



# WINNER

## Digital BootCamp Learner of the Year 2022

Zaira Martinez Delgado



### A bit about Zaira...

As a former digital boot camp student, Zaira Martinez Delgado specialises in cyber security and now works as a Success Coach with Firebrand Training, her previous training provider, supporting and guiding students.

### Congratulations on winning the award for Digital Bootcamp Learner of the Year 2022. How did you feel when you heard your name called out?

Honestly? I didn't believe it! But my colleagues came with me to the event and were cheering so loudly that I thought it must be true. Even when I had the email the previous week to say I was a finalist and had been invited to attend the award ceremony, I thought it must be a scam and didn't open it for a couple of days – I've obviously worked in cyber security too long!

### What has been your career journey to get where you are today?

I was a primary school teacher. But I've always been interested in IT even as a child and I have family members that work in the industry and my partner is a software developer. I decided to learn more and was particularly drawn to cyber security, I made the decision to change to supply teaching so that I had more time to study and develop my skills in IT.

Looking at various learning opportunities, I eventually embarked on the Digital BootCamp course and once I'd qualified, I became a Success Coach. Having been through the process myself, I'm now able to use this experience to help and support other students who are going through exactly the same process.

### Tell us why you choose to do a digital bootcamp course?

I was researching and doing self study with the Open University but I didn't really want to do another degree – it's a long term and expensive commitment. I then found out about the government funded digital boot camp qualification and it seemed to be the perfect combination of acquiring new skills, learning through actually doing and still being able to work if needed.

### What's been your biggest challenge to get where you are today?

For me, the time constraints were quite hard. I was working full time and studying. Learning new concepts



is hard! It took a lot of hours to understand these new concepts. I had an excellent mentor though at my training provider and her help was invaluable. But do not underestimate the time it takes – there is an awful lot of work to do. But if you do something you feel passionate about and you are learning something you find interesting, the commitment will totally be worth it.

## Can you talk us through a typical day for you as a Success Coach?

IT is a fast moving and constantly changing industry so I allocate time at the beginning and end of every day to check news feeds and understand what's happening in the cyber security arena. It's important that you always keep learning too so I also allocate time for self study.

I then check through emails and see what questions/ support/updates there are from my team. We're all working remotely so this gives us all a chance to communicate and catch up with any issues that have arisen.

Each day, I'm responsible for delivering sessions to my students – whether that's giving guidance about exams, reviewing and providing feedback on any technical concepts, advising how to research potential employers – this is where my knowledge and experience in cyber security is very useful. I help the students organise their time, ensure they're meeting their commitments and provide support so that they're not feeling overwhelmed with their studies. This session can last a couple of hours.

In the afternoon, they'll be another session which might cover things like how to break into the industry, advice on CVs, covering letters, LinkedIn profiles, interview techniques etc and I help them to identify and highlight their transferable skills. They may have limited experience in the field they want to go into but their skills in other areas can be really useful, such as communications, research, creativity etc.

I'll get them to do an activity such as a SWOT analysis to help them identify areas that they can promote to potential employers or skills that need developing. I'll finish the day with a team update and respond to any queries that have come up through the day.

## What's your favourite part of the role?

I'm very sociable so I love all the interactions with the students and my colleagues. The opportunity to inspire and encourage others to achieve their goals is something I am passionate about. I believe in there being the same opportunities for everyone so whatever field they've come from, whatever life challenges they've faced, I want my students to understand they can succeed and I am there to help them do so. Also, my team – I love working with

them! They've all been incredibly supportive throughout my professional development and I literally could not have succeeded without them. I'm a huge advocate for the Digital BootCamp and recommend it to everyone I know!

## What's the best piece of advice you've been given, and what would yours be to someone else considering a career in this field?

When I started my Digital BootCamp, my technical trainer told me to work hard or to leave. He was that blunt! He made it very clear it was going to be hard work and that I needed to commit the time and energy to complete my course. But he was totally right. You have to really want to do this otherwise you won't commit your time and energy. My advice though would be to stay curious. Always ask questions, keep learning and to not give up even if you fail at first, you will have learnt lessons during the process. That advice applies not only to your training but also as you continue in your IT career. It is important to keep learning, stay up to date with developments and keep moving forward.

## How has your training provider supported you during your apprenticeship?

My training provider, Firebrand were so supportive throughout and still are. Initially I was quite apprehensive about the route I was embarking on because I was taking my career in a new direction. But they helped me by putting together a plan to success, mapping out the steps it would take so that I didn't feel overwhelmed. And I had the best success coach! She not only helped support me through the course but also personally, making sure I was ok and this was just as important.

The values of the company were very aspirational and ones I totally felt aligned with. So much so, I joined the company. My experience with Firebrand right from the beginning has been life changing.

## How would you like your career to progress?

I am hungry to keep learning and am very focused on my professional development - I think I will be studying for the rest of my life! I love my role now, combining my technology expertise with my people skills. So more of the same I think – supporting others and passing all my exams!