

How Certifications Build Capability, Credibility, and Career Mobility

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Career success today demands more than knowledge. Professionals are expected to demonstrate mastery, apply complex skills in real-world situations, and continuously evolve as their industries change. That's where certifications and credentials come in. They offer a way to validate capability, build confidence, and increase mobility across job roles, organizations, and even international borders.

More professionals are turning to certifications, specialty certificates, and microcredentials to advance their careers. Employers rely on these programs to benchmark talent and ensure their teams are prepared to lead through change. For many, certifications are not just a personal milestone; they're a strategic necessity.

I've experienced this firsthand.

When I earned my Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation from the American Society of Association Executives, I did so to advance my professional growth and strengthen my career. I prepared for the CAE exam through the full CAE prep course offered by MSAE, which provided structure, accountability, and a community of peers

who were all working toward the same goal. That preparation not only gave me the knowledge I needed but also reminded me of the value of learning in a structured environment alongside others.

At the same time, I held a leadership role at the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA), where I worked to expand the Certified Management Accountant® (CMA®) certification globally. The leadership at IMA supported my decision because they recognized how certification would benefit not only my own development but also the organization's ability to grow, lead, and serve members worldwide.

The timing was right. As IMA's global footprint grew, so did its portfolio of certifications. We started with the CMA, then added the Financial and Managerial Accounting Associate (FMAA) and the Certified in Strategy and Competitive Analysis (CSCA). Together, these certifications enabled us to meet the development needs of professionals and provide meaningful recognition across various regions and roles.

That experience deepened my belief that certification is one of the most powerful tools for growth. It supports individuals, strengthens organizations, and helps entire professions adapt and advance.

Today, I continue this work at Holmes Corporation, where I help associations and certification bodies build and deliver learning systems and development platforms that prepare professionals for success. I also volunteer with ASAE through the International Associations Advisory Council (IAAC), where I serve as Vice Chair, and support associations looking to expand their global impact.

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Why Certifications Matter

Certifications are more than a checkbox. They provide structure, standards, and recognition that help professionals grow with confidence and clarity.

1. Certifications build capability

High-quality certification programs are grounded in real-world application. They challenge candidates to think critically, solve problems, and demonstrate leadership. Whether you're preparing for a CMA, PMP®, SHRM-CP®, PCC®* or a specialty credential in strategy or software, you're not just gaining knowledge; you're building skills that matter.

2. Certifications offer recognizable validation

Not all employers will be fully aware of your degree or job history, but most understand the value of a certification. Even if they don't recognize the specific certification by name, being able to reference the body of knowledge or core competencies behind it helps communicate your expertise in a meaningful and credible way. Certifications provide a common professional language that can travel across industries and borders.

3. Certifications increase mobility

Certifications serve as a passport, enabling professionals to transition between careers, industries, or locations. Specialty certifications can help you break into a new focus area. Microcredentials can equip you with the tools to adapt to emerging challenges and trends. Together, they help professionals stay relevant and resilient.

4. Certifications support lifelong learning

Most certifications require ongoing education to maintain active status. This keeps professionals up to date in fast-changing industries. Microcredentials and specialty credentials enable professionals to delve into focused topics and expand their expertise without requiring a full-scale certification. These tools reinforce a culture of continuous improvement.

5. Certifications guide personal growth

Certifications offer a structured path forward. The process itself encourages self-reflection. It helps identify strengths and knowledge gaps and focuses development efforts. For professionals who may not always have access to formal mentors or training programs, certification provides a vital roadmap for advancement.

Looking Forward

Certifications aren't just titles; they're tools that guide action, signal credibility, and provide a foundation for lifelong achievement. My own CAE journey taught me this firsthand, helping me grow as a leader while bringing new insights to the organizations where I work and volunteer. I've also seen how using structured, official study programs and materials, such as the MSAE CAE Prep Course I completed, can increase the likelihood of passing by providing candidates with proven study methods and a strong support network.

At Holmes Corporation, we've made it our mission to partner with leading associations to create learning systems that deliver on this promise. We serve professionals across various sectors, including human resources, supply chain, payroll, infection prevention, project management, finance, coaching, and other rapidly evolving fields, designing programs that are accessible, flexible, and engaging.

Our goal extends beyond helping professionals pass tests. We are focused on creating results that matter to learners, employers, and entire professions.

*Registered trademarks of the Project Management Institute (PMI), Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and International Coaching Federation (ICF), respectively.

Want to learn more about credentialing or Holmes Corporation? Contact Jim at jimp@holmescorp.com.



Meet Jim

JIM PIECHOWSKI, CAE, is Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at Holmes Corporation. He has held senior roles at HOCK International, IMA, PTA, FFA, and Northwestern Mutual, specializing in international expansion, membership growth, and certification programs. Jim holds a Master's degree in Nonprofit Management from the University of Wisconsin and an Executive Scholar Certificate from Northwestern University. A passionate advocate for professional development, Jim drives strategic partnerships that create lasting, mission-driven impact worldwide.