

# THE POWER OF CERTIFICATION

If you're an employee, attaining certification will help you establish an edge. If you're an employer, offering it will help to attract plum hires

By Tony L. Callahan

**A** quick internet search of your chosen sector of home building will show that professional certification programs abound. Sales and marketing, construction, accounting, finance, information technology, and purchasing: Several certification programs exist for every functional area within a home building company.

Purchasing professionals, for example, can choose from programs such as Certified Professional in Supply Management (CPSM) from the Institute for Supply Management, or Certified Supply Chain Professional (CSCP) from APICS (formerly known as the American Production and Inventory Control Society). The benefits of certification include expanding knowledge within your chosen profession, connection to a network of other certified professionals, and distinguishing yourself from your peers.

## A DIFFERENTIATOR

For a business, professional certification helps ensure that there are qualified people in key roles. Certification provides employee development opportunities and improves competitive advantage through a better, more knowledgeable workforce.

**Knowledge.** The main reason to pursue certification is to attain knowledge, but do your homework before selecting a specific program; most will provide you with a list of the topics the program covers. Be sure the program you choose is relevant. Having letters after your name is meaningless unless you can deploy the acquired knowledge to perform your job better. If you have the choice between self-guided study and a classroom setting, know that taking a class with people from other industries or other companies within your industry



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offers upsides. There's the chance to learn from your peers—not just the instructor—and to hear how other companies and other industries approach the same challenges you do.

Most certifications require formal training or a significant amount of self-guided learning. With each study session, look for ways to apply what you've learned to your job. If you're not able to do that, the certification program isn't a good one.



**Networking.** Going through the certification process with like-minded professionals is a great way to build a network of capable people. Working on a special project and want to bounce some ideas off other professionals? Utilize your network of certified pros. They're free consultants: All you need to do is be willing to return the favor when they call you asking for advice.

## A WIN-WIN

Having a network of people outside your industry will give you an edge. Our industry has been a bit slow to embrace new technology, as well as business models such as Lean, Six Sigma, continuous improvement, concurrent engineering, finite scheduling, and rough-cut capacity planning. Other industries have a significant head start in these areas. Mine your network of professionals from outside home building to learn how others embraced new ideas. Learn from their mistakes.

**Continuing education.** Most certifications require continuing education in order to maintain certification. This helps keep you current and teaches new skills so you stay abreast of developments in your field—or you risk becoming obsolete.

Companies depend on their employees to retain a competitive advantage, and competition is getting tougher every day. Sometimes you just need a little nudge to enroll in that course. A continuing education requirement could provide the additional push you need to attend that seminar or take that online course you recently read about.

**Setting yourself apart.** Knowledge acquired from a good certification program will enable you to make significant improvements on the job, but it will be the results that set you apart, not the letters after your name. You're not done when you pass tests or meet experience requirements—your work has just begun. Now it's time to apply your knowledge, to work to ingrain it in your everyday thinking and to tackle problems differently from the way you previously did. Work to make your employer or your company better every day and people will notice.

**Benefitting your organization.** Getting qualified people to fill key roles is tough in the current market; there isn't enough skilled labor to go around. Companies must develop bench strength from their existing talent pool. What better way than enriching the knowledge of current employees? Create a culture of continuous learning and recognize those that engage in it and excel, and share their success at company functions.

Some organizations pay for employee certification, others don't. Regardless, invest in yourself. Maybe the edge you'll establish will be the tie-breaker in a promotion opportunity.

Knowing more is better: Never stop learning. Less than 5 percent of the workforce currently hold a certification, but the number will grow. Employees notice that expanding knowledge and networks are differentiators in today's dynamic marketplace. More and more companies are realizing they need to develop their workforce to remain competitive. Certification is one way to achieve that. **PB**

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