

How Will a CPLP® Certification Help Demonstrate Your Value?

In January I attended a Chicago Chapter ASTD (CCASTD) event. Surprisingly, half the people I met were in transition. With the projection by CareerJournal.com that 78,000 more employees will enter the field of training and development (T&D) by 2014, the competition will grow. More and more, workplace learning and performance (WLP) professionals are contemplating the option of pursuing the Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP®) credential, an ASTD certification. Given the current state of the economy, many in the profession will likely ponder the question: Will the CPLP® certification help me demonstrate my value to future employers or clients?

People have long used certifications across various industries to proclaim their expertise, enhance credibility and validate experience. It is a tool people often use to separate themselves in crowded professions. Whether or not a certification truly measures one's worth and credibility in a profession over practitioners who don't have it has long been debated and that debate will no doubt continue. The T&D industry intensified this debate for WLP professionals with the launch of ASTD's CPLP® certification in 2006.

Three plus years have passed since the first batch of CPLPs were anointed. We now have data to gain an initial perspective on the value of a CPLP® certification. Will the CPLP® letters behind your name open new doors of opportunity? Does it have the potential to help blaze pathways you couldn't have entered without the certification?

THE CREDENTIAL

Dr. Joy Thompson, from the University of St. Francis, defines the CPLP® certification as follows: **"The CPLP certification is the gold standard for adult learning professionals, and as the Program Director of the MS in Training and Development, I use the ASTD competency model as one of the benchmarks when revising or updating the program."** When asked to compare the credential to a Master's level program, Dr. Thompson states, "Clearly the differences between the certification and the master's are in the depth of the content. A certification tends to explain what to do and how to do it. A master's will also address the 'why' or theoretical basis, helping professionals to be more aware and adaptable in their practice."

I believe credentialing in any profession provides benefits to the industry and practicing practitioners. The CPA (Certified Public Accountant) credential is one of the most commonly known credentials. It has become the standard for assessing accountants and the accounting profession. ASTD is positioning the CPLP® certification as its flagship credential for the T&D profession. The CPLP® certification is grounded in the framework of ASTD's 2003 competency model based on nine areas of expertise (AOE). The certification has three parts - job experience, a knowledge exam of 150 questions and a practical application component. It typically takes nine to twelve months to complete the certification process. The certification is administered by the ASTD Certification Institute, an independent arm of ASTD.

MARKET VALUE

Currently, over 900 people globally have their CPLP® credential with that number growing each year. Jennifer Naughton of the ASTD Certification Institute noted over 600 CPLP® preferred listings on the ASTD Job Bank since 2006. **A recent search of the Job Bank revealed 10% of the current job listings have a 'CPLP Preferred' requirement.** A quick search of the job search engine, Monster.com, showed eight job listings among thousands for T&D positions while a local web search in the Chicagoland area found only three 'CPLP® Preferred' job listings and one 'CPLP® required' listing. Searches on other national job engines found a sprinkling of job listings noting 'CPLP® certification a plus', 'CPLP® strongly desired' and one site even listed a job with 'a Master's degree or CPLP® preferred'.

It is difficult to quote a market value for the CPLP® credential. Plenty of anecdotal stories do exist.

- Kris Schaeffer of Kris Schaeffer & Associates directly attributes four of her new consulting clients to attaining her CPLP® credential.
- Recently, a Department of Labor training manager in Chicago specifically sought a CPLP® trainer to facilitate a retreat.
- A hiring manager in Houston recently emailed me seeking candidates for an instructional design position requiring the CPLP® credential.
- Patricia Buckner, T&D graduate student at Roosevelt University, recently completed four job interviews and each desired a CPLP® certification for the position.
- Ellen Markey, Training Manager at APAC, has seen increasing demands for CPLPs in middle-to-upper management WLP positions.
- Others have contributed their certification to getting in-place promotions and finding new jobs.
- Some in transition have pursued the certification and have yet to secure a job. For them, the jury is still out on the market value of the certification. They do remain hopeful the credential will be the differentiator to aid them in their search and have seen evidence of this through getting interviews.

In addition, I interviewed several companies about the value they place on the CPLP® certification. One representative stated, "Having a CPLP® certification is not the deciding factor to hire an employee or contract with an independent consultant. Rather, relevant experience will always be the first criteria, followed closely by formal college degrees." Other firms echo similar criteria. From employers' perspectives in selecting a candidate, it appears the order of importance is experience first and then comes formal education - at least a bachelor's degree, followed by the certification. In my opinion, you need the first two to get to the table and then the certification can be used to separate yourself from the crowd.

PROFESSIONAL VALUE

A random sample of those currently holding the CPLP® certification cited a variety of reasons for pursuing it. John McDermott states, "I wanted to credentialize my experience (20+ years) and the CPLP® seemed the most appropriate." Rich Taylor states he uses his credential "as part of a story about [his] personal commitment to excellence." Others cite benefits ranging from professional growth, personal challenge, to job marketability and networking with likeminded professionals. Many are using this as a way to prove to themselves they can meet the high

standards while others are using it to round out their knowledge in the different areas within the training field.

On a larger scale, some see the credential as a way to give back to their profession, including elevating the worth of being in the training field. A recent survey done by the ASTD Certification Institute found that nearly 90% of CPLP® recipients report that the credential has assisted them in their professional development and in the job market. I believe most would agree the certification offers varied benefits to the WLP profession and practitioners in the industry.

CONCLUSION

So will the value of a CPLP® credential become the acceptable standard for training professionals like the CPA is for accounting professionals? Only time holds the answer to this question. As I conclude this article reflecting on the value of the CPLP, an old nursery rhyme my daughter and her friends often sang comes to mind - *First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage*. That is, gain relevant work experience, formal education, at least a bachelor's degree, and next obtain the CPLP® certification to cement your credentials. Like most things in life there are no guarantees and no one accomplishment will secure your future.

Each of us will make the CPLP® decision individually based on professional goals and market place demands. Some will seek the credential to increase the credibility of their training and consulting services. Some will use it to increase their personal stock value in an organization, position themselves for a promotion or to leap-frog back into the market place after a job loss. I firmly believe the CPLP® credential can be a differentiator to separate you from peers once you have gained the experience and earned the degrees. Personally, I have seen doors open for me that were triggered by my CPLP® credential. Prospective clients have contacted me upon learning through internet searches about my credential. The credential is allowing me to enhance my credibility and get noticed in a crowded field. Once at the table, I still need to seal the deal throughout the rest of the vetting process.

I firmly believe the CPLP® trend will continue gaining momentum, and its value will greatly increase within the boundaries of the T&D profession over the next decade. Some of us are early adopters and are actively pursuing the credential now while others are choosing to wait and see what the future brings. The decision is a personal one.

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