



# Joseph Sullivan, J.D. '93, Guards Against Security Threats

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Joseph E. Sullivan, J.D. '93, is one of the good guys. For the past two decades, he's been fighting criminals, first as a federal prosecutor and then as a top security officer for eBay, PayPal, and Facebook. Now, he's taken on the massive challenge of guarding Uber—the fast-growing global transportation company—from digital and physical threats.

"I have taken a nontraditional path and wound up with the most amazing jobs I could imagine," said Sullivan, who was recently named Uber's first chief security officer. "Today's students should keep their eyes open for the many different types of opportunities that exist for graduates with a law degree."

Growing up in Massachusetts, Sullivan developed an interest in the law, politics, and government at an early age. After earning a bachelor's degree in political science at Providence College, he took the next step toward a career in law. "My dad was an artist and my mom was a writer, so I like to say that I rebelled by going to law school," he said with a smile. "I was accepted at the University of Miami and several New England schools and felt it was time for me to leave the Northeast."

As a Miami Law student, Sullivan excelled in the trial advocacy program, as well as his classes on international and criminal law. He spent a summer as an intern in the U.S. Department of Justice's Miami office, followed by a one-year DOJ clerkship after graduation. An early adopter of technology, he convinced his superiors that the office should have an Internet connection.

Even more importantly, Sullivan began dating a very special student he met in his first year at Miami Law. Soon after graduation, he married Suzanne R. Sullivan, B.S. '90, J.D. '93, who had been active in the *University of Miami Law Review* and moot court competition. She also taught Legal Research and Writing at the law school in 1994 after graduating.

When a work trip took them to San Francisco, they fell in love with the city and decided to move west. He worked for the DOJ and she in civil litigation. A few years later they packed up again, this time for Las Vegas, when Joe Sullivan was offered the opportunity to pursue his "dream job" as an Assistant United States Attorney. Suzanne Sullivan transitioned from private practice to working for the Nevada Attorney General's office overseeing real estate enforcement actions. The Sullivans moved back to the San Francisco Bay Area in 2000 when he became the first federal prosecutor in a U.S. Attorney's office dedicated to fighting high-tech crime on a full-time basis. "Silicon Valley was taking off, and cybercrime was right there as well," he said. Meanwhile, she represented cities in real estate, land use, and redevelopment matters for a regional law firm, until she stopped practicing in order to raise their family. Now, the Sullivans have three daughters, ages 8, 10, and 13.

## Focusing on technology crimes

After eight years with the DOJ, Sullivan left the public sector in 2002 to join eBay, where he split his time between legal and trust and safety roles. In the next six years, he handled a wide range of tasks, including developing user safety policies, overseeing investigations and working with law enforcement, building out a regulatory compliance team, and ultimately managing PayPal's North American legal team.

In 2008, Sullivan left for Facebook, initially joining in a legal role but quickly transitioning to overseeing the company's security team. During his tenure as chief security officer for Facebook, the service grew from just over 100 million active users to more than 1.4 billion active users, and the security team grew from ten people based in California to over 130 stationed around the world. As detailed in a 2012 *Forbes* article on "Facebook's Top Cop," Sullivan and his security team wrestled with some of today's biggest issues:

- Protecting the privacy of Facebook users from government surveillance in both democratic and authoritarian nations
- Developing new options for users seeking to safeguard their privacy

- Keeping users from uploading violent or nude images
- Helping law enforcement officers track down pedophiles and other sexual and financial criminals prowling Facebook in search of victims
- Preventing terrorists from using Facebook to communicate to advance their plots
- Guarding the company from viruses and denial-of-service attacks, such as the Russian “Koobface” gang who tried to “enslave” Facebook users’ computers

Sullivan and his team also reviewed new Facebook features before launch, monitored the site for programming errors, handled requests for user information, and assisted prosecutors in criminal and civil cases involving Facebook activity

In Sullivan’s years at Facebook, his security team moved quickly to help users facing dangerous situations. For example, a youth pastor in Indiana who created numerous fake accounts was reported to the FBI as a potential pedophile, and a Florida baby who had been abducted from its mother was recovered in 30 minutes after the suspect’s IP address and location were provided to police. “Every day, we tried to make the world a little safer,” said Sullivan. “I have been fortunate to work for companies that have appreciated my judgment and empowered me to have an impact on peoples’ lives.”

During this period, Sullivan also served on the board of the National Cyber Security Alliance, a non-profit public-private partnership focused on helping users stay safer and more secure online. He was also an executive committee member for several years for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, and became an advisory board member for Airbnb and a number of other Silicon Valley startup companies.

## A new security role

In April, Sullivan took on a new challenge, becoming the first chief security officer for Uber, one of the fastest-growing companies in history. “I wanted to go outside my comfort zone, tackle new issues, and build a new team from scratch,” he said. “Uber is already having a tremendous impact on cities around the world. Drivers can earn income while working flexible schedules, improving their standard of living. Uber also gives people the ability to access convenient shared transportation in a way that can change urban environments. Just think about the benefits we would enjoy if our cities had 20 percent fewer cars.”

At Uber, Sullivan is responsible for both real-world and digital security. “We need to make sure we have a good system in place for vetting potential drivers and for providing our passengers with safe experiences,” he said. “Because people trust us with sensitive financial information, we need strong technology controls as well.” In addition, Sullivan

and his team need to protect buildings, systems, and employee teams on the ground in more than 300 cities around the world.

Reflecting on his 22-year career, Sullivan said, "Government service, working for a law firm or being an in-house counsel can all be rewarding positions. But if you're not happy in one of those roles, it's time to move on. It's okay to have a law career that evolves over time, as long as you feel like you're building for the future. That's what I've done, and I've enjoyed every step along the way."

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