



NEWSLETTER

MIC NEWS

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FLOWING FORWARD: BUILDING THE FUTURE OF CYBERSECURITY TOGETHER



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Hello MiC Community,

I hope each of you are settling into 2026 with purpose!

As I look forward and plan for our ecosystem for 2026, I am once again reminded of one of my favorite quotes from Steve Jobs – “You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards.”

Since I founded MiC in 2019, I have been following my intuition, even when the path was unclear or filled with roadblocks and obstacles. I think since then I have been operating in a flow mental state. The “machines” define a flow mental state as “an optimal state of consciousness where you're completely absorbed and energized by an activity, leading to deep focus, enjoyment, and peak performance, characterized by the merging of action and awareness, a distorted sense of time, and a loss of self-consciousness, often occurring when a challenging task perfectly balances your skills”.

Key characteristics of Flow:

- Intense Focus: Complete absorption in the present moment, blocking out distractions.
- Effortless Action: Actions and decisions feel spontaneous and seamless.
- Loss of Self-Consciousness: The ego fades, and worries about judgment disappear.
- Altered Time Perception: Time seems to speed up or slow down.
- Sense of Control: Feeling capable and in command of the situation.
- Intrinsic Reward: The activity is enjoyable for its own sake.



This EXACTLY describes why, since 2019, I have created three (3) companies with one vision—train, develop, place, and support cybersecurity talent through technical education, leadership development, and a strong professional community.



In 2026, we will pilot in multiple locations the MNC-CTC Cybersecurity Workforce Hub. The Hub (as we will affectionately refer to it) is an integrated model designed to align community, education, and workforce pathways across the cybersecurity career lifecycle.

The Hub brings together our three purpose-built organizations to better support cybersecurity career pathways in our global community.

- MiC – Leadership development and a global professional community
- MiC Talent Solutions – Apprenticeships, workforce engagement, recruitment, placement, and professional services
- Mary N. Chaney Cybersecurity Training Center (MNC-CTC) – NICE Framework-aligned cybersecurity education through the Cybersecurity Residency Program (license pending)

Our theme for the 2026 MiC Annual Conference is "Be The Change, By Changing Yourself". For me personally this means to think more broadly about how to effectuate change in the global cybersecurity community we serve.

I am grateful for how far we've come and inspired by all that lies ahead. Every connection, every conversation, and every moment of success within the MiC Community continues to keep me motivated because this work matters. We are not just building careers; we are creating pathways, opportunities, and impact that will survive long after we are gone.

Let's continue moving in flow — with purpose, with focus, and with each other! See you in March!



SYSTEMS OVER SUPERHEROES

BY ALEJANDRO IBANEZ

Hello MIC Community and Newsletter!

I am so proud of the MIC community and absolutely thrilled to talk to each and every one of you via your email. I'm your new host for the "Aspirers" program, now aptly renamed "Leading with a Capital A." (I know my ego could not possibly fit anymore but I didn't name it) I am absolutely delighted and honored to spend the entire year with all of you! I am treating this as an artist-in-residence arrangement in order not to break my NDA with Mary ... MiC.

This year, I'm excited to kick off the 2026 newsletter, introduce you to my cyber friends, family and colleagues from around the world. Meet and connect with all the Aspirers in the MIC community. To the graduates, elders, and support members of the group: I'll be reaching out, but please feel free to beat me to it if you'd like to join any session. Let's "chop it up" like it's a real, honest conversation, perhaps like the Red Table Talk (the kids will get that reference).

Alright, enough stalling. Here's the piece I wrote while Ralph was Slacking me to submit it to Mailchimp. Yes, I'm talking about myself in third person. No, I will not be taking questions. I am diving into something we've all felt but don't talk about enough: burnout, and how to actually build a life that doesn't run you into the ground. Take it away!

I was posed the question earlier this year: how could we help fight burn out for us? After a long talk. Maybe burnout isn't a sign of a failure, but rather a reminder that I need to cultivate more robust personal systems to support my well-being and career.

Let's dive right into a topic that should resonate deeply with many of us: how to build a career with professional longevity in the high-stakes, high-stress world of cybersecurity, crucially, without burning out or experiencing severe mental strain.

For those of you who've read my newsletters before, you know the drill. My style is less "stuffy academic journal" and more "chat over coffee." So I encourage

you to set aside any expectations of overly formal or corporate jargon. We're going to tackle this serious subject with an approachable, no-nonsense, and decidedly informal tone. We'll be exploring actionable strategies, from attempting the art of the 'disconnect' to adopting mental frameworks that turn pressure into manageable feelings. This isn't just about surviving; it's about thriving in a sector that demands constant vigilance, but which shouldn't demand your complete destruction to get there.

I probably shouldn't share my Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) secrets, but on a typical Saturday in Seattle, you can usually find me chilling and thinking things over with a London Fog while in the fog. Early in my career, it took me a long time to realize that just relying on my own habits, willpower (or lack of), pettiness, and discipline





wasn't enough without solid support systems. It hit me on the flight back from a conference: stop trying to rely on random motivation and focus on building a system instead.

For those that need a refresher on my lifestyle, I often recommend establishing three core systems and cultivating two improved habits, recognizing your role in this process because you are the one.

Here's the idea: It's all about making sure your systems keep running, even when your motivation dips. I'm trying to rely less on just making impulsive decisions, move criticals to when you have the energy to respond.

You should run your personal and professional life with the smart strategy of a big company, but without all the typical corporate downsides... Looking at you GRC, If we can do a SOC II why can't you SOC it to your goals.

First thing First- Preflight check list.

- Have you actually set up your annual and monthly goals? What do you really want to achieve this year? If you keep missing your targets, it's going to lead to some serious burnout and feeling completely lost.
- Give yourself permission to stray from the standard path. What makes you stand out from everyone else in our field?
- Picture the end of the year: What achievements would you seriously regret not going after?
- Block out just an hour or two for proactive planning. If you don't dedicate time to plan, you're going to spend the next couple of years just reacting to things. Living passively isn't bad, but it won't help you become that "game-changer" you want to be. And for those who know me I am in it for the long game.

So at this point you might be thinking "wow Alejandro why aren't you a CISO yet, or how do you do it?" well my dear reader, It's all about the journey but here's the secret that fuels me when it's not just a quadshot espresso or my matcha by evening.

I focus on one main annual goal, backed by three categories that support it. For instance, if you're aiming for a Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) role, you'd need to focus on Health (Mental and Physical), learning/skills(managerial, technological and social), and financial health (I say this because treat yourself sometimes shows up as a therapy session, other times as a bottega bag, up to you).

If you're struggling to define your goal, find someone whose job you admire and try to create your own "remix" of it. Look, I'll be honest, early in my career, a lot of my motivation came from a very specific energy: watching someone do something poorly and thinking, "I could do that better." Instead of letting that frustration fester, I turned it into a system. This built my early career and pushed me to build better compliance frameworks.

P – Pinpoint the problem. What's broken, inefficient, or just plain bad?

E – Envision your version. How would you actually do it better? Put up or leave

T – Test your theory. Build it, try it, run it. Prove it's not just talk.

T – Track your results. Document what worked, what didn't, and why.

Y – Yap about it, Share what you learned. Write it up. Teach someone. Make sure you build a legacy.

Pettiness gets a bad reputation, but channeled correctly? It's just competitive energy with a chip on its shoulder. The key is you have to actually prove you can do it better, and not just complain about it in Slack. It moves you from your comfort zone and to uncomfortable then to trying new things.

Here's how the PETTY Framework played out for me. For those that didn't know, I used to be an event planner before switching to tech. And let me tell you, there are folks on my old planning roster I'd trust to run a SOC more than some of the security leaders I've encountered. Event planners manage chaos, coordinate dozens of moving pieces, and make real-time decisions under pressure. Sound familiar? All shade, no tea, because with the year we've had in cyber, there are some programs that could use more than just an adjustment to their SOC II controls.

When I made the jump, I used the PETTY Framework at every stage. I looked at helpdesks and said,



"I can implement that better." Then infrastructure deployments. Then eventually, full security programs. Each step started with that same energy: "I see what you're doing, and I can do it better." Then I proved it.

That's my journey. Yours will look different, but the framework still applies.

After the MIC Program, I now use systems that support more of a multiyear goal that I check in on and ask how I am building myself to be a better person, security professional, and boyfriend. I turned to microsystems to support the wild calls from work, day to day life. I took time to analyze that I suck a decision fatigue, especially after a day of pager duty pings, and text messages. Thinking critically takes a lot of mental power and can cause decision fatigue. It's smart to save that energy for when you're at your best, for me, that's usually Sunday or Saturday. That dedicated time is when I set the week's priorities, pull together my data from all aspects (like weight, skin, and water intake), and check in on my goals, including learning objectives and annual roadmap progress. This allows me through the week to just refer back to Sunday and be like oh we are up two pounds this week, so we scheduled an extra HITT class or Boxing this week to burn the cals but also meal prep'd low cal for the week. Using Sunday to prepare for the week ended up truly allowing to disconnect and not worry when sitting on the sofa after a long day because I knew that past Alejandro got it, or if I had forgotten to study for X project on work time, I know I have a study time scheduled in the week to get to it, so I avoided the guilt of while watching television or reading my favorite books to move myself to another task.

Let's talk about The Check-In: Use a framework that works for you and review these goals at least once a week. The aim is for your daily life to run on efficient, automated processes, but you must do a deep-dive review on your designated critical day. As the kids say these days, "Prepare yourself," because you're about to do some serious self-reflection. Below is the personal framework I use for my check-ins. Most of these categories won't change every week, but I review them monthly. You might need a different check-in frequency.

- Mood/Emotional state:
- Physical health:
- Money/Financials:
- Learning/Education:
- Spiritual wellness:
- Travel goals:
- Mental clarity:

Remember what I said at the start? Burnout isn't a failure, it's a reminder. A reminder that you need systems, not just willpower. That you need boundaries, not just ambition. This industry will take everything you give it and ask for more. So stop giving it everything. Give it your best hours, your sharpest thinking, and your most strategic effort. Then log off and trust that past—you already handled the rest.

The point isn't to just stare at these categories and feel good about writing something down. The point is to spot the pattern before it becomes a problem. If your mood has dipped three weeks in a row, that's data. If you haven't hit a single learning goal this month, that's data. If your physical health keeps getting bumped for "urgent" work stuff, that's a giant red flag waving at you. When something's slipping, don't beat yourself up...adjust. Move a priority. Cancel something. Ask for help. The check in gives you permission to course correct before you're already in crisis mode.

That's the whole game, small adjustments weekly so you're not making desperate changes quarterly. Here's the thing. Every new level in life is going to demand a different version of you. Whether career progression, personal progression, or even skill progression, this system allows you to make micro adjustments to build for the new you.

So here's your homework, block for one hour this week. Just one. Set your annual goal. Pick your three supporting categories. Schedule your weekly check in. That's it. You're not overhauling your life overnight. You are laying the first brick. The system builds itself from there. 2026 can be the best year of your life, but you have to lay the first brick. This field needs you around for the long game. Now go take care of yourself.

See you in the fog.

Alejandro Ibanez
Future CISO (manifesting)
The EX- Petty Professional



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