

Certifications or a Degree? That's the Question!

Even before the pandemic, a transition counseling conversation would focus on education level. What degree did you have and what did you want to do with it. However, there were times that someone would come to me totally frustrated. He felt that he was not being considered for a job even with two master's degrees that were related to the job. The missing factor – a PMP certification. His military experience was loaded with project management. The missing ingredient was the cert. Why?

First, let's define why employers like certifications. These pieces of paper or the acronyms plastered by your name on a business card or a resume show that you have successfully completed an industry recognized course of study. The value of this course of study is a standardization of the elements of the topic that make knowledge, processes, terminology, and all of the other components of the subject. That expertise and the ability to communicate on the subject increase not only performance but ease of assimilation into the work group.

I will never diminish the value of a degree. Both my undergrad and Master of Human Resources degrees were leverages in career advancement. Through interaction with fellow HR, I discovered the value of certifications. I admit that I am a horrible test taker. I read too much into the multiple-choice questions and blew the exam. But – I finally passed and received the Senior Professional Human Resources (SPHR) certification from the Human Resources Certification Institute (www.hrci.org). This provided further credentials to the resume. When the Society of Human Resources (www.shrm.org) created its certification, I completed the process and was awarded the SHRM-SCP, senior certified professional. I now completed the continuing education to maintain the certifications. This keeps me up to date as I assist y'all in your transitions.

Employers are looking for these certifications. Now more than ever, certifications are valued due to the task specific skills and knowledge. Compare this to a broader knowledge from a degree where the course work may vary from the requirements of the certifications. Employers hire talent and skills to meet their job needs. Certifications provide an element of certainty during the hiring process.

So – the bottom line is to research the career that interests you. Explore the requirements and focus on what will make you most marketable. If there is a certification on the job description, don't overlook it. Don't bluff. Get that cert!