expertise through high-level training and extensive real-world experience.

## Certifications are invaluable for staying current with the latest knowledge and advancements in cybersecurity

All NSE 8s agreed that certifications were essential for staying current with the constantly evolving threat landscape. They not only validated that their skills and knowledge remained relevant and up to date, but also provided third-party confirmation of their expertise in cybersecurity.

- In the fast-paced world of cybersecurity, staying ahead requires more than just experience—it demands continuous learning and skill validation. Certifications play a crucial role in ensuring that professionals remain equipped with the latest knowledge and competencies required to navigate an ever-changing threat landscape.
- These credentials are dynamic educational tools that help professionals stay current with advancements in cybersecurity. They validate the skills and competencies that professionals require for their work, broaden knowledge, and equip individuals with the expertise they might not gain through hands-on experience alone.
- Achieving and maintaining a certification requires continuous learning and a commitment to keeping it valid. This process pushes professionals to tackle complex problems, fostering mastery beyond memorization. The combination of theoretical understanding and practical problem-solving through labs provides invaluable experience.
- Certifications give individuals a broader scope of knowledge and skills beyond their existing repertoire. Passion and curiosity are essential for success.



**Your certifications are always best when they're up to date. Because products and threats change, attackers change too. To stand out, you can't be someone who acquired a certification a few years ago and has outdated knowledge. You need to update your expertise continually."**

**Mohammad Al-Zard, NSE 8**  
Technical Director  
Space Data Systems, Jordan



## Talented individuals drive the success of cybersecurity technology by crafting the optimal architecture

Skilled cybersecurity professionals are able to transform technology solutions into a system that delivers essential protection. NSE 8s know how to create an effective architecture using a mix of robust products, tailored solutions, and a deep understanding of the client's cybersecurity maturity.



**The mistakes start from the architecture. With faulty architecture, people will rely on tricks to make things work. But in the end, things go wrong. That's why a robust foundation is so important."**

**Pieter-Jan Blaton, NSE 8**  
Technical Manager  
Exclusive Networks, Belgium

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- Networking and computing fundamentals are critical, especially in complex fields like cybersecurity. Many NSE 8s agree that to secure networks, you must first have a thorough grasp of how and why those networks were constructed.
- A strong cybersecurity architecture is the foundation of all successful security strategies.
- Investing in expertise is as important as investing in products, because skilled professionals are instrumental in deploying and maintaining an effective cybersecurity architecture.
- Integrated solutions tend to offer a return on investment. Point solutions often cause more problems than they solve.
- Understanding a client's cybersecurity maturity level is key to a successful implementation. Applying advanced solutions won't work if the client doesn't have the required operational expertise to support them.
- Companies should focus on solutions that are tailored to their specific needs.
- NSE 8s play a crucial role in recognizing a company's unique requirements and adapting the architecture to meet their needs.

“

Even as the technology has gotten better, you're only as safe as the people you have running those systems," Russ says. He believes this will only become more apparent as AI becomes the main way to create attacks. "We're still hugely dependent on humans as operators, and they are, in turn, only as good as the solutions they've got under them."

**Russ Doucet, NSE 8**

Chief Technology Officer  
INSA, Canada

“

NSE 8 certification gives you a positive reputation, but you must live up to it too. Being an NSE 8 really helps with trust. It builds trust with clients, with Fortinet, and with your employer."

**Rony Moussa, NSE 8**

Head of Cybersecurity  
Presales and Training Lead  
Triple C, Lebanon

## To create and maintain a skilled team, focus on training

Building a strong cybersecurity team requires more than just hiring skilled professionals—it demands continuous investment in their growth and development. Prioritizing training ensures that teams remain agile, well-equipped, and prepared to tackle evolving threats with confidence.

- Training is the cornerstone of creating and maintaining a skilled team, because it supplies team members with the knowledge and skills they need to perform their roles effectively in a rapidly changing threat landscape.
- Regular training keeps teams updated on the latest developments, enabling them to respond to new challenges promptly and effectively.
- Investment in training demonstrates a company's commitment toward its employees' professional growth, thereby fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect. This enhances job satisfaction and leads to improved productivity and team performance.
- Companies that prioritize training are better positioned to retain talent, because employees are likely to stay where they are valued and have opportunities for growth.



**It will take time, but companies should invest in the education of their people. Fortinet makes it easy to do this with their training programs.”**

**Swjatoslav Cicer, NSE 8**  
CEO / Leader IT-Security  
2F-IT, Germany

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## Cybersecurity is as much about your people, as it is your solutions

The NSE 8 role is a challenging one, designed for those who aim for cybersecurity expertise—rarely an easy path. NSE 8s are experts, educators, and empathetic technologists in the field of cybersecurity.

- Becoming an NSE 8 requires comprehensive knowledge of the big picture; the ability to design, integrate, and configure cybersecurity infrastructure; and the skill to quickly troubleshoot problems.
- The NSE 8 certification does not focus solely on products. It's about solving complex problems that span the entire cybersecurity landscape. This knowledge comes only from real-world experience and lab experiments with products and new configurations.

- The NSE 8 role involves simplifying complex information for clients, educating them about their cybersecurity position, and empathizing with technology users. NSE 8s strive to inspire and lead others toward a clearer vision of cybersecurity.
- The NSE 8 title comes with responsibility. NSE 8s have achieved the expert level in cybersecurity, so it's natural for people to look to them for answers and expect those answers to be correct.

## The impact of the NSE 8 certification

The NSE 8s offered several key takeaways about the benefits that having the NSE 8 certification has had on their careers.



**Training is important for us as a distributor because we make sure that our Fortinet partners, the resellers and system integrators, can gain the skills they need to be successful with their end users. Providing the proper training is the best way to ensure these products and solutions give companies the protection they need.”**

**Sylvia Schlaphof, NSE 8**  
Head of Engineering  
BOLL Engineering, Switzerland

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### Educational growth

- Overwhelmingly, NSE 8s shared that certifications and continual learning were instrumental in achieving cybersecurity expertise. They ranked these experiences over university-based education, which gave them the basis to enter the industry, but was not what helped drive them to the expert level. In fact, a few of them did not attend any formal post-secondary education institutions at all and relied solely on their certifications.
- The NSE 8 certification augmented their hands-on experience, adding theoretical and product knowledge that solidified their expertise by filling in gaps and enhancing their knowledge.
- The certification also enabled them to attain a distinct level of product expertise that sets them apart from other cybersecurity professionals.

### Personal reputation in the industry

- Every NSE 8 we interviewed stated that the certification bolstered their reputation in the industry because achieving expert level enables a cybersecurity professional to stand out.

- NSE 8 means recognition of expertise, because the hands-on nature of the certification ensures that those who achieve it truly have high-level knowledge and experience.
- Thanks to the certification, customers, colleagues, and other businesses—including Fortinet—see the NSE 8s as experts.
- The certification demonstrates a strong commitment to the field and to continuous learning.
- NSE 8s said the certification contributed to their career advancement.

#### Organizational reputation

- NSE 8s noted that their certification was advantageous for their organizations as well. Clients often specifically requested NSE 8s to work on projects.
- Many NSE 8s were able to attract new business because of their level of expertise.
- They said they better understood the challenges their clients faced, enabling them to design more effective solutions.

Professionals at the NSE 8 level become powerful agents of change who bring a myriad of benefits to their organizations. These inspiring stories show that many different routes can be taken to achieve this level of expertise.



**Because I'm one of two people within our organization with an NSE 8 certification, VanRoey is considered an expert partner. That gives us a better relationship with Fortinet, and it allows us to market that knowledge in each request for proposal (RFP) when we're soliciting business."**

**Els Bleys, NSE 8**  
Security Engineer  
VanRoey, Belgium

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We wanted to set ourselves apart and be different. If you're going into a competitive situation, you want the winning hand. Having a single NSE 8 shows customers you have the technical expertise to win their business. Having multiple NSE 8s shows commitment to setting a culture of excellence across the engineering bench. Customers typically want the best technical resources possible to deliver the solution, and an NSE 8 provides that certainty. It's huge for us as a company."

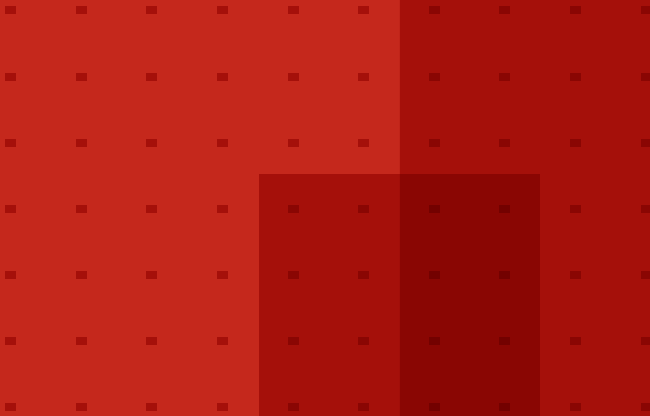
**Jeff Robbins, NSE 8**  
Chief Security Officer  
Business Communications Inc, USA





CHAPTER 3

# Inside the Careers of NSE 8s



# NSE 8 Fortinet Partners





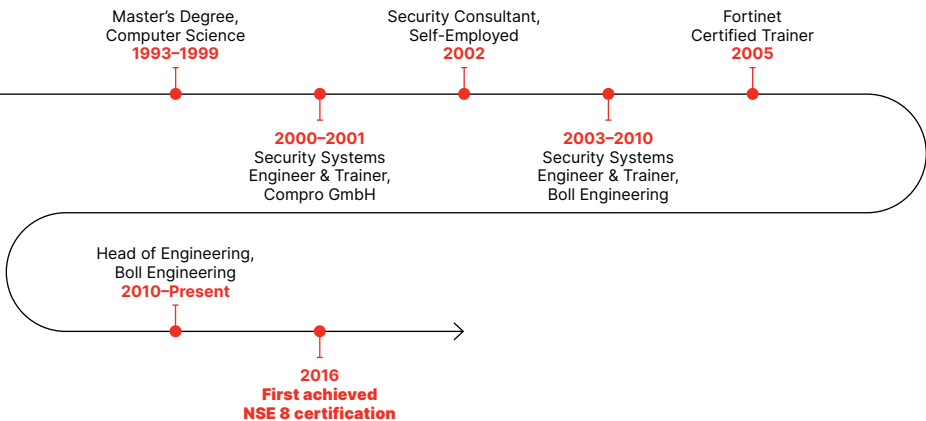
## Sylvia Schlaphof, NSE 8

- Head of Engineering
- BOLL Engineering, Switzerland

### Cybersecurity is a Marathon

“ It’s one thing to be able to put a product in place; it’s another thing to make sure that you’ve done everything to achieve the goals of that product. An NSE 8 is able to confidently state that they have implemented a system properly and have the best chance possible of getting the outcomes that are needed from this investment.”

Sylvia Schlaphof’s career has spanned the progression of cybersecurity over the past 35 years. Currently, Sylvia works as the Head of Engineering for BOLL Engineering, an IT security firm in Switzerland, but her career in cybersecurity began in the early 1990s. Her longstanding work has allowed her to watch as technology has changed and shaped our world in the twenty-first century.



## Lack of training makes companies vulnerable

Sylvia began focusing on and partnering with Fortinet in the early 2000s. This experience has allowed her to see how important it is to properly train those who work in cybersecurity. They need to know not only how to use the products, but they also need to develop fundamental skills and knowledge of best practices to truly succeed in the field.

From the start of her career, Sylvia saw how vital it was to have proper skills development and training. In 1989, she began work as a Software Engineer, but she soon went back to university to pursue a computer science degree. After graduating, she worked as a System Administrator at a university in the early 1990s. Her lack of knowledge immediately became apparent and caused her to reconsider how she was approaching her profession.

“When one of the workstations was hacked, I realized I needed to go into cybersecurity. That hack left such a big impression on me because I saw how vulnerable companies could be, and I realized I had to do something to try to combat those threats,” she says.

She also recalls how her lack of training meant she was unable to serve her clients well in her first job. “On my first day, they showed me how to install a firewall and then on my second day, I had to show a client how to do the installation. I should not have been put in that position with so little training. That has really stuck with me over the course of my career.”

## Expertise should be shared

Sylvia’s role at BOLL has evolved over time and she has had the opportunity to watch the cybersecurity technology industry grow—both in terms of the importance of cybersecurity and the breadth of products and solutions that now exist. She started as a Trainer and Systems Engineer, supporting the company’s clients with Fortinet installations and other firewall products. Today, she is a Fortinet Certified Trainer (FCT), working with BOLL’s partners to install and integrate Fortinet solutions with their clients. Her job is to ensure that those partners have the training they need to perform the implementations properly.

Throughout her career, Sylvia has used the Fortinet training she has received to educate others. She has helped them become experts by gaining basic and advanced knowledge of products, but, more importantly, by gaining understanding of the cybersecurity industry as a whole. And she’s been very successful. In 2022, she was named Trainer of the Year in Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) for Fortinet.

## NSE 8 allows you to stay one step ahead

Ultimately, her NSE 8 training has reinforced the skills and technical knowledge she's acquired over the course of her career. "It's one thing to be able to put a product in place; it's another thing to make sure you've done everything to achieve the goals of that product. An NSE 8 is able to confidently state that they have implemented a system properly and have the best chance possible of getting the outcomes that are needed from this investment," she says.

Sylvia says the value of her NSE 8 status is twofold. "First off, it's a big boost for your reputation. When I'm introduced to people, they know me as an NSE 8. I'm an expert. Bam! That's a statement. However, NSE 8 is about more than what it can do for your reputation. It allows you to learn about tools and topics you might not use every day but are essential to becoming an expert in the industry. The NSE 8 certification forced me to learn things I needed later on to help my customers. It wasn't just about passing the exams and getting the certification. It helped me better serve my clients and stay a step ahead."

## Proper training is the best defense

As an FCT, certifications are central to her career and provide significant value to BOLL as a business. However, her outlook on the importance of certifications is broader than this. For her, certifications and training—both her own and those others acquire—are a way to propagate knowledge.

"BOLL is not only a distributor of products; BOLL is a distributor of knowledge and a creator of expertise. We benefit from Fortinet training, but also act as trainers ourselves," she says. "We are helping to train the next generation of cybersecurity experts."

Being a trainer has allowed her to deepen her knowledge and stay current, but also teach people how to go from mastering products to achieving a comprehensive and strong understanding of cybersecurity. "Training is important for us as a distributor because we make sure that our Fortinet partners, the resellers and system integrators, can gain the skills they need to be successful with their end users. Providing the proper training is the best way to ensure these products and solutions give companies the protection they need."

## Addressing the skills gap

She sees NSE 8 certification as pivotal in addressing this skills gap. She believes that certification provides firms with a way of ensuring they have the expertise necessary to get the outcomes they, and their clients, need. With so many cybersecurity products and services available, companies and trainers need to be able to adapt and respond to the specific needs of specific clients. NSE 8 certification provides this type of knowledge. "Becoming an NSE 8 is an investment in the future," Sylvia says. "It helped me to be ready for my customers today and tomorrow."

## Cybersecurity requires endurance

Sylvia's advice to companies is to make sure training starts with the basics and evolves from there. "The fundamentals are important because you can't progress without that foundational knowledge first. You really have to understand this stuff inside and out. I always compare it to sports. If you're running long distances, you need to train to boost your endurance. Without this initial building block of endurance training, you will never be able to run a marathon. And that's what cybersecurity is today: a marathon."



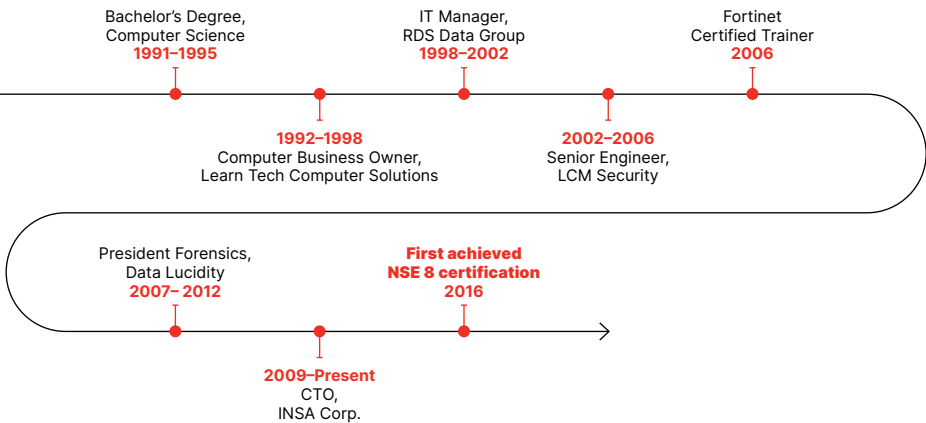
## Russ Doucet, NSE 8

- Chief Technology Officer
- INSA, Canada

### Don't Overlook the Human Element

“The real security comes from the people who are implementing it and using the tools. Cybersecurity protection is accomplished by people, not only by technology.”

Russ Doucet is the CTO at INSA Corp and was also a Fortinet Certified Trainer (FCT). He was the first NSE 8 in Canada. His career spans the evolution of cybersecurity over the past four decades. He has seen hacking go from something done by relatively benevolent actors just looking to prove their skills, to something run by organized crime and state actors. He has been on the front line combatting the ever-changing online threats facing individuals and companies, and his story illustrates why experience—and sophisticated certifications like the NSE 8—are crucial to achieving the expertise needed for an effective cybersecurity career.



## Learning, distinction, dedication

After spending his childhood interested in and working with computers, Russ graduated from the University of Western Ontario in the 1990s, where he earned a computer science degree. “When I was in university, security wasn’t even a subject degree they offered because it wasn’t that big of an issue,” he says.

While he considered his post-secondary education helpful at the time, over the course of his career, he’s come to see it as less relevant to his job. Instead, certifications and experience have been the main ways he has increased and solidified his knowledge of the profession over time.

“I see three main benefits of certifications,” he explains. “The first is obviously learning. They offer content every practitioner needs to know. The second is public facing. It shows you’ve reached a certain standard. It allows us to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace. The third is that certifications demonstrate dedication to the manufacturer. Showing Fortinet that we have NSE 7 and NSE 8 certifications tells them that we are a serious partner. That gives us credibility. It’s led to a lot of great interactions and made a difference to our business and even the product itself over time.”

However, he also believes certifications must be combined with real-world experience to be valuable. “If you don’t have any practical skills to back them up, then you’re going to struggle to deploy those certifications in a useful way. Certification is a symbol. It’s a good way to show where you are, and then you can take that material and use that common skill set to advance your experience and get to the next level.”

## The role of trusted advisor

Russ has seen the benefits of being an NSE 8, both for himself and for his business. “It distinguishes you not only reputationally, but it provides that overarching understanding of how cybersecurity should and does operate. The NSE 8 certification ensured I broadened my knowledge and it helps us with clients. Our sales team loves the fact that we have NSE 8s on staff. That’s a selling point that puts us ahead of our competitors. Having an NSE 8 starts the conversation with any client in a good place because they know they can trust us.”

Having worked as a Fortinet Certified Trainer for nearly 20 years, Russ has a deep knowledge of the product portfolio. In his capacity as a trainer, he teaches seminars and speaks to organizations about cybersecurity technology. His main role is to assist in presales and presales engineering with the firm’s customers.

“We really try to assume the role of trusted advisor,” he reflects about his current job. “Aside from the products we sell, we try to be a source of expertise. We strive to deploy highly skilled and experienced people strategically to encourage adoption of the product and make sure things are working properly. That way, clients get the most value they can out of their product. To be an expert, a cybersecurity professional must understand the big picture. They also have to know the strengths and weaknesses of products, and how to use specific technology. Finally, they must be able to architect it all together. Still, at the core of it all are the people. The human element can’t be overlooked because ultimately, cybersecurity depends on people to operate it.”

## Cybersecurity is a people problem

One point that Russ returned to repeatedly, is that he feels too few organizations see cybersecurity as a people problem, not just a technological one. “The real security comes from the people who are implementing it and using the tools. Cybersecurity protection is accomplished by people, not just by technology,” he notes.

“Even as the technology has gotten better, you’re only as safe as the people you have running those systems,” he says. He believes this will only become more apparent as AI becomes the main way to create attacks. “We’re still hugely dependent on humans as operators, and they are, in turn, only as good as the solutions they’ve got under them.”

## Certifications are the path to expertise

For those wondering whether to pursue an NSE 8 or other high-level certification, Russ recommends it as a major way to stay on top of the radical changes happening in cybersecurity. He advises certifications, industry training, and community college programs over expensive degrees. “I suggest cybersecurity to anybody who’s got any interest or aptitude in it. I think it’s a great field. I tell people: Go work somewhere, get some certifications, focus on the thing that you like. That’s the way to be successful in this field.”

Ultimately, Russ maintains that to truly thrive in cybersecurity, you must strive toward mastery. “What’s important is the knowledge. The certification helps you get that knowledge. Then, you couple that with hands-on experience to deepen and strengthen that knowledge.”



## Swjatoslav Cicer, NSE 8

- CEO / Leader IT-Security
- 2F-IT, Germany

### Passion, Preparation, and Practice Lead to Success

“ If you’re not passionate about cybersecurity, you won’t ever become an expert.”

Swjatoslav Cicer is CEO / Leader IT-Security of 2F-IT, a technology and IT security consulting company located in Ostfildern, Germany. His NSE 8 certification has helped the business attract clients from all over Germany. He is responsible for the IT security division of 2F-IT’s business, which includes providing consulting support for customers using Fortinet products.

IT / IT-Security,  
German Army  
2006-2014

First achieved  
NSE 8 certification  
2016

2014-2016  
IT-Security Consultant,  
Cancom GmbH

2017-Present  
CEO / Leader IT-Security,  
2F-IT GmbH

## Experience is the best teacher

Swjatoslav's education journey illustrates the benefits of hands-on work experience. He did not attend a higher education institution; instead, he spent nine years in the German army after graduating from high school. During that time, he worked in electronic warfare and IT security. This experience gave him an immediate understanding of why cybersecurity is so vital.

During his career in the army and IT security, Swjatoslav furthered his education by acquiring a staggering number of IT-based certifications—nearly 35 in total. He believes certifications help to augment real-world experience. "You must prepare to pass the exams for certifications. As you do that, you learn things you may miss in your daily projects working with the tools," he says.

## Certifications give reassurance

As the CEO of 2F-IT, Swjatoslav oversees the organization's security consulting. As the principal architect for the firm, he reviews, designs, and supervises a team of 13 skilled cybersecurity professionals on a range of complex projects. He worked his way up after starting as a senior IT security consultant for another German IT organization. His career path has left him with the conviction that while certifications are essential, they must be bolstered by experience.

He believes that his array of certifications has helped not only to extend his knowledge, but also to reassure clients that he and his team have the requisite knowledge to solve their challenges. "I must emphasize: certifications help with customers," he says. "Customers ask for certifications. You must show the customer your level of expertise, not only your past projects. Certifications help to do that. However, you also need hands-on experience with customers, using many different sophisticated designs. Without practice, you cannot do much with a certification because you'll forget what you learned in a short amount of time."

## NSE 8 sets you apart

His NSE 8 status has helped Swjatoslav to grow his business and improve both his and 2F-IT's reputation. "I did my NSE 8 certification because there were so few people with this certification in Germany. It was a major benefit to have that expert level in building the company. There are still not that many worldwide, so it helps to set you apart. With this

certification, we were able to win bigger customers and complete larger projects. We could compete against much more well-known organizations because of the NSE 8 status. The reputation is that strong.”

One major benefit of the NSE 8 certification is the depth of product knowledge. “While you’re preparing for the certification, you get to explore products more in depth. Certifications help you learn a product inside and out; you are exposed to new possibilities, new features, and new design options with the product. You come to know the solution thoroughly.”

“Fortinet knows we may be small but will recommend us to clients because we’re experts. Most companies still don’t have an NSE 8. They know we can handle bigger, more complex projects with Fortinet solutions that larger companies often can’t because they lack knowledge. The NSE 8 level shows I’m really an expert.”

## Preparation leads to excellence

Swjatoslav believes in the importance of certifications not only for himself, but for everyone who works at the firm. The résumés of 2F-IT employees are impressive. With three NSE 8s, we are the only Fortinet partner in Germany to have this many NSE 8s within a single company, truly setting us apart from the competition. In addition, we have another person who’s passed the NSE 8 written exam and three others who hold NSE 7 certifications. This is proof of his belief in creating expertise. “It all starts with proper planning. To be an expert, you must be able to plan accordingly and design the project. That begins with work before the project even starts, to ensure the configuration will meet the customer requirements.”

## Expertise minimizes risk

Swjatoslav believes expertise is essential to combating what he perceives as the two most pressing threats in cybersecurity currently. “The main weak points in cybersecurity right now are email and endpoint security,” he explains. “Email accounts for 70 or 80 percent of all malicious software and ransomware. Then, when it comes to endpoint security, many customers only have a normal antivirus or Windows Defender and think they’re secure. It’s not safe anymore. You need to integrate your products within a larger IT networking security architecture. Without expertise, companies get a cobbled-together mess that doesn’t work the way it should. With expertise, we see the whole picture. That means we can think outside the box and provide customers

the insight and knowledge to approach cybersecurity at a strategic level. No company can have 100% security and no vendor can promise that. With expertise, though, you can minimize the risk. This is the main goal now for all security vendors: to make up for the gap in the lack of trained quality security professionals with quality expertise and products.”

Ultimately, he feels companies have an obligation to invest in talent if they want the best cybersecurity. “It will take time, but companies should invest in the education of their people. Fortinet makes it easy to do this with their certification program.”

## Practice makes progress

Swjatoslav has a lot of practical advice for cybersecurity professionals looking to advance in their career. Firstly, he believes the lower-level Fortinet certifications are crucial to successfully attempting an NSE 8 certification. He also thinks companies should set up labs to experiment with Fortinet products and gain real-world experience. Additionally, when it comes to preparation, time management is key. “I would say to achieve NSE 8 certification, it’s 50% your knowledge and 50% time management for the exam. Many people taking the test don’t finish all the tasks because of time pressures.”

At the end of the day, Swjatoslav believes that to truly succeed in any certification pathway, professionals must have passion, preparation, and practice. “If you’re not passionate about cybersecurity, you won’t ever become an expert,” he says.



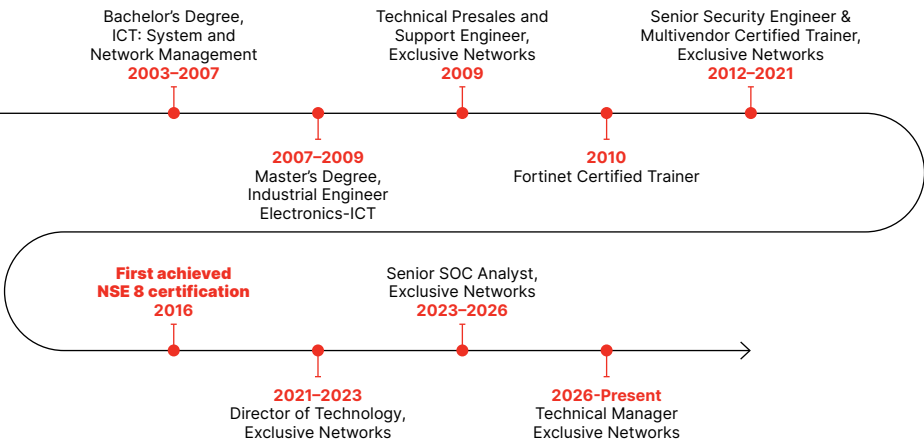
## Pieter-Jan Blaton, NSE 8

Technical Manager  
Exclusive Networks, Belgium

### Understand Your Customer's Journey

“ My expertise allows me to do an advanced assessment of a customer's security posture, determine their maturity level, and then tell them what the next step is or which product to adopt.”

Pieter-Jan Blaton works as a Technical Manager at Exclusive Networks. Pieter-Jan has worked his way up in the cybersecurity industry over a 15-year career. He has served in a variety of roles, including sales and network engineering, Director of Technology, and Senior SOC Analyst, which have helped him develop a breadth of experience.



## Networking is a strong foundation for cybersecurity

Pieter-Jan's interest in IT began in high school and led him to earn degrees in IT and engineering from the Karel de Grote-Hogeschool in Antwerp, Belgium. Those courses taught him programming and advanced networking, as well as electronics and signal processing. "Having a background in networking has really helped me," he says. "Network security is not something you can skip if you want to be successful in cybersecurity."

"Basic certifications are very important in understanding the product itself and the problem it is trying to solve. The training doesn't have to be overly technical, but you have to learn enough to be able to listen to customers' needs. My higher-level certifications have allowed me to understand the importance of proper configuration and architecture, both of which are crucial to efficiently diagnose problems. If you have theoretical knowledge, you can quickly understand the context of the product and what it should do," he explains.

## The importance of a range of experience

Pieter-Jan began his career at Exclusive Networks as a presales and support engineer. He soon became a trainer and content creator for seminars and technical workshops, working on the organization's technical team for many years. He then served as the Director of Technology in the Belux region of Belgium for two years, prior to assuming his global role as Senior SOC Analyst. Throughout his career, he has given many presentations on how to build strong SOCs.

A major reason for his success has been his range of experience. "I worked in perimeter security, endpoint security, web application firewalls, DDoSing, sandboxing, wireless, MDM, and then moved onto the newer technologies like EDR, XDR, UEBA, and demystifying AI and machine learning. I've had the opportunity to spend a lot of time studying emerging technologies and talking about that with customers. That has allowed me to know exactly what they need based on their situation."

## Privilege and responsibility

Pieter-Jan agrees with other NSE 8s that this certification provides benefits that come with responsibilities. "Becoming an NSE 8 is difficult to achieve. If you see someone with that certification, you know they're truly an expert. That has been a big advantage for me and our company. It's proof of your expertise. Clients see that and they just trust my skills. They don't have to vet me or our business." The credibility of being an NSE 8 means

that when Pieter-Jan raises a problem with Fortinet, he gets an immediate response. "Because of my knowledge, they know I wouldn't say something is an issue if it wasn't," he says.

Pieter-Jan also says that, thanks to his NSE 8 expertise, he's often able to listen to a client's description of a problem, ask a few questions, and then swiftly find a solution. "Sometimes, in ten minutes, we can fix problems that people have been working on for weeks," he explains.

He emphasizes that as an NSE 8, your insights into a client's cybersecurity approach are valued. However, that also means you have a duty to be honest, even when they've purchased a product that isn't effective. "My expertise allows me to do an advanced assessment of a customer's security posture, determine their maturity level, and then tell them what their next step is or which product to adopt. I've seen so many partners waste hours with clients where they don't properly assess the customer's cybersecurity maturity. It's never the same for each client. If you have good expertise and knowledge in cybersecurity, you are able to give the right advice to a customer, so they will be able to make appropriate tool selections within their time and budget."

## Good architecture is foundational

Pieter-Jan points out that companies often fail in selecting the right approach: multivendor with best-of-breed point solutions, or a single vendor approach. Both have pros and cons. "We see many clients with a full security stack from multiple vendors and they don't work. They have all these products but don't know how to configure or integrate them properly. Often, these products can work together but you have to select them properly to make them work as one security platform." He's seen many companies buy products they had no idea how to configure properly, which therefore ended up being useless. "Expertise is important because it helps me understand the journey that the customer is on and how to implement the appropriate technology for where they're at."

Ultimately, the biggest mistake he sees companies make is creating bad designs. "The mistakes start from the architecture. With faulty architecture, people will rely on tricks to make things work. But in the end, things go wrong. When they upgrade, for instance, everything breaks, because the product is being used for something it wasn't designed for. That's why a robust foundation is so important."

## Build on your knowledge

For those attempting to achieve their NSE 8 certification, Pieter-Jan believes it's essential to establish a strong foundational knowledge first. "You must know networking and operating systems well. That's what comes first. You also need to understand these different technologies from a theoretical perspective, and how security is applied to them in each environment. For example, only once you have a good base of knowledge about how a next-gen firewall should be designed and working, can you move up in the Fortinet training. Additionally, you have to really pay attention to a clean and efficient configuration," he says.

As for companies seeking to improve their cybersecurity, he advises them to focus on finding employees who are curious. "You really need to find people who are eager to learn and who do not take just any truth for granted. People who want to go through all the foundational steps to build their knowledge and deeply understand cybersecurity; those are the people who ultimately are the best at this."



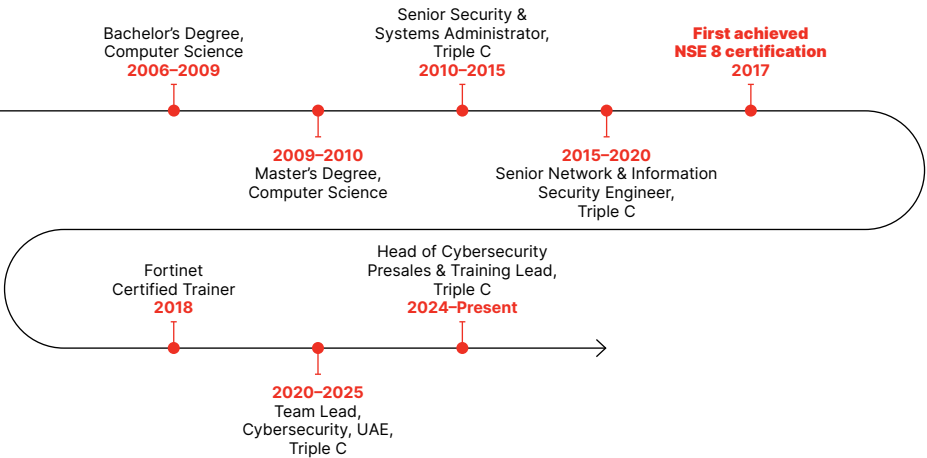
## Rony Moussa, NSE 8

- Head of Cybersecurity Presales and Training
- Lead Triple C, Lebanon

### It's All About the Details

“ To be an NSE 8, you have to know the details about the details.”

Rony Moussa works as Head of Cybersecurity Presales and Training Lead at Triple C, a systems integrator located in Lebanon. Triple C provides services throughout the Gulf region and is a Fortinet Authorized Training Center (ATC). He acquired his NSE 8 certification in 2017, and in 2023, he was awarded Fortinet Trainer of the Year for the EMEA region.



## Start with the basics

Rony's educational background in computer science led him to his career in cybersecurity. In 2009, he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from the Lebanese University—Faculty of Sciences. He followed that with a Master's degree in Cybersecurity in 2010. "I started in cybersecurity when I was young and found the attack aspect of hacking interesting. However, once I graduated, I went into offensive security before moving into defensive security later in my career." That was when he started in the Fortinet NSE Certification program, working his way up to an NSE 8.

## Building trust with clients

Rony has worked for Triple C since receiving his Master's degree. Triple C's focus is designing and implementing cybersecurity solutions for companies of all sizes. He has witnessed the cybersecurity skills gap firsthand: A major part of Triple C's portfolio includes helping organizations manage their cybersecurity products because they don't have sufficient in-house expertise. The success of Triple C is predicated on the trust it establishes with customers.

"Because of my experience as an NSE 8, and the reputation of Triple C, our clients trust that we will provide best-in-class cybersecurity solutions for them," he says. The mix of industry knowledge, coupled with the company's wide-ranging, real-world experience, provides credibility. "We work with so many different types of businesses—we protect telcos, large universities, government entities, and banks. Working in these diverse environments allows us to see the specific threats faced in each of these industries. This gives our clients confidence that we can solve their unique problems."

## Get into the details

For Rony, the most essential part of his journey to becoming an NSE 8 was how it empowered him to learn about cybersecurity products in-depth. "To be an NSE 8, you have to know the details about the details," he says.

Often, cybersecurity products are black boxes to those who use them; they might understand what they do, but not how they work. Rony believes his certifications allow him to shine a light into those black boxes and truly understand how cybersecurity products should be architected and configured. "You see a lot of cybersecurity professionals who just rely on their experience," he says. "They face a problem, they know the solution, but they don't know why. So, if you want to know why, you have to understand the black box."

## With a good reputation comes responsibility

Rony's NSE 8 status has given him the benefits of a great reputation in his career, but these benefits come with a profound responsibility. "There are less than 400 active NSE 8s in the world at this time. When you're an NSE 8, everyone knows you're an expert. You have the knowledge. At the same time, it is a big responsibility because everyone expects you to have all the answers. When you become an NSE 8, you feel like you can't make mistakes anymore. NSE 8 certification gives you a positive reputation, but you must live up to it too," he explains. NSE 8 certification has brought the same prestige to Triple C. Their clients have sought out the company because of its connection with Fortinet. "Being an NSE 8 really helps with trust. It builds trust with clients, with Fortinet, and with your employer."

Rony has also found professional networking to be an advantage of being an NSE 8. "With an NSE 8 certification, you feel like everyone at Fortinet in the region knows you. You meet everyone. They know you're at the expert level. Now, when you raise tickets, Fortinet knows it's a real issue and they put forward their best support engineers to solve it. That also helps us with our customers."

## Companies can't hire their way out of the skills gap

Rony's career has left him convinced that the cybersecurity skills gap is real and companies cannot hire their way out of it. "You cannot find enough people with the necessary skills to cover all the problems," he says. At the same time though, he thinks companies often undervalue both their cybersecurity teams and the training necessary to help them improve.

"When talking about the skills gap, it's not always that companies don't have the people to manage their cybersecurity. Too often, we see that companies don't invest in training their IT staff. People have to stay up to date. You need the training to ensure your team can level up. It's all about people. It's all about expertise. The product itself can do the job, but have you ever seen a firewall working without good configuration? That's where expertise comes in."

He sees this problem when clients buy products from a vendor that can implement them, but can't ensure they are configured correctly to be effective in the long term. "You have to plan well. You have to go to the experts, talk to them, and actually put the correct design and solution in place. A great product isn't enough. The engineer who's configuring the product should be an expert to get all the benefits from the device."

## There are no shortcuts

He advises those seeking to become an NSE 8 not to skip any steps along the way. "You should go through all the Fortinet levels, starting with NSE 4," he says. "The NSE 8 level will be about everything you have learned in the earlier stages, along with your hands-on experience. You can't just skip past that."

The same is true for those interested in transitioning into cybersecurity from another industry: start with the basics. "To work in this field, you have to learn the basics of networking and systems before you go into cybersecurity. I see this mistake with students coming from university or people trying to change careers. They think they can jump directly into cybersecurity. However, cybersecurity is about protecting networks and systems, right? You have to understand the concept of what you are protecting. Otherwise, you will end up protecting something that you don't know anything about."



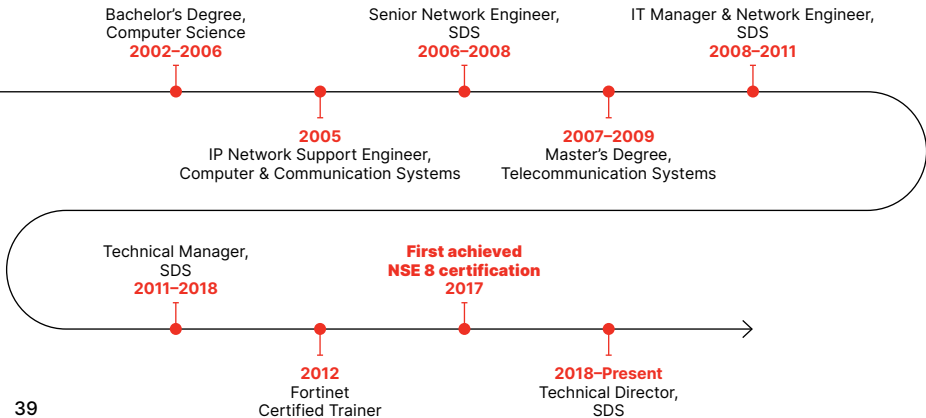
## Mohammad Al-Zard, NSE 8

Technical Director  
Space Data Systems, Jordan

### Are You Ready to Take the Challenge?

“ When cybersecurity products are installed by someone without cybersecurity expertise, it leaves clients with blind spots in their network. They’ll have gaps and back doors where problems can come through. Organizations need someone who understands the entire deployment. If you’re not able to put all of the products together as one fabric, you won’t be able to get the highest value out of it.”

Mohammad Al-Zard is the Technical Director and Fortinet product owner at Space Data Systems (SDS) in Jordan. He holds a B.S. in Computer Science and an M.S. in Telecommunication Systems, along with more than 20 industry certifications. Mohammad was the first engineer worldwide to pass the original version of the written exam in 2015. He is a strong advocate for certifications as a way for professionals to stay up to date in the fast-paced environment of cybersecurity and become highly proficient, providing confidence and credibility to customers.



## Implementing concepts in the real world

Mohammad believes his degrees were valuable because they provided him with a foundational understanding of networking. However, once he started working in cybersecurity, he soon realized he would need certifications to truly round out his education and up his game as a professional.

"I understood how networks communicated, but to truly understand how to secure a network, to know its vulnerabilities, you have to work in the profession for a while and combine your industry knowledge with certifications," he explains. "In my opinion, university won't give you the deep knowledge you need to truly understand the best way to deliver a solution for your clients. My cybersecurity certification gave me the real, tangible value of how to implement the conceptual knowledge in the real world."

Mohammad was drawn to the NSE 8 certification because of the strenuous nature of the program. "I'm a guy who likes challenges—and the NSE 8 certification is a challenge," he says. "I also wanted the recognition that came with being an NSE 8. The more you advance in the field, the more you dive into the technology, the more people expect you to know. I reached a point where I recognized I needed to go through certification programs to achieve this expertise. You have to work hard and combine your study with practical experience. Everything comes at a price. The question is whether you are willing to take the challenge or not," he says.

## The importance of practical experience

Mohammad operates as a solution integrator focused on security. He also assesses new technologies to see if they truly solve problems that existing technologies cannot and supports the SDS sales team. "We try to deliver best-in-class solutions for our clients with the best employees we can hire," he says.

Mohammad is careful to point out that certifications on their own also aren't enough. "It's all about practice. The more knowledgeable you are, the more powerful you are. The more you practice, the more fluent you become. Actually, doing the work is how you get better in cybersecurity," he says.

He also offers a unique perspective on certifications: that it's not enough to gain the initial certification. To keep current with the cybersecurity landscape, professionals must commit to keeping their certifications valid. "It's all about being able to deliver value to your customers so they don't feel like they have to look elsewhere. Recertification is another factor that distinguishes someone. Your certifications are always best when they're up

to date. Because products and threats change, attackers change too. To stand out, you can't be someone who acquired a certification a few years ago and has outdated knowledge. You need to update your expertise continually."

## Greater confidence for the customer

Mohammad has seen distinct benefits to his career from having an NSE 8 certification. "The NSE 8 certification is a clear way to demonstrate your professionalism and value to your clients. It builds confidence with customers. Being an NSE 8 offers confidence to me as an individual, my company, and our clients. It's a key differentiator with the instant credibility it provides. Because of the credibility of being an NSE 8, clients are always willing to listen to me when I propose solutions."

He has also found that customers are more confident in their own choices when following the expertise of an NSE 8. "The NSE 8 certification gives our clients comfort because they get answers faster. Fortinet prioritizes an NSE 8's requests, so I can answer their questions quickly; not everything has to go through a support ticket process. It's like you have level three support instantly available. And it implies there's a technical team waiting to help your customers in any situation. It also tells them they're going to get the maximum value out of their technology."

## The architecture is what matters

"You need someone who truly understands the value behind the technology and how we can make different products work together with interoperability to have effective cybersecurity," he says. "It's a comprehensive, data fabric approach. That doesn't happen without experts in place. If you can't fully master the concept behind every single box and product being suggested for the client, you won't be able to achieve this."

He says when cybersecurity products are installed by someone without cybersecurity expertise, it leaves clients with blind spots in their network. "They'll have gaps and back doors where problems can come through. Organizations need someone who understands the entire deployment. If you're not able to put all of the products together as one fabric, you won't be able to get the highest value out of it," he adds.

Frequently, he finds that organizations fail to recognize the need for a strong security architecture. “They have a tunnel view. Customers need a coherent architecture. They should be able to have 360-degree vision into their security with a strong deployment. Many companies lack this.”

## Knowledge is power

Mohammad’s biggest advice to students echoes the lessons he’s learned from his own career success. “I will say it again: knowledge is power. The more knowledgeable you are, the more powerful you are. That would be the first message I would tell every single candidate—whether they’re considering an NSE 8 certification or just a career in cybersecurity. And that knowledge comes from committed and constant practice. Work with the technology as much as you can, in as many situations as you can. That will give you the edge to work in any environment and meet any requirement.”



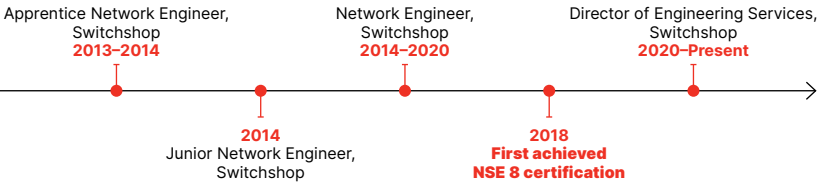
## Luke Titmus, NSE 8

Director of Engineering Services  
Switchshop, United Kingdom

### Curiosity Leads to Expertise

“As NSE 8s, we have to maintain our expertise in the fast-paced cybersecurity field and the broader industry. For me, attaining these certifications also helped to solidify all the things I had learned in isolation over the years. It allowed me to fit the knowledge together like a puzzle, clearly seeing the bigger picture.”

Luke Titmus started as an apprentice at Switchshop, an IT networking and security company based in the United Kingdom, in 2013 when he was 18, and is now Director of Engineering Services. In this role, he leads a team of 26 people, including field-based engineers, helpdesk engineers, managed service engineers, presales engineers, and project managers. During his apprenticeship, he attained a networking certification through course work at a local college. That was the last formal education he received, yet he has been able to build a robust career in the cybersecurity industry, in part due to the certifications he earned through the Fortinet Training Institute.



## Striving to be well-rounded

Around five years into his career, Luke started to understand the broader cybersecurity landscape. As his knowledge of cybersecurity increased and his company came to rely on Fortinet technology, he realized that pursuing Fortinet certifications would be a great way to advance in his career. He already had a good underlying knowledge of firewalling, application control, web filtering, viruses, and access control lists, and Fortinet certifications helped to expand this knowledge. Luke worked through all NSE training levels before finally attaining NSE 8.

A defining moment in Luke's career came in 2019 when he won the Fortinet Ultimate Fabric Challenge, a global competition at the Fortinet Accelerate Conference, where winners from each regional XPERTS Summit compete. "I ended up coming first in that competition. On the final day of the conference, at the keynote speech in front of around 4,000 people, I went up on stage and collected my medal. It was quite a scary experience, but I knew I had arrived," he says.

## Certifications are an education in themselves

Luke's experience with Fortinet showcases one of the prime benefits of the Training Institute: It offers an alternative path to attaining industry credentials, one that does not require a four-year university degree. Luke was able to gain his certifications while working, allowing him to put what he was learning into practice every day.

"My time learning with Fortinet showed me that there are many pathways into a cybersecurity career," Luke says. "I rose up in my career with certifications and dedication. Certifications must be renewed frequently to ensure that professionals stay on top of the changes in the field and the newest threats."

## NSE 8 is a launchpad for your curiosity

Luke believes the Fortinet certification process has accelerated his career. "I think the Fortinet process can play a very large role in moving you forward," he says. "It led me to go deeper and further into topics. When I learned about how to protect against different kinds of attacks, I would start reading into what actually happens as part of that attack process to understand what the person on the other side is trying to do, and then how I could protect the system from them. The NSE Certification program provides the foundational knowledge to fuel your curiosity to find out more about these topics."

Luke also thinks the certifications helped him become a more complete cybersecurity professional. “The certifications help because you can more accurately and quickly make a diagnosis without having to collaborate as much. You can start solving problems faster. When you get to the NSE 8 level, as soon as you start getting introduced into conversations as having that certification, people are automatically more trusting in terms of your knowledge so you don’t have to spend that time proving that you know what you’re talking about.”

## Understanding how everything fits together

For Luke, his NSE 8 certification allowed him to put all the puzzle pieces together. “As NSE 8s, we have to maintain our expertise in the fast-paced cybersecurity field and the broader industry. For me, attaining these certifications also helped to solidify all the things I had learned in isolation over the years. It allowed me to fit the knowledge together like a puzzle, clearly seeing the bigger picture.”

“Fortinet training starts with firewalls and then other products,” explains Luke. “Then, you get to NSE 7, which includes in-depth firewall knowledge, and finally, at the NSE 8 level, you have a culmination of everything you’ve learned so far. You come to understand the whole Security Fabric of products that are integrated. The whole process really helped me expand my knowledge in cybersecurity.”

When he was pursuing his NSE 8 certification, Luke found that it was crucial to understand the underlying architecture of cybersecurity. “You’re going to be looking at FortiGate and FortiAuthenticator. You need to understand how these integrate with each other, and other systems outside Fortinet, to make sure you are capable of passing the NSE 8 certification. Having this detailed knowledge about each product in the vast portfolio is vital,” he adds.

## A culture of learning

Luke’s main advice to those interested in pursuing the certifications is to invest the time. “The more well-rounded you are, the more capable you become. Having a broad range of experience allows you to speak the language of multiple teams. Having diverse experience allows you to use the right language with the right people to convey what you’re trying to say.”

Luke believes continuous learning is also crucial. “Having a culture of teaching and learning is really important in an engineering organization. The NSE 8 certification can help support that culture by providing people with the proof that they’re progressing. The culture of learning I’ve enjoyed in my career provided a stairway that everybody was happy and proud to climb,” he says.



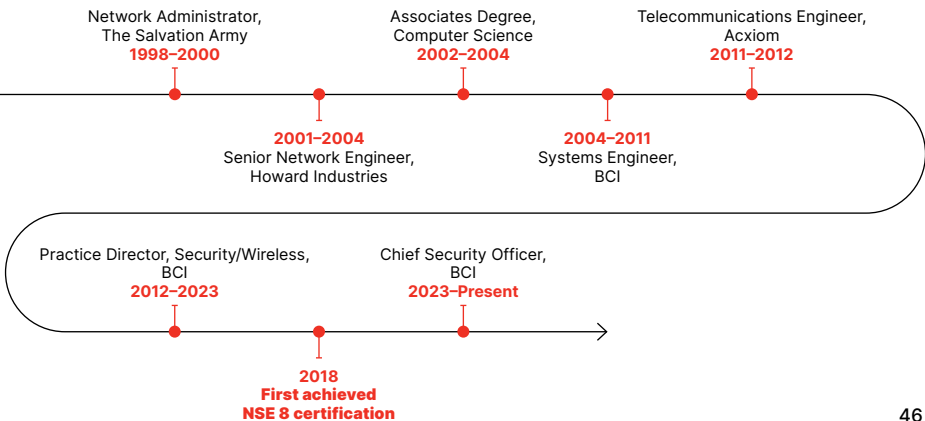
## Jeff Robbins, NSE 8

- Chief Security Officer
- Business Communications Inc, United States

### Start With a Strong Foundation

“If you don’t learn the foundations of the stack, how do you put anything on top of it? It’s like building a human pyramid with one person on the bottom and then saying you want four at the top. It’s just not going to work. You might pull it off for a second, but it isn’t a recipe for success. With the NSE 8 certification, that strong foundation is everything. To succeed, grow, adapt, and accelerate learning, you must have that foundation. You’re dead without it.”

Jeff Robbins is the Chief Security Officer for Business Communications Inc. (BCI), and has worked there for nearly 20 years. In addition to his NSE 8 certification, Jeff holds more than 50 other industry-based certifications, which he believes have been far more important to his career success than his undergraduate degree in computer science. He says he especially appreciated the lab-based nature of the NSE 8 certification. “You can’t fake your way through a lab-based test. With the NSE 8 exams, you have to actually show you can do this. If you can’t bridge that knowledge gap and don’t know how to do the lab, you won’t pass.”



## Expertise creates efficiencies

One of the main reasons Jeff sought to achieve NSE 8 certification was to show both his, and BCI's, commitment to Fortinet. "We were committed to creating a top-class Fortinet consulting practice, and we realized that we had to have this deep expertise in-house. Having multiple NSE 8 certifications was part of implementing that idea," he says.

The NSE 8 certification has propelled BCI to more expansive growth and opportunities. "For us as a company, it was a no-brainer. We just had to have it, and from the moment we heard about it, we knew we wanted multiple people to hold an NSE 8 certification. We wanted to set ourselves apart and be different. If you're going into a competitive situation, you want the winning hand. Having a single NSE 8 shows customers you have the technical expertise to win their business. Having multiple NSE 8s shows commitment to setting a culture of excellence across the engineering bench. Customers typically want the best technical resources possible to deliver the solution, and an NSE 8 provides that certainty. It's huge for us as a company," Jeff says.

Jeff has also seen the NSE 8 certification offer benefits to the firm's customers. "Our clients get a deeper understanding of the technology because of the expertise we have," he says. "In cybersecurity, you're often working under strict deadlines. If you can't work efficiently, or don't understand the bigger picture or the technology in depth, you can't do the job in the required time. If you have the expertise, you can architect better solutions in a fraction of the time."

## Certifications are life-changing

Personally, Jeff has used his NSE 8 certification to help mentor and encourage the people he manages, so they're motivated to improve their own knowledge and skills. "I realized 20+ years ago when I got my first industry certification that it was life-changing. When you get certain certifications, like the NSE 8, you know you'll have a good salary and be able to provide for your family forever. You're not going to struggle. That's what I try to tell many of the younger people I work with. If you commit to honing your skills to achieve this, it's life-changing. It's life-changing because you feel more secure and empowered in your career, and you will have a wealth of opportunities."

Jeff also believes it's crucial for employers to create an environment that encourages this work-life balance and where you cultivate talent. "If you want to build a team of high-end experts who are sought after across the globe, what makes you different? If your goal is to build a strong cybersecurity team, first and foremost, you must focus on the people. If you're not taking care of your people, you don't have a chance of building a strong cybersecurity team."

## The skills gap is real

Given the length of his career in the business, Jeff has some unique insights into the profession. For one, he believes there's a profound skills gap and a lack of knowledgeable and trained technical control engineers to install products. "You have policy guys who are writing policy. Policy is awesome, you need that. However, if somebody can't enforce that policy on the ones and zeros passing across the wire, it's worthless. Look at the headlines every day. It's just breach after breach after breach. It's amazing how many times you see those breaches and they're related to poor architecture, or misconfigurations, or professionals who honestly didn't know what they were doing and were undertrained. That's a huge problem.

When you don't have highly trained cybersecurity professionals, you'll have installations done poorly. You might not realize it's a problem until an incident occurs and you see it was caused by a badly configured appliance or architecture. You can always tell the skill level of the professionals who architected and implemented the configurations. That's the value of certifications, especially lab-based certifications like an NSE 8 certification. When clients bring us in, our high-end, talented professionals can quickly see the skill level of the people who did the architecting and engineering."

## Mindset is key

When it comes to other cybersecurity professionals interested in pursuing an NSE 8 certification, Jeff says they need to approach the training and exams with the right mindset. "You can be very good technically, but to pass a lab-based certification like the NSE 8, it's all about effectively understanding what's in the blueprint. It's all about your mindset and how you approach the lab. You can't pass a lab-based exam—a networking exam for example—without grasping core reachability and functions like routing protocols and VPNs. You have to have that understanding. If you don't learn the foundations of the stack, how do you put anything on top of it? It's like building a human pyramid with one person on the bottom and then saying you want four at the top. It's just not going to work. You might pull it off for a second, but it isn't a recipe for success. With the NSE 8 certification, that strong foundation is everything. To succeed, grow, adapt, and accelerate learning, you must have that foundation. You're dead without it."



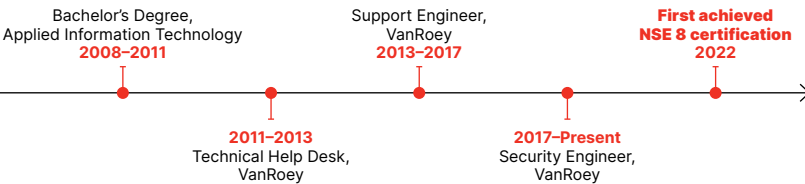
## Els Bleys, NSE 8

Security Engineer  
VanRoey, Belgium

### Get Your Hands Dirty and Do the Work

“ If you want to succeed in cybersecurity, you really have to go for it. You must have hands-on experience. Learn from your colleagues. Ask them questions. Gain as much knowledge as you can. Just get your hands dirty and don't give up.”

Els Bleys works as a Security Engineer at VanRoey, a multifunction systems integrator located in Belgium. In 2022, she received her NSE 8 certification. Going through the Fortinet certification process has helped her professionally and personally with her career path, as well as benefiting her organization. She wholeheartedly believes that the only way to succeed in cybersecurity is through endurance and an unflinching commitment to getting your hands dirty and doing the work.



## You need to know the product

Els acquired a professional bachelor's degree in Belgium after studying networking and infrastructure at university for three years. She had already studied computing in high school, which sparked her interest in the field. Even with her formal qualifications, she is a firm believer in ongoing education. Since starting work, she has accumulated a broad range of experience and knows this has helped her in her career. Certifications, along with hands-on work in cybersecurity, have provided her with the best education for her role.

"It's not possible to pass an exam if you don't know the product," she says. "The only way to really know the product is to implement and test it. The certifications then reinforce your on-the-job knowledge. It's not possible to do it the other way around, where you study first and then work with the products, because then you're just learning it by heart and not learning it in real life. You can't really understand a product if you don't work with it regularly."

## Providing customers with assurance

Els has worked at VanRoey for her entire 14-year career. She began as a technician providing remote support for clients. However, she soon developed an interest in cybersecurity. When she expressed this interest to her managers, they supported her in starting her security education and getting certifications. She took her first Fortinet certification exam in 2015 and earned the NSE 8 certification in 2022. In her current role as a Security Engineer, she helps clients understand what solutions they could adopt and build to improve their cybersecurity position. Her goal is to help them construct the right architecture and portfolio of products, tailored to their specific needs.

At the start of her career she worked with the Fortinet firewall and spam protection products, and then leveraged this knowledge during her certification progress. Reflecting on her journey, she says, "It's nice to take the Fortinet certification journey because you learn on the job with new products and then, if you're comfortable with them, you can do the exam. Once you're certified, it tells customers that you're ready to install them. It assures them that the technician knows what they're doing and that everything will work as promised, after we do the implementation. Personally, it also provides me with the confidence that I know the products really well."

Her Fortinet certifications have benefited her and her company. "Because I'm one of two people within our organization with an NSE 8 certification, VanRoey is considered an expert partner. That gives us a better relationship with Fortinet, and it allows us to market that knowledge in each request for proposal (RFP) when we're soliciting business."

For Els, the benefits of being an NSE 8 extend further than the confidence it gives her and her customers. “Fortinet, through its certification program, has defined the foundational knowledge that you need to achieve expertise and resolve any challenge in the cybersecurity framework,” she says. “It helps you be better at your job.”

## We need more trained cybersecurity professionals

“The skills gap is a major challenge. We need more trained professionals. There’s also the problem that the market is always evolving, so we need people who can adapt. It will never stop evolving. Bad actors always find new ways to hack. So, the security products must be up to speed to counter all the new technologies. No company can ever be 100% secure, so you need expertise to enable you to stay up to date on the newest threats.”

Training is just one part of the solution, though. Companies must also retain and cultivate talent. “You cannot become a cybersecurity specialist straight out of high school. It’s not even possible in a year or two or three. If you want to have a strong cybersecurity team, it takes time. Also, if you have good people, don’t let them go because it’s rare to get good people these days. We call ourselves the VanRoey family because we really stick together.”

## Products alone won’t solve everything

As well as training and retention, Els feels companies also need to focus on architecture. She sees many customers approach their cybersecurity in a backward way. “The biggest mistake customers can make is to buy a lot of products before they’ve made sure their core business is sound and segmented properly. Products won’t solve everything. Buying one product won’t fix all issues. Focusing on only the products, rather than the architecture—in which the network, applications, storage, and security products are integrated—will inevitably lead to failure.”

## Don't give up

The constantly evolving threat landscape is a big reason why Els recommends those in cybersecurity commit to always learning. “Even if you get a certification, the challenge is that you must be constantly learning about the market and the challenges that are coming at you, from hackers to new products, to new environments like the cloud. The certifications help to ensure you stay up to date in that learning process. Part of the learning process is recognizing your limitations. It's important to realize that, even with an NSE 8 certification, you don't know everything. That's simply impossible. I make mistakes, it comes with the territory.”

For those ready to embark upon their own certification journey, Els says the Fortinet training prepares you well for the exams, even if it is hard work at times. “When it comes to the NSE 8 certification, though, it really is a different level. It's difficult. You truly have to know everything.”

That is why her most essential advice is to not give up. “If you want to succeed in cybersecurity, you really have to go for it. You must have hands-on experience. Learn from your colleagues. Ask them questions. Gain as much knowledge as you can. Just get your hands dirty and don't give up,” she says.

# NSE 8 Fortinet Employees





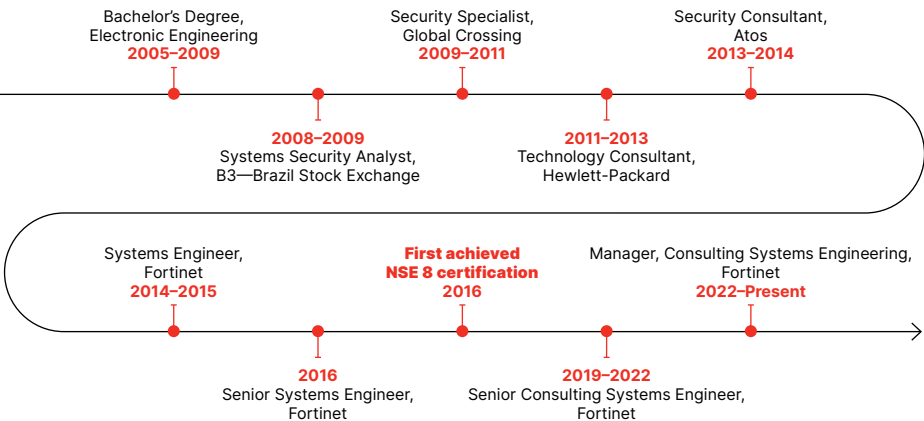
## Michel Barbosa, NSE 8

Consulting Systems Engineering Manager  
Fortinet, Brazil

### Proper Implementation is Critical

“ Cybersecurity is never static. There are always new threats emerging and no company or professional can ever achieve or guarantee 100% protection. Too often, companies think they can just put a product in place and forget it—but the implementation of cybersecurity products is just as vital as the products themselves.”

Michel Barbosa is a Consulting Systems Engineering Manager at Fortinet, where he has worked for nearly a decade. He became an NSE 8 in 2016 and thinks that certifications are key to staying current in the ever-changing cybersecurity landscape. He values diversity in cybersecurity, both in experience and perspective, because it guarantees out-of-the-box thinking in solving client challenges.



## Supplementing your experience

Michel was interested in cybersecurity even before he went to university and remembers playing with—and breaking—computers at a very young age. When he was just 16, he started a cybercafe with his father because, at the time, computers and cost-effective internet access were not freely available across Brazil. That sparked his interest in the field. In 2009, he graduated from the Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, located in Sao Paulo, Brazil, with a Bachelor's degree in Electronic Engineering.

After graduating from university, Michel pursued internships in network security and cybersecurity. He worked at the Brazilian stock exchange, which exposed him to security for financial markets. That job led him to take certification courses because he realized he lacked experience. "At the start of my career, I took a bunch of certifications because I noticed that, if you didn't have a lot of experience, the certifications really counterbalanced that," he says. Those certifications helped his career progression and allowed him to begin specializing in cybersecurity, where he worked supporting intrusion prevention systems (IPSs). "With IPSs, you get to see and react to attacks that are happening to your customers. I had to develop the skills to understand and dissect attacks, decide whether they were critical or not, and remove false positives."

He also worked in consulting and postsales at a global technology company, which helped him understand the perspective of the customer. "That job taught me about the adoption of cybersecurity around the globe. I saw that security varies greatly from place to place. It made me realize that very often, organizations buy technology but don't apply it correctly," he explains.

## Certifications keep you relevant

Like most NSE 8s, Michel believes that his certifications have been as important, if not more so, than his formal post-secondary education. He has more than a dozen certifications for a wide variety of products and services. "Firstly, certifications helped me because sometimes my daily work didn't provide enough exposure to certain important topics, ones that I needed to understand in order to be up to date in that technology—for instance, the cloud. So, I used certification training to stay relevant. Secondly, I wanted to have a set of skills that differentiated me from others in the field. Finally, some certifications, like NSE 8, are perceived as especially desirable by others in the industry. They position you as an expert. So, when I had the chance to participate in the launch of the NSE 8 program, I took it, because I knew it would benefit my reputation."

In his current role at Fortinet, he oversees in-house operations and steers the vision for how the company supports presales engagement. He relies extensively on data to help clients find their Goldilocks solution—a cybersecurity infrastructure that isn't oversized or undersized. His department also runs training sessions for sales engineers so that they can be better and more trusted advisors to their clients. His work in the Fortinet labs involves doing proofs of concept for new products, along with prototype testing, and carrier homologations, which ensures new devices follow all regulations.

## NSE 8 is a catalyst

Michel believes that acquiring his NSE 8 certification was a catalyst to advancing his career. "I did the NSE 8 certification to challenge myself, expand my knowledge, and increase my efficiency," he says. "As a result, I had the personal benefit of recognition, in part because I was one of the first NSE 8s in the world. People still recognize me for that. It's both internal and external recognition. I'm viewed as an expert. However, it also made me a better professional overall. It made me explore things that I would not have explored otherwise."

Being an NSE 8 also allows Michel to better serve Fortinet clients, because he has a broader perspective on the technology and on cybersecurity in general. "I understand the limits and boundaries of the products and am able to leverage that knowledge to solve the pain points of our clients," he says. "In my career, I've often seen projects derailed by mistakes that came from a lack of knowledge. Many cybersecurity problems come from poor network design. NSE 8 certification helps you to be able to think through the design properly."

## Cybersecurity is a game of cat and mouse

"Cybersecurity is never static. There are always new threats emerging and no company or professional can ever achieve or guarantee 100% protection. Too often, companies think they can just put a product in place and forget it, but the implementation of cybersecurity products is just as vital as the products themselves. Cybersecurity is a game of cat and mouse. The technology itself doesn't mean much if it's not implemented properly, or if it's not designed and maintained in the best way. You need the required knowledge to understand the threats, their evolution—because they're always changing—and the limitations of how the current technology might respond to them. Without knowledge, you're just checking boxes and wasting energy because the product by itself is usually not going to do much."

## Experience is vital to becoming NSE 8

“My advice is to get as much hands-on experience as you can. You need this experience to be prepared for the NSE 8 exams; you need to have had contact with the technologies that are covered. Theoretical knowledge by itself, while valuable, is insufficient. Professionals need to actively pursue that experience. Cybersecurity is a very broad field. You can work on the offensive or the defensive aspects, you can be more of an infrastructure or network person, or you might choose to be more analytically focused. My advice would be to pick the field that you are most interested in and try to specialize in that.”



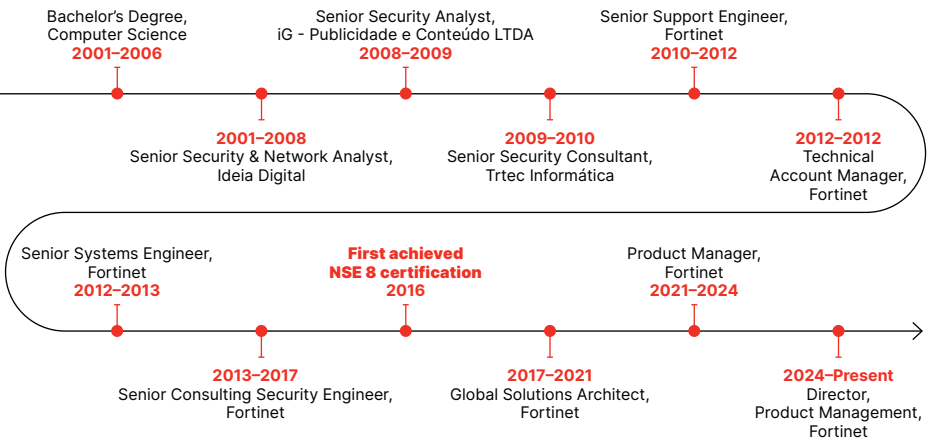
## Sdnei Avelar, NSE 8

Director, Product Management  
Fortinet, Brazil

### Push Beyond Your Comfort Zone

“ A certification gives you a path to follow. It’s more comprehensive than self-study. For instance, the NSE 8 exams touch on topics that you may not think about when you study on your own. Certifications take you beyond your comfort zone.”

Sdnei Avelar is a Product Management Director at Fortinet, where he has worked for over 14 years. His career spans more than two decades in cybersecurity, much of which he has spent training other industry professionals. This gives him a unique perspective on what is necessary to succeed in cybersecurity, but also of the relative importance of training and skill development.



## Learning never stops

Sdnei has had a lifelong passion for computers and technology. During his childhood in Brazil, computers were his hobby. He spent countless hours disassembling and reassembling them to try to understand how they worked. It wasn't until high school, however, that he began to consider working with computers for a living. He taught himself how the internet operated and became adept at fixing computers, which was his first job at a Brazilian systems integrator, before enrolling in post-secondary education. He went to Ruy Barbosa University in Brazil, where he graduated in 2006 with a B.S. in Computer Science. Although what he learned in that degree program has little relevance to what he does today, Sdnei believes that having a foundation in networking is vital to a career in cybersecurity.

"I was 100% a networking guy when I was at university. My university education contributed very little to what I do in my job today. That's because most universities focus on programming. They teach you to code. That isn't as relevant for cybersecurity, unless you are into the development, security, and operations side. When I graduated, I started taking different courses in networking, and security came up naturally. Often, people in this business make the mistake of thinking they can be a cybersecurity expert without being a networking expert. But you cannot secure something that you don't understand. You need to know networks first, and then you can learn security," he explains.

Sdnei believes certifications hold two main values: They expand your knowledge and provide a structure for learning. "Certifications push you to learn something that you might not otherwise learn," he says. "You will not learn these things in university. You're forced to sit down and study the material, and couple that with a practical component. With the NSE 8 certification, you must get your hands dirty to pass the exams by working in labs. A certification gives you a path to follow. It's more comprehensive than self-study. For instance, the NSE 8 exams touch on topics that you may not think about when you study on your own. Certifications take you beyond your comfort zone."

His NSE 8 certification also prevents Sdnei's cybersecurity knowledge from going stale. "Aside from the prestige that comes with it, I got the NSE 8 certification because I thought it would be very challenging. The NSE 8 is a very comprehensive certification that includes many topics that people don't work on daily. It allowed me to identify what I needed to learn more about and increase my knowledge, so I don't fall behind. Aside from the knowledge that comes from lifelong learning, Sdnei points out the obvious: that you simply can't work in the industry without certain certifications. "To have jobs in this industry, people need to be certified."

## Expertise helps build trust

The majority of Sdnei's career has been at Fortinet, which he joined in 2010. While at Fortinet, he has held numerous roles, including Support Engineer, Technical Account Manager, Professional Services Engineer, Consulting Systems Engineer, and Global Training Engineer, before assuming his current role in product management.

As Director of Product Management, he works in the R&D department and is responsible for creating customer-facing products. A trend throughout his career has been how he trains his colleagues, company partners, and customers. In his current position, he trains people on new products and helps them to hone their product messaging for customers. Training others has brought him a great deal of fulfillment. "I've become a trusted advisor for a lot of other cybersecurity professionals. In some cases, I've become a mentor. A lot of people who do great things in Fortinet see me as a mentor. I've helped them grow and I'm proud of that," he says.

## The importance of investing in skilled people

Sdnei highlights one of the biggest challenges in the industry that programs like the NSE 8 are trying to correct: the skills gap. "Most companies lack good people to deliver solutions," he says. "We've got very few people with the required expertise. Certifications play a very important role in bringing up people's skills, which is something we really need today."

Like many other NSE 8s, he believes that companies often misuse their cybersecurity resources, focusing too much on buying products and not enough on knowing how those tools are integrated and implemented. "Companies should devote more to implementation. They think buying the solution is the most important thing. But implementing the solution is the most important part, because if you don't implement it the right way, you will expose your networks. I don't see customers spending a proportional amount of resources on getting the right people to deliver the solutions. You can't have just anyone implementing your cybersecurity solutions."

This means companies need to invest in their cybersecurity teams more fully. "First, you need to trust people. Then, you need to help them develop their skills to the fullest. Sometimes, managers focus more on what individuals don't know, or an error that they made. They are interested only in what people are not doing correctly rather than looking at their potential. Trust them and give them the tools and space to develop and grow. That's how you build strong teams. And that's not just for security, that goes for everything," he says.

## Get your hands dirty

Sdnei's advice for those interested in pursuing cybersecurity expertise is to do labs. "Always run labs and try out new situations. If you get your hands dirty, you're going to be better prepared. Labs are the key."

He also reiterates the advice of other NSE 8s: that those who are entering the profession should focus on networking first. "You need to learn networking properly. Security is not just about networking, but network security is the biggest part of cybersecurity. My advice is to first become a very good Network Engineer. Understand networks and then you'll be able to start putting security on top of them."



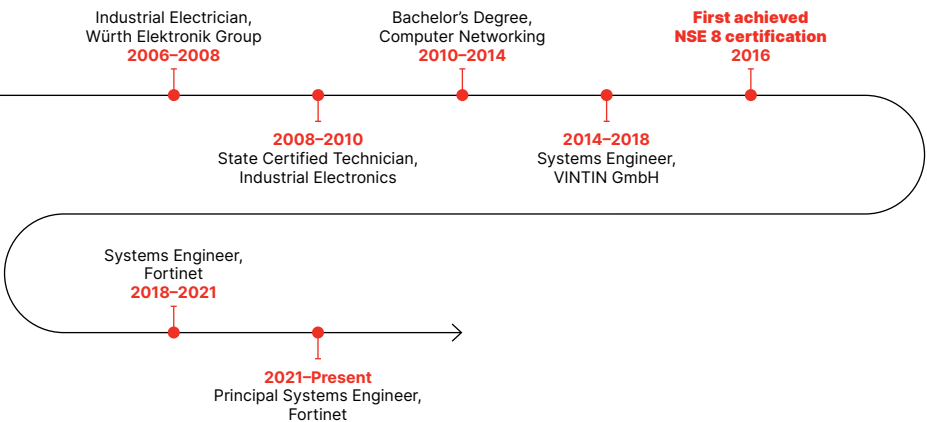
## Marek Fritsch, NSE 8

Principal Systems Engineer  
Fortinet, Germany

### Expertise Comes From Understanding the Mess

“ Expertise comes from looking at the real world and seeing the mess that exists. Once you can figure out that mess, then you’ve achieved mastery. Similarly, simply knowing how cybersecurity is supposed to work if everything is perfect, isn’t being an expert. Expertise is understanding why it’s so messed up and what to do about it.”

Marek Fritsch works as a Principal Systems Engineer for Fortinet. In this role, he provides technical assistance to customers during the presales process. Although he holds a Bachelor’s degree in Computer Networking, like many NSE 8s, Marek believes certifications and hands-on experience have been the most important form of education in his career.



## Understanding networking is fundamental

Originally, Marek did not pursue a career in cybersecurity. His education path is an example of how anyone with interest and passion can build a career in cybersecurity, if they dedicate themselves to it.

He trained as an electrician in Germany and worked in that role for two and a half years after graduating high school. But like many other NSE 8s, he was self-motivated and wanted something more. He had done some work and training in IT, and a teacher pushed him to go to university to pursue a degree. Eventually, he enrolled at Hochschule Furtwangen, where he earned a B.S. in Computer Networking in 2014. After he graduated, he used his knowledge of networking to get a job as a Systems Engineer. He earned his NSE 8 certification in 2016, after he progressed through the other Fortinet certification levels. He believes that understanding networking is foundational to succeeding in cybersecurity. "It is fundamental to understand networking because cybersecurity is built on standardized protocols and underlays, and it's about securing weak points in a network and larger IT environment," he says.

Marek holds 14 certifications in the industry. Despite his time in higher education, he believes his certification programs have proved more valuable over time than what he learned at university. In part, this is because the certifications are more detailed, more product specific, and more relevant to real-world situations.

"Certifications help you complete your education and improve your understanding of cybersecurity products," Marek says. "Certifications are more detailed than what you learn at university. You gain a broader knowledge with the NSE 8 certification. At university, you're looking at only parts of the environment, like switching and routing. When it comes to a certification, you put the parts together in one environment and then you have to have a bigger understanding of all the components in the environment."

## It's not just about a product

Marek finds that organizations often focus on specific products for specific issues, without thinking about how those products fit into a larger cybersecurity ecosystem. "Cybersecurity is part of a bigger system. If you can help other systems work better or they can help you work better, that helps everyone. Your products and services must be able to share information, regardless of whether the solutions come from the same vendor or not."

As an NSE 8, Marek has come to the conclusion that technology isn't nearly as important as people, when it comes to cybersecurity. Without experts like NSE 8s,

products can only provide so much protection from threats. “Cybersecurity products on their own are not enough. It’s the people that configure the tools that make them secure,” he says. “We need people who know how to configure these tools in the right way, to make the systems perform the way they should.”

Too often, cybersecurity fails because people install products and don’t know what they’re doing. Or they pick the wrong technology and configure it incorrectly. Ultimately, the problem in cybersecurity is the lack of people with a true understanding of the profession.”

He believes that pushing for diverse cybersecurity teams is part of the solution. “You need different specialists on each team. They can then help each other with their specific knowledge. I like working with people who have VMware knowledge and others who are experts in client operations systems. We all benefit from each other’s expertise. You should learn as much as you can from those you work with,” he adds.

## Facing the realities of cybersecurity

From his vantage point as an NSE 8, Marek thinks companies frequently have blind spots in their cybersecurity landscapes that make them vulnerable to threats. “Customers don’t always know what’s going on in their environments. That’s the biggest challenge I see facing our clients. They don’t use analytics or monitoring to see just how effectively their cybersecurity is performing. They may know what’s happening at certain points in the environment where the services are running, but not what’s happening with the products as an integrated whole. They also lack the automation they need to recognize problematic user accounts. Companies often install products, but then don’t have any checks on them.”

The interplay between cybersecurity solutions and employee awareness is the best protection. Cybersecurity is developing all the time. Hackers will try to get into any system they can. So you need people with hands-on experience to counteract them with the products that are available.”

## Go deep

Marek’s main piece of advice to cybersecurity professionals looking to advance in their careers—advice that is echoed by many other NSE 8s—is to try to gain as much hands-on experience as possible. “My advice is to work with a variety of customer environments and on many projects with different requirements and different solutions. You need to get a feel for as many use cases and as much of the available technology as you can,” he says.

One practical tip he has for those taking the NSE 8 exams is to prioritize time management. “The NSE 8 exams demand a lot out of you, and if you don’t manage your time wisely, you’ll run out of it,” he explains.

He also suggests that professionals try to stay current on cybersecurity developments generally, to improve their knowledge and skills. “If you are interested in cybersecurity or IT technology, read as much about it as you can and stay current on cybersecurity news. Take a closer look at the vulnerabilities that current threats expose. What are the tools hackers are using? What scripts are they deploying? How do they develop the tools or the scripts that they rely on? You have to go as deep down that rabbit hole as you can to understand how they are trying to achieve their goal.”



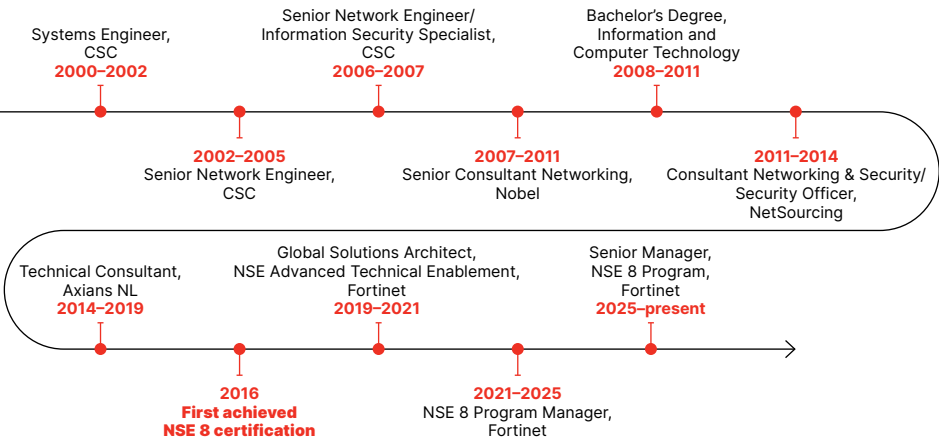
## Steffen Torn, NSE 8

- Senior Manager, NSE 8 Program
- Fortinet, The Netherlands

### Identifying the True Experts

“ The goal of the NSE 8 is to confirm real mastery. That’s our vision—to certify those who are truly the experts.”

Steffen Torn, Senior Manager, NSE 8 Program at Fortinet, is uniquely positioned compared to other NSE 8s because he designs the training strategy for and oversees the entire NSE 8 program. He became NSE 8 certified while working as a cybersecurity consultant, before joining Fortinet. Steffen understands the NSE 8 certification from all angles and knows what it takes to become a true cybersecurity expert.



## Networking is the gateway

Steffen has had a lifelong passion for computers. This fascination began when he was 8-years old and his father brought home his family's first computer. Even though his parents limited the amount of time he could spend on the computer, by age 10 he had learned some simple programming to help him win at video games. As he grew into a teen in the Netherlands, he taught himself more programming and learned how to leverage the power of computing.

He attended a technical high school and pursued his interest in computer programming more formally. Reflecting on his teenage years, he says that he was most fascinated with how devices communicated with one another and began to build networks at home to study these interactions. Later, as a college student, he earned a B.S. in Computer Science from Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences.

Like many other NSE 8s, Steffen began his education by developing a firm grasp of networking. This foundational expertise eventually led him to cybersecurity. "My education began by hacking my way into games, and programming like a novice. Then, my focus became networking. Cybersecurity only happened when I was already working full time as a network engineer and started to interact with cybersecurity. I could never have had a career in cybersecurity if I hadn't understood networking so thoroughly first."

## From networking to cybersecurity

After university, Steffen began his professional career as a network engineer, working for several firms. He also worked as an IT consultant. He primarily built large networks for enterprise organizations. After a few years, he recognized that these networks needed firewalls and cybersecurity. The more he explored the world of cybersecurity, the more it interested him, and he began to find networking boring by comparison. "I needed a new challenge and cybersecurity was there to provide that challenge," he says. He accrued more than a dozen certifications and became so adept at cybersecurity that he was able to achieve his NSE 8 certification.

"When I started working with Fortinet products, that's what drew me to the NSE 8 certification. It was about having authority—both organizational and individual—to make customers aware that you are an expert," he explains. After Steffen gained a familiarity with and fondness for Fortinet products, in 2019, he decided to join Fortinet full time as part of the NSE 8 program team. By 2021, he was in charge of the entire NSE 8 certification program.

## The goal is to confirm expertise

In his role at Fortinet, Steffen is responsible for every aspect of the NSE 8 program—from ensuring the exams are relevant and well written, to running the exams and training, to overseeing the applications supporting the NSE 8 program. However, he works with a team of subject matter experts and all decisions are made as a group. “We’re all writers and editors at the same time, reviewing with each other throughout the process.”

Ultimately, Steffen’s goal with the program is “to confirm real mastery. That’s our vision: to certify those who are truly the experts.”

It follows, that a key benefit of the certification is gaining authority, both personally and in your organization. “Once you have the NSE 8 certification, you are certified as an expert. It is well known in the industry how hard the expert level certifications are. So, it gives you credibility. You become a trusted advisor for your clients. You become the go-to person in your company for more junior engineers and serve as their mentor. It also opened doors for me with Fortinet and helped me get where I am today.”

## Knowledge versus expertise

However, Steffen is careful to emphasize that achieving this expertise cannot come from reading and studying alone. “You must have hands-on experience to pass the NSE 8 exams. If somebody has between 5 and 10 years of true, in-depth, hands-on experience with our products, they shouldn’t have to study much for this exam. They should take it and pass. We’re trying to assess that experience during the examination. If you don’t have hands-on experience, or you didn’t acquire hands-on experience, then you will fail the exam,” he says. “We’re really trying to take professionals on a cybersecurity journey. We’re trying to educate them broadly, not just in Fortinet products, but in cybersecurity as a whole.”

## Putting expertise to use

Steffen views this expertise as increasingly vital in a cybersecurity landscape that is continuously evolving and increasingly influenced by AI. “The future of cybersecurity is all related to AI and how AI affects cybersecurity. That goes both ways. Attackers can leverage AI to enhance their attacks and we, as a cybersecurity vendor, can also leverage AI to better defend against those attacks. However, with AI, both attacks and responses are happening faster than ever before,” he says.

Consequently, continuous training and skill development are essential to succeed in the industry, and to protect enterprises. “The threat landscape has evolved. It has become so mature that it’s very hard for untrained people to defend themselves. Phishing is a great example. It’s more sophisticated than ever.”

## Start with networking

To those interested in cybersecurity, Steffen recommends starting young and getting as much hands-on experience as possible, especially in networking and programming, not just cybersecurity. “If you’re in your early 20s and have expert-level cybersecurity certifications, hiring managers aren’t going to hire you because they know your expertise isn’t there. You need to have 5–10 years of real-world experience. Get it in networking and programming so you understand how these concepts work. Then, move up to cybersecurity. My philosophy has always been that I didn’t want to obtain a certification where I didn’t already have real-world experience. So, you really must get your hands dirty first,” he says.



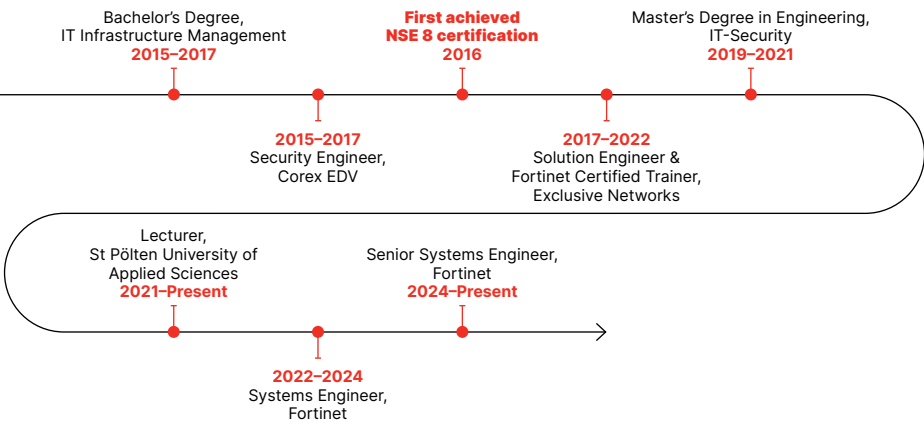
## Daniel Balogh, NSE 8

Senior Systems Engineer  
Fortinet, Switzerland

### Good Cybersecurity Requires Time and Attention

“ In some organizations, cybersecurity professionals are so busy with their day-to-day jobs, that they cannot keep up with the technology. They don’t have enough time to learn and cope with the new challenges, so they fall behind. Companies need to give them that time so they can improve.”

Daniel Balogh is a Senior Systems Engineer at Fortinet. He works with Fortinet public and carrier teams who focus on crafting solution designs for government agencies, as well as wireless networks and large service providers. He also works as a university lecturer, where he shares his knowledge and expertise about cybersecurity with students. He has turned his passion for the industry into a way to inspire others.



## Hands-on experience is imperative

Daniel is a dedicated learner and has a profound curiosity for cybersecurity. He built his first computer when he was 12, and then began studying computing and IT engineering in high school. “I always wanted to know why things work the way they do,” he says. “I had the good fortune to be able to get deep technical knowledge through my computer science courses. After I left school though, I realized I had to keep up with my training and knowledge to be good at what I do.” That’s part of the reason he quickly achieved his NSE 8 certification in 2016 before finishing his bachelor’s degree in IT infrastructure management in 2017. He then went on to acquire a master’s degree in IT security from University of Applied Sciences Technikum in Vienna in 2021.

This is one reason he believes wholeheartedly in sharing what he’s learned. He’s taken his passion back into the classroom, working as a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences in St. Polten. “You get all this theory from your education, but for certifications, you really need hands-on experience. What I learned for my NSE 8 exams, for example, was how to pinpoint my own mistakes. Being able to do that is crucial. Now, it’s one of the most important skills I have.

## Putting theory into practice

He found that studying for his NSE 8 exams while working was beneficial. “It was a great combination,” he says. “I’d learn about concepts in the training, and then immediately be able to put them into practice. It was a good back-and-forth between different types of knowledge.”

He believes his career is evidence that to excel at cybersecurity, you must have inherent motivation. “You can build up the knowledge you need to succeed in cybersecurity, but you have to be motivated to do it. Certifications help, but you also have to prove yourself and your skills constantly.” In speaking with other NSE 8s, Daniel has found the same theme—they are all motivated to learn on their own. “The other NSE 8s I know all say that because the certification is so demanding, they had to learn a lot on their own. We all developed a mindset where we refused to give up and just kept pushing. You have to stay focused and motivated. It’s like preparing for a marathon—you need to maintain positive energy, believe that you can do it, and not give up and take the easy way. No one who passes the NSE 8 certification likes the easy way; otherwise, they wouldn’t take the exams.”

## Certifications allow you to evolve with cybersecurity

For Daniel, the primary benefit of his NSE 8 certification wasn't the certificate itself, it was the knowledge he gained through the training. "The certification is demanding. Even while you are learning the material, you are also learning to recognize your own mistakes and how you can get better. I learned a lot while preparing for the NSE 8 exams, especially that it is important to never stop learning. In cybersecurity, the world never sleeps. You constantly need to learn and adapt to new challenges. The reputational boost associated with the certification can help you get a position where you're being challenged and building your skills every day."

He says that the NSE 8 certification has helped his career because it acts as a sign of quality assurance to his employers and customers. "Even in Fortinet, being an NSE 8 matters," he adds. "Especially in Europe, being an NSE 8 helps. The countries are quite small and everybody gets to know you quite fast. For certain projects, having an NSE 8 certification is a requirement. It's definitely helped my career."

## Everyone needs to adapt to change

Because the environment is so dynamic, those who fail to engage in continuous learning quickly fall behind. "If you don't keep up with the challenges, you lose. It's like a race. You try to be first. You try to implement security measures before the attackers can exploit weaknesses. If you aren't aware of the latest threats from attackers, then you probably can't adopt the appropriate security measures. Then the attackers have an easy game." He often sees his clients struggling to keep up with changes in the threat landscape. Supply chain attacks are a prime example. "Hackers target vulnerabilities. Right now, they see vulnerabilities in supply chains. Companies need to use alerts so they know which suppliers have been targeted and are compromised. Too often, there isn't the quality security assurance in many partner organizations. This ends up leading to problems in those they partner with," he explains.

## Be an inspiration for others

"In some organizations, cybersecurity professionals are so busy with their day-to-day jobs, they cannot keep up with the technology. They don't have enough time to learn and cope with new challenges, so they fall behind. Companies need to give them that time so they can improve."

The other key to staff improvement is in individuals adopting a growth mindset, one in which they constantly add to both their knowledge and skills. He finds those who have this mindset are most likely to get ahead in the field.

"I led a Fortinet training a few years ago and covered firewall basics. One of the students was really interested and spoke to me afterwards about cryptography. Recently, I ran into this student again. He thanked me for the training and said that class was the moment which motivated him to enroll in a degree program. He's since completed his bachelor's degree and is working on his master's degree. I find that really inspiring," Daniel shares.

This same mindset is crucial in order to meet the demands of passing the NSE 8 exams. "You need a positive attitude and stamina, just like you're running a marathon. You don't give up after 20 kilometers. You have to push through," he says.



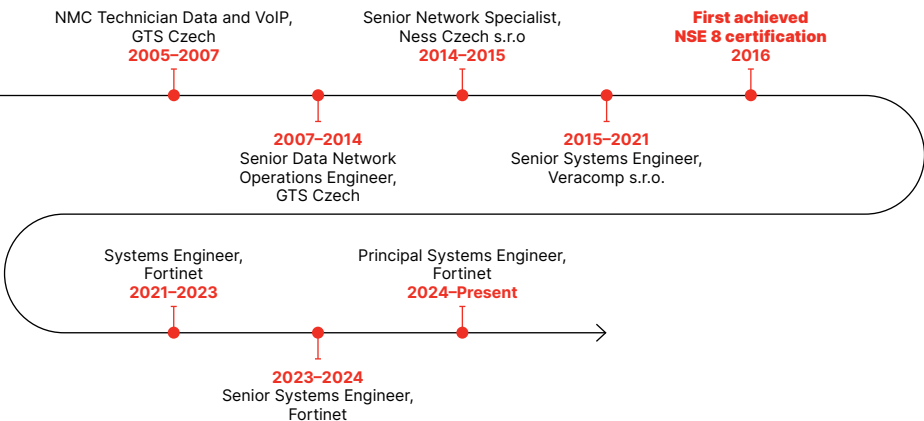
## Ondrej Veci, NSE 8

- Principal Systems Engineer
- Fortinet, Czech Republic

### You Don't Need a Formal Education to Become a Cybersecurity Expert

“ My personal opinion is that it's not necessary to hire people who have the highest education in IT. Companies can create solid security teams if you have good people who like this profession, who want to learn new things, and are interested in cybersecurity, IT, and new technologies.”

Ondrej Veci works as a Principal Systems Engineer at Fortinet. He lives and works in the Czech Republic and has spent his career at IT and cybersecurity companies in the country. He received his NSE 8 certification in 2016 before joining Fortinet, but the certification has aided his career both within the company and in his other jobs. With his highest level of education being high school, his career is proof that certifications can be a springboard for motivated people to succeed in cybersecurity. At Fortinet, his role is primarily to help customers find the best solution for their needs. This includes working closely with the Fortinet sales team to show partners and customers how to implement these solutions.



## Certifications and hands-on experience are an education

Ondrej graduated from high school in the Czech Republic in 2005, and immediately went to work in IT at a firm in Prague. His first job was as a Network Operations Center Specialist. The position enabled him to thoroughly understand how networks worked, and he advanced onto a team that helped craft network solutions for customers. “I learned so many things about how networks work—about routing and switching—and this is an absolutely necessary background for my job now.” After working with a variety of Czech companies, he started to use Fortinet products and it sparked his interest in cybersecurity. It was at his second job, in 2013, that he saw how certifications could help his career. Since that time, he has completed more than 10 certifications, culminating with his NSE 8 in 2016. His NSE 8 certification was required by a previous employer, and he managed to obtain all of his Fortinet certifications within a span of two years.

The Fortinet certifications solidified his passion for the work, and this eventually led him to join the company. He says he views certifications as his true education. “Because I never went to university, certifications and hands-on experience were absolutely the biggest part of my education in cybersecurity,” he says. “I was self-motivated. I learned everything I could in every job I had. I got hands-on experience with telecommunications providers, where I learned how networks work. Having gained this knowledge, I had the motivation to go on to achieve certifications. The Czech Republic is a small market compared to the U.S., Canada, and the rest of Europe. I realized achieving certifications would provide me with product knowledge that few others in the country had. I wanted to understand how to provide the best implementations; becoming an NSE 8 helped with that.”

He believes it’s possible to build a successful career on certifications rather than more formal education. “My personal opinion is that it’s not necessary to hire people who have the highest education in IT. Companies can create solid security teams if they have good people who like it and who want to learn new things and are interested in cybersecurity, IT, and new technologies.”

## NSE 8 enables you to see the bigger picture

Ondrej has experienced the benefits of his NSE 8 certification in many ways, including in terms of personal confidence and pride. “I wanted the personal challenge and I have a feeling of pride having it in my email signature,” he says. “I definitely gained better knowledge of the products, but I also understand the big picture now,” he says. Equally important was the way NSE 8 certification helped him establish immediate trust and credibility with fellow cybersecurity professionals and customers. “After I got the

certification, I had this guarantee for my customers and partners that I had this knowledge and they could trust me. At Fortinet, it helps my work with the sales team. It tells customers and partners that someone with the highest Fortinet certification is working on their project. The salespeople can say that to everyone. I'm viewed as a trusted partner."

The NSE 8 certification also gave him a perspective on cybersecurity that he thinks others in the field often lack: that cybersecurity challenges can't be solved by products alone.

"Too often, you see customers buy a bunch of technology. Cybersecurity is not only about the products. It's about knowing the environment, configuring it correctly, and optimizing the devices. There's no such thing as buy-it-and-forget-it. That's why it's important to have someone with experience who can design, deploy, and configure the device correctly. If you don't have the expertise, there can be many mistakes and misunderstandings."

## Human error is the biggest threat

Similarly, when it comes to the biggest cybersecurity problem facing organizations today, Ondrej says it's about people too. "The biggest challenge is, and always has been, humans," he explains. "The users. That's because the human firewall is still the most vulnerable thing in the network. You really have to take a long time to educate users. You need to train. You need to test the users. Human error is where most problems originate."

He also believes the Internet of Things brings with it a whole new set of issues for companies to contend with. "With the Internet of Things, there are so many more devices that are now connected and vulnerable," he says. "For instance, with a healthcare center, you suddenly have all these life-saving devices that are now vulnerable. It's difficult to secure all of them." He also believes that the advent of AI will make it easier to create detrimental malware and phishing attacks.

## Passion should drive you

Ondrej's advice to cybersecurity learners interested in pursuing an NSE 8 certification is clear. "I think you must really want it," he says. "You should really love it and it should be a passion for you because if it is just part of your job, you won't succeed. It's also important to have many years of practice. You should have a background in cybersecurity, as well as networking. And you should do all the other Fortinet training beforehand." He goes so far as to suggest building one's own lab to practice, as do many other NSE 8s.

This passion is necessary for passing the exams, and for succeeding in cybersecurity more broadly. "Just like with the NSE 8 certification, when it comes to cybersecurity, you need to like it. You should have a passion for learning and make time for that because you can't be good if you're not always learning the newest things," he says.



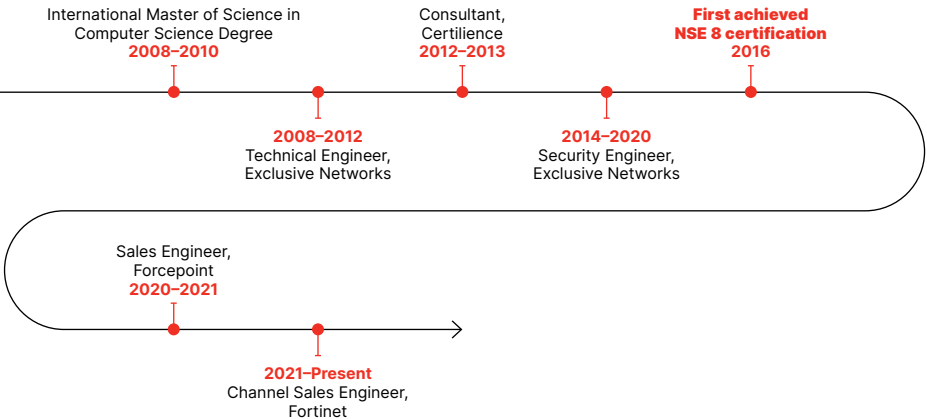
## Michael Bazy, NSE 8

Channel Systems Engineer  
Fortinet, France

### Passion Is the Key to Success

“Passion is the most important thing to have in cybersecurity. It could be passion for any aspect of the work, but you have to be passionate about something. If you don't have it, the sleepless nights and the demands of the work may get to you. Cybersecurity requires work, and if you don't have a passion for it, you won't want to do what's necessary to succeed.”

Michael Bazy is a Channel Systems Engineer at Fortinet. He has worked in cybersecurity for 15 years and believes passion is the foundation for building a strong career in the industry. He earned his NSE 8 certification in 2016 and found the training forced him to extend his knowledge and skills so that he could achieve true mastery. His NSE 8 certification has afforded him a level of credibility that benefits his work advising and training others in Fortinet and partner organizations.



## The benefits of work experience

Michael is one of the few NSE 8s who knew he wanted to work in cybersecurity from a young age. He began to work with computers in his youth and was also fascinated by video games and the technology that made them work. Cybersecurity sparked his interest because, while still in school, he recognized there was a need for security that was difficult to fill. "I didn't want to be like other people. I didn't want to do the same thing as everyone else, so I stepped back and saw that cybersecurity was this emerging field. I decided it was right for me," he says.

Michael earned his International Master of Science in Computer Science Degree from Supinfo in Lyon, France in 2010. However, throughout most of his higher education, he was also working and completing certification programs. I chose the university I did because I got to work half the time and attend classes the other half. My university was directly linked to companies like Microsoft and Cisco, so I learned about their products while in school. In my co-op job I was working with Fortinet products. What I learned about them allowed me to pass my university exams easily."

## Learning doesn't stop once you start working

Michael joined Fortinet in 2021 but had worked with Fortinet products throughout his career at other firms. Over his career, he has been employed by several organizations in France, and also in Australia and New Zealand. He found that in all of these roles he enjoyed continually learning. He also evolved to become a trainer and eventually began doing technical training for Fortinet products for one of the largest French distributors, before joining Fortinet directly.

Michael now holds more than 20 industry certifications. The real-world experience and certifications offered him something university education could not. "Certifications help show what skills you have. By going through the training, aside from simply gaining knowledge to pass these certifications, you're focused on topics other than what you do in your day job and what you learn at university. The certifications help build your skills but also open your mind to other skills you don't have but could need later."

One thing that has become clear to Michael over the course of his career is that, to achieve excellence, you must push yourself. "Passion. Passion is the most important thing to have in cybersecurity. It could be passion for any aspect of the work, but you must be passionate about something. If you don't have it, the sleepless nights and the demands of the work may get to you. Cybersecurity requires work, and if you don't have a passion for it, you won't want to do what's necessary to succeed."

## Building trust with customers

In his current position, Michael views himself as an evangelist, but also as a bit of a technical account manager. “My role is to build and maintain trust between Fortinet and our partners from a technical perspective rather than just a sales perspective. The foundation of building this trust comes from recommending the right products to clients and offering them a vision for their cybersecurity. “I want to be their trusted advisor and I want my partners to be able to follow my vision with complete confidence. We want our customers to achieve the best results either by getting them the right products and solutions or by providing managed services, all of which fits into their larger cybersecurity architecture.”

## NSE 8 is the chef’s kiss

When Michael achieved his NSE 8 certification, he immediately saw personal benefits from it. “I did the NSE 8 certification for the challenge and because I wanted recognition. The prestige of the NSE 8 mattered to me. There is a distinction around it. People assume you know everything about everything, which is not true—you should realize you can still make mistakes. But it is gratifying to see the level of respect and credibility it gives you from others in the field.”

He also says his previous employers gained a great deal of value from his NSE 8 certification. “The NSE 8 certification was the chef’s kiss for them in attracting customers with complex deployments. It showed we’d be able to handle it technically,” he says.

## Without expertise, you’re not secure

Michael encourages others to strive for the expertise that an NSE 8 provides. You can have the best equipment, but if you don’t know how to master it, you won’t have strong security. You need expertise to ensure the hackers have less of an advantage,” he says. “Cybersecurity is about blocking threats while not disrupting the product routine and the network,” he explains. “And, if you can improve productivity by accelerating traffic and making everything work smoother, so much the better. Cybersecurity isn’t effective if it blocks the business from doing what it’s supposed to do.”

## Stay curious

When it comes to those interested in pursuing an NSE 8 certification, Michael has one resounding piece of advice. "It's a lot of work, but it's definitely worth it. Once you do it, the recognition and rewards will come," he says. He also thinks that to really launch oneself in the profession, people should start by examining what's new in the industry and build on those developments.

Finally, whether a professional is looking to excel as an NSE 8 or just in cybersecurity in general, Michael believes curiosity is the key. "You must have curiosity. You need to be sure of what you just learned and not be afraid of sometimes asking dumb questions. That's something I always start my training with. I always tell people that the only dumb question is the one you are too afraid to ask."



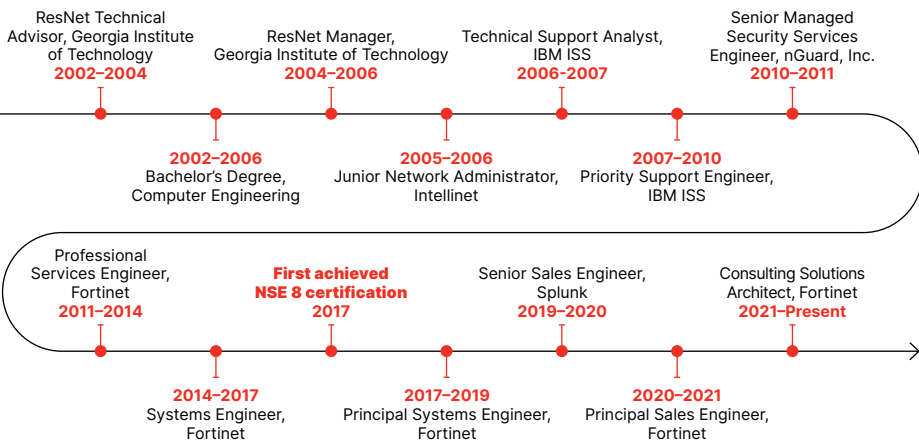
## Jonathan Torian, NSE 8

Consulting Systems Architect  
Fortinet, United States

### Understanding What's Under the Hood

“ The NSE 8 certification level prepares you for every scenario, even the most uncommon ones. It forces you to understand how to solve the unusual problems people have in practice, and they come to trust you because of the results you are able to produce.”

Jonathan Torian is a Consulting Systems Architect at Fortinet, where he has worked for most of the past decade. As an NSE 8, he considers himself a master of all trades, with the ability to help customers tackle any cybersecurity challenge they face. He turned his long-time interest in computing into a successful career and believes that passion, curiosity, and self-motivation are the keys to thriving in the cybersecurity industry.



## Finding your calling

Like many NSE 8s, Jonathan is a life-long learner. He became interested in computers when he was 10 and vividly remembers playing Duke Nukem on an old PC. That game sparked his fascination with technology. His mother worked in IT and encouraged him to understand how computers worked and the problems they solved.

In high school, Jonathan began network certification training and took apart routers and switches in his spare time. "I knew by the age of 14 this was the path I wanted to pursue," he says. "I didn't necessarily know I would end up in cybersecurity, but I knew it would be something to do with computers and networking." After graduating from high school, he matriculated to Georgia Tech, where he majored in computer engineering. While there, he also took classes in network engineering, knowing that was where he wanted to specialize.

He graduated in 2006 and took his first job working in technical support for a company that created cybersecurity products. "I got my first taste of customer service, marrying that with my computer knowledge, I was sold. I knew I had found my calling. Being able to solve real problems for customers and use my networking knowledge felt like my purpose in life," he explains.

## More than book knowledge

Prior to joining Fortinet in 2011, he acquired a number of independent industry certifications. After being hired, he embarked on his NSE 8 certification journey and currently has more than a dozen certifications.

"When I started at Fortinet, I realized I needed to gain a deeper understanding of these products. I knew I had to know the products well so I could handle deployments when called upon by a customer. That launched me on the journey of acquiring an NSE 8 certification," he says. "I realized that, even with all my hands-on experience, I didn't have an understanding of the 'why'. I was reading administration guides to understand the products, but that wasn't enough. Certifications allowed me to take that book knowledge and combine it with the practical knowledge I was getting from doing the actual work, to ensure I really understood why everything worked the way it did."

## Expertise equals credibility

Jonathan prizes his NSE 8 certification because of how deeply it allows him to understand Fortinet products and solutions. “I understand what’s happening under the hood,” he says. “With the NSE 8 exams, I was exposed to a lot of different scenarios. Now, when I’m in front of a customer, I’m familiar with their challenges and I have the confidence to stand behind what I’m recommending because I’ve seen it. Becoming an NSE 8 forces you to understand the aspects of how cybersecurity deployments work technically. Being an NSE 8 gives you instant credibility. If I go to a trade show or conference and I have my NSE 8 pin, people immediately trust I’ll have the expertise. When I engage with anyone, I’m able to explain what’s happening during the deployment, and why.”

## A new perspective on uncommon scenarios

“The NSE 8 level prepares you for every scenario, even the most uncommon ones,” he explains. “It forces you to understand how to solve the unusual problems people have in practice, and they come to trust you because of the results you are able to produce.” Jonathan also points out that being an NSE 8 enables him to think less like an engineer at times and more like a customer. “NSE 8 takes the collective knowledge of experts who have dealt with problems in real-world scenarios. With my certification, I can then map that knowledge to create an optimal solution, then put together Fortinet products to best achieve an outcome that is ideal for a customer’s goal. Too often, engineers try to put customers in a box. However, most engineers have probably not encountered the specific challenges of that client. The NSE 8 level opens your eyes to looking at deployments from a new perspective. It teaches you to solve problems differently.”

## Lack of expertise will leave you vulnerable

When it comes to the current challenges in cybersecurity, Jonathan believes expertise is crucial to achieve proper protection. For example, he sees many companies that don’t understand the products, or portfolio of products, they’re deploying. “With customers, they often make the mistake of thinking there are no significant differences between firewall vendors. But not everything translates from one vendor to the next. Frequently, they don’t have the necessary expertise behind what they’re deploying, and unfortunately, that results in gaps in their protection. I think expertise is very

important because a lot of cybersecurity solutions are poorly implemented. This is due to the ever-evolving nature of the industry. It's a full-time job to keep up with the latest breaches, techniques, tactics, and procedures used by malicious actors. We are processing so much information from so many sources and it's hard for cybersecurity professionals to keep up. I often hear companies say they can't find the talent to staff their needs. Cybersecurity isn't overly hard, per se, but it does require a significant investment of time to be good at it, along with experience. And there aren't enough people who have both."

## Demonstrate curiosity and initiative

When it comes to advising those interested in pursuing an NSE 8 certification, Jonathan is unequivocal. "My number one piece of advice is to be curious. It doesn't matter about the topic. Look through the study guides. Go through all the documentation. Go to the knowledge base and blogs. When you're getting ready for the NSE 8 exam, there are no dumb questions. Every time you encounter something you don't fully understand, research it. Investing time is required to do cybersecurity well. You will get out of it what you put into it. At the end of the day, a lot of that's driven by initiative. You've just got to take the initiative to get curious and try to figure stuff out as best you can, and then when the opportunity comes, hopefully you're prepared enough to perform well."



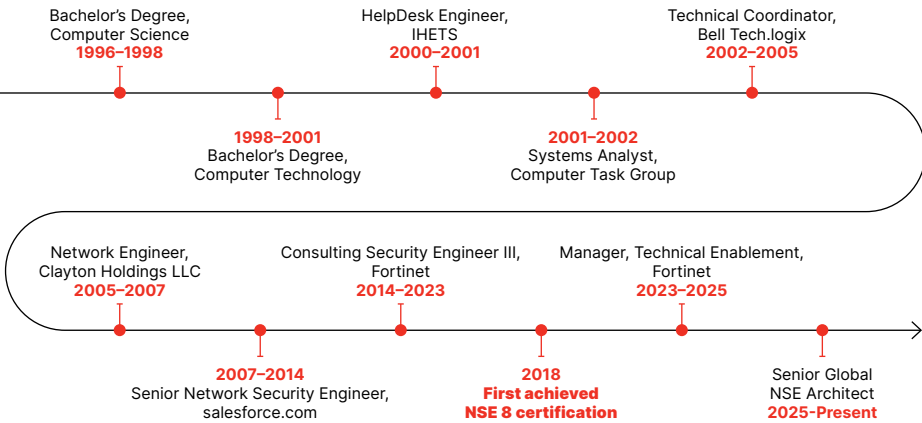
## Sean Toomey, NSE 8

Senior Global NSE Architect

### Operate with Empathy

“ I always try to put myself in our customers’ shoes. You must have technology empathy. As a leader, you must be able to empathize with the roles you see people performing, whether that’s a sales engineer, a person in a training course, or the customer. You understand their needs and then think of what skills they will need to succeed.”

Sean Toomey is a Senior Global NSE Architect at Fortinet and received his NSE 8 certification in 2018. He has worked in cybersecurity for more than two decades and this experience has provided him with a unique perspective on how to succeed in the industry. Namely, he believes that trust in and empathy for customers and colleagues are fundamental in cybersecurity.



## University training is a snapshot in time

Sean graduated with a bachelor's degree in computer science from Purdue University in 1998 and achieved a second bachelor's degree in computer technology in 2001. However, he believes the education he's received from certification programs has been just as important, if not more so, than his university education. He holds more than 10 industry certifications in addition to his NSE 8 certification.

"University training is a snapshot in time that quickly becomes obsolete," he says. "I look at certifications as a minimum bar. It's not just me saying that I'm an expert in these technologies. I've taken the test to prove it, and that means something to a lot of people. It's being able to prove that you know what you know. Plus, it's a way to continually evolve and sharpen your skills. If you don't challenge yourself, you will stagnate, and this environment changes too fast to tolerate stagnation."

## Empathize with the customer

Sean found he had a knack for cybersecurity, and it resonated with him. "I understand the needs, I understand the business drivers behind it, and I understand the technical knowledge necessary to configure these products following best practices," he explains. "But nothing makes up for experience. Hands-on experience is the foundation of all else. If you're protecting a network, you have to know what a network is and how it works."

The ability to understand what customers want is something that he's honed throughout his career. "I always try to put myself in our customers' shoes," he says. "You must have technology empathy. As a leader, you must be able to empathize with the roles you see people performing, whether that's a sales engineer, a person in a training course, or the customer. You understand their needs and then think of what skills they need to succeed."

## Demonstrating value

Sean has experienced firsthand the benefits of being an NSE 8. For him, NSE 8 certification is proof of his expertise. "Doing my NSE 8 certification, I proved to myself that I'm an expert. Now, I want to get as many people certified as possible because it demonstrates the value of our organization. I was able to do it because I took the initiative. It helps me and my team to demonstrate our value to the rest of the company and our customers."

He uses his NSE 8 status to produce better outcomes for his colleagues and their clients. "I can lean on the experience I gained from that certification to give better advice, generate better designs, and empower others to do the same. I want them to do things the right way

to guarantee their success. It lends credence to what you're saying because you've positioned yourself as an expert and you have this proof in hand. With clients, they understand that you're coming from a place where you really understand the nuts and bolts of what is necessary to make a solution successful. They trust you more as a result."

## Building trust

Ultimately, because so much of cybersecurity is predicated on trust, the NSE 8 certification helps Sean excel at his job. "We're really in the business of solving problems," he says. "We're there to make somebody's life easier. That's why we do what we do."

It's this combination of expertise and empathy which means customers can have full trust in Sean and Fortinet. "Most companies look at network security as an insurance policy," he says. "They want to see that return on investment. Expertise is important because if you deploy the wrong product or configure it the wrong way, the client is not going to get the return on investment they're looking for. Expertise allows you to know what's a good idea and what's not. This expertise helps you map out a solution for their particular situation. For me, expertise allows professionals to do the deployment right the first time, and that builds the trust that is so vital to these relationships."

## Meet sophisticated threats with specialized expertise

Sean advocates for cybersecurity professionals to engage in specialized training. "Today, the threats are so sophisticated that we have to respond with technology that's equally sophisticated. That requires a lot more specialized expertise than it used to, and it requires that you deploy something in an optimal way. It's not enough to have a FortiGate device. You have to configure it properly or else you're not going to get the level of protection you need and expect from that solution."

The need for specialized expertise becomes even more apparent when organizations are dealing with the challenge of scale. "I worked with a financial client that had 20,000 firewalls. With that kind of scale comes complexity and other challenges. You need an NSE 8-level of expertise in order to design that size of network appropriately. It has to be able to get off the ground and fly. If it falls straight to earth, then you've potentially

cost the company a lot of revenue. Too often, I see companies rely on someone without the proper expertise. Their solutions may work when the business has 10 or 20 firewalls, but it will fall apart once they scale to 1,000 or 10,000.”

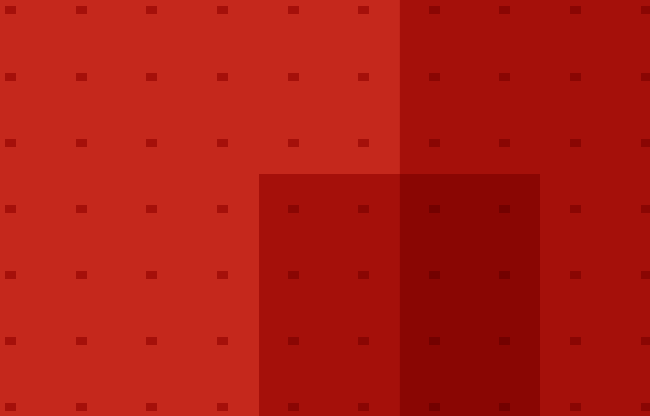
## The Power of Hands-On Experience and Collaboration

When it comes to professionals looking to advance in cybersecurity or pursue an NSE 8 certification themselves, Sean recommends they start by doing the work but also collaborate with other people. “You have to talk to other people who have deployed the products to get an understanding of where the challenges are for them and why they do what they do. It becomes a human thing. You have to connect with the people around you in your network who do those things and try to gain a good understanding, so you have that working knowledge. And in learning the products, there’s a lot of collaboration between you and other people who have achieved the certification. So, my best advice is to get as much experience as you can working with different products and technologies. That way you gain insight into how our work fits within the larger picture.”



CHAPTER 4

# The Fortinet Training Institute



# The Fortinet Training Institute

The Fortinet Training Institute is committed to developing experts in the field of cybersecurity through its training and certification programs for customers, partners, and employees, as well as many academic and education outreach partnership programs around the world. Supported by the strong Fortinet network, the Training Institute has issued over 1.8 million certifications as of the end of December 2025. The Fortinet Training Institute ecosystem of public and private partnerships helps Fortinet further address the skills gap by increasing the access and reach of its cybersecurity certifications and training.

Fortinet also works with global leaders, like the World Economic Forum, as part of its effort to drive change on the most pressing cybersecurity issues. Its partnerships extend to industry, academia, government, and nonprofit organizations, in an effort to reach more people and help close the cybersecurity skills gap.



Learn more about the  
Fortinet Training Institute at  
[fortinet.com/training](https://fortinet.com/training)

# Fortinet Training Institute Footprint



# The Fortinet NSE Certification Program

The Fortinet NSE Certification program has been carefully crafted and researched for over a decade to address the rapidly evolving threat landscape as well as job market needs. Our primary objective is to satisfy both current and future requirements, ensuring that the certification program remains at the forefront of network security expertise.

The certification program includes a wide range of self-paced and instructor-led courses, as well as practical, hands-on exercises that demonstrate mastery of complex cybersecurity concepts. Each certification level validates specific competencies, from foundational knowledge to expert-level.



Learn more about the  
NSE Certification Program at  
[fortinet.com/training-certification](https://fortinet.com/training-certification)



[www.fortinet.com](http://www.fortinet.com)

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