

Tips for Leveraging Your Credential

Are you making your certification work for you? By increasing the visibility and recognition of your certification, you can increase its value. Here are some tips for enhancing the value of your credential and leveraging greater benefits from your accomplishment.

- 1. If the provider of your certification has an employer notification process, take advantage of it.** Many certification programs have a process for notifying employers when their employees have become certified. Typically, all you need to do is complete an employer notification request form. Once the form is received, the certification provider will send your employer a letter announcing that you have been awarded a certification. Often the letter will describe the rigorous eligibility requirements you have met and the comprehensive assessment you passed.
- 2. Send a news release to your organization and association newsletters and local newspapers.** Some certification programs provide participants with a sample news release which can be used “as is” or modified, if desired. Submit the news release for publication in your organization’s newsletter and for publication in newsletters or magazines of any professional or trade group of which you are a member. Many communities have business newspapers and free local newspapers that publish announcements about professionals. Don’t forget to send a news release to these publications as well as the big name newspapers. To ensure your news release gets to the right source, find out who edits the newsletter or the section of the newspaper where such announcements are published and direct the news release to that person. This step will take only a few minutes of your time and it will greatly improve your odds of getting the information published.
- 3. Make sure that your personnel file includes information about your certification status.** Does your file contain an employer notification letter (see #1 above) or a copy of your certificate? Has your file been updated to include a confirmation that you have completed your recertification requirements? Ask your supervisor or human resources department to place this information in your personnel file. By doing so, you can make sure that your certification will be upfront and center whenever your file is reviewed.

- 4. Always use your credential after your name and spell out what the acronym stands for whenever possible.** Include your credential on business cards, e-mail signatures, letters, reports, presentations, articles, organizational/company directories, resumes, job applications, etc. Don't miss any of these opportunities to highlight your accomplishment and make your certified status more visible within your organization. And check to see if the provider of your certification has a certification logo that can be used to personalize your business cards and stationary.

Spelling out the acronym for your certification also is important. For people who don't know what the acronym stands for, the letters after your name are just that – letters. To enhance the value you receive from having the credential, include the full title of your certification under your name or in another prominent location on business cards, stationary, documents, publications, etc.

- 5. In e-mail signatures, include a brief description of the certification beneath your contact information or hyperlink the acronym to the certification program website page which describes the certification.** Providing additional information about the certification draws further attention to your accomplishment and helps to inform readers of what it means. For example, your e-mail signature could incorporate a statement such as, “The [*insert title of certification*] is an elite national credential awarded to individuals who have satisfied educational and professional experience requirements and passed a rigorous examination.” If you are using such a statement, it is advisable (and easiest) to describe the credential in the same manner that the certification provider does on its website and in its other promotional materials.
- 6. Explain to your current employer (or potential employer) the value-added of certification.** Connect the dots for employers so they will understand how *they* benefit from *your* certification. When employers recognize the value of the certification, your credential brings greater benefits to you. Here are some points to highlight:
 - The certification verifies that you have met education, work experience and other requirements. Be specific about how these requirements relate directly to your job and explain that this means you have the academic background and experience that experts have identified as being necessary for competent performance in your job role.

- The certification confirms, through a rigorous assessment process, that you have mastered the knowledge and/or skills required for your job role. Since you have the core knowledge/skills required for the role, you can hit the ground running when starting a new job. Your employer will not need to train you in the basics of the job role and instead, can focus training on what is unique about the particular organization in which you work (or will be working). It also is beneficial to point out the alignment between specific content areas/tasks covered on the assessment and the key responsibilities of your current position (or the one for which you are applying).
- The certification requires that you remain current in knowledge essential to the professional role by participating in continuing education, re-assessment, and/or other required activities. Participation in recertification or certification renewal provides your employer with some confidence that your knowledge/skill base continues to evolve as the field changes. Your knowledge is up to date and consistent with *today's* requirements for competent performance.

7. Cite your certification and its direct benefits to your employer when requesting a salary increase or seeking a promotion. Your certification is of value to your employer and makes you more valuable as an employee. Be prepared with some “talking points” about this when you make your request. Use some of the points in tip #6 above for this purpose.

8. During your performance appraisal, highlight the fact that you were recently awarded the certification or describe what you've done to maintain it. Point out specific links between these activities and your current position. Emphasize the alignment between specific content areas/tasks evaluated on the assessment and the key responsibilities of your current position. Or explain how your continuing education activities relate directly to your job. Whenever possible, give examples of how the knowledge you have acquired has directly benefited your employer (e.g., “Based on what I learned in the financial management course I took to fulfill my recertification requirements, I was able to identify ways to reduce the department budget by 10%).

- 9. Display your credential and be prepared with a 30-second “elevator speech” when people ask you what it is.** Hang your certificate in your office, being sure to place it in a location where people can walk up to it and read what it says. Wear your certification lapel pin to industry events and meetings in your organization, including meetings with your supervisor. If you wear a uniform, attach your certification patch and wear it daily. And be sure to have a brief explanation ready when people ask you about your certification. See tip #5 for an example of how you might respond to questions about your certification.

Regardless of whether you have just received your certification or have already been certified for several years, the tips outlined in this article will make your certification work for you and will help to ensure that you continue to benefit from your credential for many years to come.