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The week before his job interview at Medtronic, Chris Angerhofer tested out the route to the company’s facility in Mounds View, Minnesota. “I didn’t want to be late the day of the interview. I wanted to be sure of where I was going ahead of time.” It was a telling moment in Chris’ life. At 33, the new father previously felt he had lost his bearings. Not any more.

At 19, Chris had made the decision to take a job at a local repair shop right out of high school. A self-described “indifferent” student, Chris was a skilled, confident mechanic. He was certain that he could always find that kind of employment.

Things went reasonably well for about 10 years. In that time he found an even better job at a John Deere dealership, got married, became a father, and bought the couple’s dream home. Then, in 2006, the recession hit Minnesota hard. Chris lost his job. In the months that followed, he felt that his world had turned upside down.

“Losing my job was humiliating, but it got worse. Without a job, the bank raised the interest rate for our mortgage. My wife was still on maternity leave, so the bills piled up.” Chris looked for other jobs as a mechanic, and finally found work in a

neighborhood shop that repaired aerial lifts used in construction. His paycheck was 30% less than his previous salary, while his health insurance deductible skyrocketed. He continued to look for better paying jobs in construction, and then in related industries, but no one was hiring. For the first time in his life, having a job as a mechanic did not feel secure.

A new direction for Chris came from sources closer to home—his mother and sister. Both worked in Internet communications technology fields, and neither had ever been unemployed. They were not just examples, but mentors. “My mother and sister both encouraged me to go back to

school, complete my associate's degree, and study network administration." The move from mechanic to network administrator seemed reasonable to everyone, even Chris. "As a mechanic, I was used to troubleshooting problems, starting at the top level and working down to a component. I thought networking would be similar."

Hard work and hope overcome uncertainty. Chris can now say that for an adult seeking new training, going back to school is the best way to move forward. But at the time that Chris enrolled at Inver Hills Community College, it felt like an overwhelming challenge. "We had to add tuition to our bills, although we tried to look at it as an investment in our future. The hours were grueling. I had a full-time job, and I was going to class and studying nights and weekends. I thought that designing and troubleshooting networks would come easily to me. Instead, it was much harder than I thought."

But where school hadn't interested him as a teenager, Chris was now a determined, committed student. Keith Steller, his Cisco® Networking Academy® course instructor, provided badly needed support and encouragement. "Keith seemed to believe in me even when I didn't think I could do it."

After nine months studying the CCNA® (Cisco Certified Networking Associate) Discovery 1-4 courses, his Cisco instructors urged him to pursue his CCNA certification. Chris now realizes that this was one of the best recommendations he ever received.

"My Cisco instructor was right about the certification. I would not have gotten the interview for my current job without it. I would urge anyone considering a career in networking to continue and get your certification. I truly feel that without that, and my instructors motivating me, I would not be in this position. Don't wait for the perfect time or easy approach to change your life—just get started."

There were still hurdles to come. Chris failed the test twice, studying harder each time. The third time, with renewed determination to succeed, he passed the exam. In fact, Keith says that Chris was the first of his students to score 100% on each test in the network certification prep class. And in a class of 40 students, Chris was one of only eight who completed the course, and one of only four who passed the certification test.

Despite his considerable accomplishments in Networking Academy courses, Chris found that building a new career was still filled with uncertainty. He began to search for networking jobs while he was still in school and working full-time. The financial burdens had forced Chris and his wife to put their house on the market to avoid foreclosure. Work was slow at the repair shop, and Chris wondered if he would find a networking job before he lost yet another job as a mechanic.

Then came the call from Medtronic. The global medical device manufacturer operates 14 facilities in Minnesota, with more than 7000 employees. Their Cardiac Rhythm Management group is the largest of

Medtronic's five business organizations, and the company had recently opened a new facility in Mounds View. Chris approached the job interview as he had his school work—with fierce determination. He studied for the interview, and arrived 40 minutes early to continue studying in his truck.

One anxious week later, Chris received a call from Medtronic, offering him the job. The only thing that he turned down was the offer to take a few days to think about it—he said yes immediately.

"I love helping my clients around the world. I find it inspiring. When I was a mechanic, I was exhausted at the end of the day. Now I'm less grumpy and less physically tired when I come home. I have more energy to play with my daughter, and after we put her to bed, I have the option to dial in remotely and continue to work from home."

Today, Chris works as an associate network analyst in the Medtronic network operations center in Mounds View. He and his team manage a network that services over 13,800 Medtronic employees around the world. Even with a new career and a renewed sense of job security, Chris is not finished with his education. Still working full-time at Medtronic, he went on to take the CCNP® (Cisco Certified Networking Professional) course, and plans to take the exam to get his CCNP certification. Chris expects to transfer to Metropolitan State University, Saint Paul, Minnesota, and earn a B.S. in Computer Science. He may work toward other Cisco certifications as well. He has his bearings now.