Behind the Keys:
Women Who Secure the Future

(In)Securities Special Edition: Day 5 Featuring:

Roxanne Pashaei

Celebrating International Women in Tech Day

Roxanne Pashaei

Director - Cyber Security Operations

Roxanne Pashaei is a recognised leader in the field of cybersecurity, with over a decade of experience in securing networks and cloud environments.

Specialising in cloud security, she has spent the past five years at the forefront of designing and scaling secure solutions for public cloud environments.

Beyond technical achievements, Roxanne is also a strong advocate for diversity within the cybersecurity industry. Recognised as a diversity game changer, she is committed to driving positive change and fostering a more inclusive environment in a traditionally male-dominated field.

With a passion for solving complex cybersecurity challenges, Roxanne continues to lead efforts that not only protect organisations but also empower the next generation of cybersecurity professionals.

1. What inspired you to pursue a career in technology/cybersecurity, and how did you get started?

My journey into cybersecurity began through technology—I started in network engineering, focusing early on DNS and BGP security. Back then, we didn't call it "cybersecurity" in the way we do now, but we were already dealing with the building blocks of today's threat landscape.

Seeing the fragility of internet infrastructure and how easily misconfigurations or malicious actors could disrupt entire services left a strong impression on me. The shift towards cybersecurity happened naturally as I started responding to real cyber events as early as 2008. From that point on, I couldn't ignore the scale of the risks—or the opportunity to make a meaningful impact.

2. Can you describe a defining moment in your cybersecurity career that made you realise this was the right path for you?

There wasn't a single moment, but rather a growing realisation during multiple high-pressure cyber incidents over the years.

I remember supporting a major DDoS attack where infrastructure was under siege. There was an urgent need not just to fix things technically but to help people understand what was happening and make critical decisions under pressure.

That experience taught me that cybersecurity isn't just about responding to threats —**it's about bringing clarity during chaos, enabling business continuity, and protecting trust.** At that moment, I knew this was more than just a job—it was a responsibility I cared deeply about.
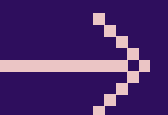
3. Can you share some of the key challenges you faced as a woman in this field, and how you overcame them?

One of the biggest challenges has been walking into rooms where I was underestimated before I even spoke. Early on, I often felt I had to over-prepare, over-deliver, and stay silent when I wanted to challenge ideas.

What changed was learning to be firm without being apologetic. I also found allies—both women and men—who believed in what I was trying to achieve and helped amplify my voice.

4. Who has been your biggest influence or mentor throughout your career, and what specific lessons or turning points have you experienced because of them?

There isn't just one person—I've had many mentors who challenged me to think bigger. One, in particular, taught me the power of resilience—not just surviving tough environments but learning to grow through them.

I also learned **the importance of letting go of the need to fit into a system and instead focusing on changing it when it no longer served its purpose.**
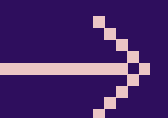
5. What are the biggest challenges women face in the technology/cybersecurity industry today? Can you share specific examples from your own experiences?

One of the biggest challenges is perception. Even as more women enter the field, outdated ideas about how women behave or respond at work persist.

While I've been fortunate to work with many supportive and respectful male colleagues, I've also faced moments that reminded me how deeply ingrained some biases still are. I once had a senior leader tell me, "Women tend to get teary at work," as if emotional expression was a weakness or something uniquely female.

It's not always about blatant exclusion—often, it's the subtle assumptions about capability, leadership style, or resilience. **These perceptions influence how women are evaluated, promoted, or invited into decision-making spaces**. What helps is having strong support networks and inclusive leaders who recognise and challenge these biases rather than reinforce them.

6. How has the industry evolved for women since you started your career? Have you noticed any significant shifts, and can you share a personal story that illustrates these changes?

There's been a noticeable shift in awareness. One powerful moment for me was creating internal forums for people passionate about security. At first, it was small, but over time, it became a space where many women found their footing, built confidence, and even started speaking externally. That kind of empowerment wasn't as common a decade ago.

7. What role do diversity and inclusion play in fostering innovation in tech/ cybersecurity? Can you share a personal example or case study where diversity directly led to innovation within your team or project?

Innovation in cybersecurity thrives on diverse ways of thinking and working. It's not just about where people come from but how they approach problems, make decisions, and collaborate.

I've seen firsthand how teams made up of individuals with different working styles—some more structured, others more experimental—uncovered risks that a uniform team might have missed.

For example, on one project, someone who tended to question "why" at every step uncovered an unusual phishing tactic that others had overlooked.

It wasn't about their background—it was about their thinking style. Inclusion means creating space for different approaches, not expecting everyone to conform to one. **That's where innovation happens—at the intersections of perspective, process, and mindset.**

8. What are the most exciting trends or developments in the industry right now that you're passionate about?

What excites me most is the growing recognition that cybersecurity isn't just an organisational concern—it's a national one.

We're finally seeing conversations shift from compliance checklists and business risk appetites to questions about critical infrastructure, sovereignty, and public trust. Bridging that mindset gap—between protecting company assets and protecting societal systems—is where I believe the most important progress will happen.

We're at a point where cybersecurity is being seen less as a technical function and more as a strategic pillar of national security—and that's exactly where it belongs.

9. What advice would you give to young women considering a career in technology or cybersecurity?

If you have the passion—or even just the curiosity—take the first step. You don't need to know everything, and you don't have to wait for permission. Show genuine interest, ask questions, explore, learn, and lean in.

In my experience, when women show they're committed, there are many of us in the community who will step up to support them. And I absolutely do that when I see someone ready to grow.

That said, the community can only help if you're willing to take those first (and sometimes second) steps. That's how it worked for me—I put myself out there, and others met me halfway. You belong here. Your way of thinking, your questions, your style—it all adds value. Start with that.
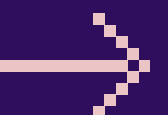
10. Can you share examples of initiatives or programs that have made a real difference in promoting women in our field?

There are many more initiatives now than when I started, and some are doing an incredible job. But what we need more of now is professional sponsorship—not just support or mentoring, but people actively advocating for women to be in the room, be on the panel, lead the project, or take that next big role.

11. If you could envision the ideal future for women in cybersecurity, what would it look like? What key changes would have been made?

In the ideal future, we don't talk about "women in cyber"—we talk about leaders, innovators, and changemakers without needing to qualify it. **Representation isn't a milestone; it's a norm.**

There are no barriers, no assumptions, no hesitation when a woman—or, for that matter, anyone—speaks. Just respect, contribution, and shared purpose. A future where we measure people by the value they bring—not by the labels they carry.