

SEAN WALLS

SVP & CISO

Bob's Discount Furniture



Headquarters: Manchester, CT

Employees: 5,950

Annual Revenue: \$2.4 Billion

PROFILES IN Confidence

For Sean Walls, career growth has rarely come from staying comfortable. Over the past several years, his journey has taken him from Pennsylvania to Texas and now Connecticut, across multiple leadership roles, through mergers and acquisitions, and ultimately to Bob's Discount Furniture, where he now serves as Senior Vice President, Chief Information Security Officer. Along the way, he has built security programs and helped organizations adapt during periods of significant change.

"If you're really serious about growing and developing, you're going to take opportunities that sometimes are risky and force you to move," Sean says. "I think if it's the right opportunity, then taking that risk makes sense."

That philosophy has shaped much of his career. Following his time at Visionworks (the last time Sean was featured in the Feats of Strength magazine), Sean moved into a larger leadership role, overseeing security across several business units while leading governance, risk, and compliance initiatives for the broader organization. Later, he joined Conn's HomePlus, where he helped oversee security through a major acquisition before the company ultimately faced financial challenges and filed Chapter 11.

Then, a former colleague connected him with the leadership team at Bob's Discount Furniture. Within days, Sean was interviewing with executives and by the end of the week, he had an offer in hand. Today, he leads security for this fast growing furniture retailer, helping guide the company through rapid expansion and an increasingly complex technology landscape.

SECURITY AS A BUSINESS FUNCTION

Sean joined Bob's shortly before the company's public offering, making it a pivotal moment for both the business and the security program.

As the company's first dedicated CISO, he was brought in to elevate security as a standalone executive function and help prepare the organization for its next stage of growth.

"This is the first official CISO role," Sean explains. His responsibilities extend well beyond traditional cybersecurity. In addition to information security, he oversees governance, risk management, compliance, privacy, business continuity, crisis management, and related operational functions.

For Sean, that broader scope creates a significant advantage. When security leaders understand compliance, resiliency, and risk as part of a larger business ecosystem, they are better positioned to influence decisions and drive meaningful change. He comments, "You can see the bigger picture, you understand the strategy, and you can affect change within your circles of influence."

That ability to connect security priorities to business objectives has become one of the defining themes of his leadership philosophy.

SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF THE BUSINESS

While many security leaders aspire to gain executive visibility, Sean believes influence is earned through communication, relationships, and trust.

"The first thing that you need to do when you arrive on your first day is develop relationships with key stakeholders within the organization," he says. For him, technical expertise alone is not enough. The most successful CISOs understand how to communicate risk in terms that resonate with business leaders.

"If it doesn't include conversations around dollars, profit, savings, and return on investment, then you're missing the mark completely," Sean explains. That perspective reflects how much the role has evolved over the past decade.

Security leaders are no longer viewed as gatekeepers whose primary responsibility is saying no. Instead, they are expected to help organizations move faster and pursue innovation while managing risk appropriately.

“We’re not here to say no,” Sean says. “We’re here to empower and strengthen the business.” He believes mature security programs can become competitive advantages, helping organizations operate more efficiently while maintaining the governance structures necessary to support growth.

NAVIGATING AN ERA OF SIMULTANEOUS CHANGE

One of the biggest challenges Sean sees today is not a single threat or technology, but the fact that, as he puts it, “everything is changing at the same time.” Organizations are navigating rapid business growth, expanding regulatory requirements, accelerating technology adoption, and an increasingly sophisticated threat landscape, often simultaneously.

For Bob’s, that includes managing the responsibilities that come with being a public company that continues to expand rapidly across the United States. And at the same time, AI is reshaping both sides of the security equation.

Sean sees enormous opportunities for organizations to leverage AI to improve efficiency and create competitive advantages. But he also recognizes that attackers now have access to increasingly powerful tools.

One development that has captured significant attention is the emergence of advanced AI systems capable of identifying vulnerabilities, creating exploits, and accelerating attacks. “The kill chain is about to be compressed significantly,” Sean says.

As a result, many long-standing assumptions about cybersecurity operations are being challenged. Organizations can no longer rely on traditional response timelines. Detection, investigation, and remediation must happen much faster than they did in the past.

“We’re not talking in one-month patch cycles anymore,” he explains. “We’re talking real-time patching.” That shift is forcing security leaders to rethink everything from vulnerability management to incident response.

AI GOVERNANCE AND THE FUTURE OF SECURITY

Like many of his peers, Sean spends a significant amount of time discussing AI governance. From his perspective, security leaders recognize that they are living through a transformational period that will reshape industries and organizations alike.

“The entire world is going to transform in the next five years in ways that will leave it almost unrecognizable,” he explains. And

the conversations he has with fellow CISOs reflect that reality.

As a member of several advisory boards, Sean regularly engages with security leaders across industries. While organizations may vary in maturity, he sees widespread awareness of the challenges and opportunities ahead. “This is all people are talking about right now,” he notes.

For security teams, the challenge is finding the right balance between enabling innovation and maintaining control. Organizations want to take advantage of AI’s potential, but they must do so in a way that protects data and manages emerging risks. That balance will likely define the next chapter of cybersecurity leadership.

BUILDING TEAMS THAT GROW

While technology continues to evolve, Sean believes leadership remains fundamentally about people.

He describes himself as a transformational leader who enjoys building programs and helping organizations mature. But he is equally passionate about developing the people around him. “I’ve always considered myself a builder and a fixer,” he comments.

Sean intentionally gives team members opportunities to get out of their comfort zones. Growth, in his view, comes from experience, challenges, and learning through real-world situations. “I like to encourage people to stretch themselves,” he says.

At the same time, he recognizes that every employee requires a different leadership approach. Some need autonomy while others need coaching and support as they develop new skills. His role is to understand those differences and invest accordingly. “As long as somebody’s willing to learn and to grow, I am willing to invest in them,” Sean says.

That philosophy mirrors his own career journey. From consulting and security leadership to mergers, acquisitions, and public company governance, Sean has consistently embraced opportunities to grow and adapt.

Today, as Bob’s Discount Furniture continues to expand, he remains focused on helping the organization navigate a rapidly changing landscape while ensuring security remains a catalyst for growth rather than a barrier to it.