

Going to the Next Level: Additional Certification versus Experience

Summary
<p>JARED HAINLINE, CCNP, CCNA WIRELESS Salt Lake City School District</p>
<p>INDUSTRY Education</p> <p>CHALLENGE Whether to pursue additional certifications or professional experience</p> <p>SOLUTION CCNA, CCNP, CCNA Wireless, and complementary experience</p>
<p>PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS: Promotion to LAN/WAN tech with a corresponding salary increase. Implementation of successful technology deployments.</p>

Which Path Should You Take?

Jared Hainline, Sr. Network Specialist at Salt Lake City School District, says, “When I have faced this question, and I have faced it many times, two main paths come to mind.” The first thing people usually think of is to earn another certification after their CCNA. Some may choose a CCNA concentration, such as CCNA Security, Wireless, or Voice. Others may choose the CCDA. There are also those who may choose the CCNP certification, the next level from the CCNA.

The second path is to gain experience. Once people get a CCNA, they want to use that knowledge before they forget the skills that they have learned.

He notes that a lot of people wonder which path they should take to get to that next level. Should they earn additional certifications or choose to gain experience? His question is, “Why not both?”

Certification Plus Experience Shows Benefits

Jared explains why he chose to pursue both paths. “When I first earned a CCNA, I was working as a desktop technician, taking care of desktop support at several buildings. Gaining a CCNA did not immediately get me a promotion or a raise. What it did do was show my employer my determination to be the best I could be and get to the next level. It allowed me to be a better desktop technician and to be able to troubleshoot desktop issues more accurately.” He notes that he no longer needed to pass a potential network problem to the LAN techs. Instead, he was able to diagnose LAN issues with much more detail and even recommend solutions. Although he was not a LAN tech and did not have access to the network gear, he was still able to use the knowledge learned from his CCNA. Applying that knowledge gave him very valuable experience as his understanding of IP routing and subnetting allowed him to help the LAN techs with their job.

The ability to do more paid off. “I got the promotion and raise I was hoping for by getting a CCNA. I officially became a LAN/WAN tech.” After a few years in that position, Jared decided it was again time to take his career to the next level. At the time, the CCNP certification required a routing test (BSCI), a switching test (BCMSN), a security test (ISCW), and a wireless/VoIP test (ONT). Because his job as a LAN/WAN tech already covered some of these technology areas, he decided to leverage his experience and pursue the CCNP certification.

But Jared learned a lot of new material too. “As I was studying for the BSCI, I learned a new concept about multicast technology. I took that new knowledge and applied it by deploying some multicasting configurations in the company network. It sure made a difference, and it made people happy.” He also explains that he gained a better understanding of AAA (Authentication Authorization Accounting) in the ISCW portion of his work, and deployed that in his company’s network as well. At the same time, he was working on an autonomous wireless network and notes that, “the ONT fit right in. Using the knowledge I learned equated to experience, and that experience helped me in passing my CCNP exams.”

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— Jared Hainline, Sr. Network Specialist at Salt Lake City School District

Moving Up to Wireless

After he obtained a CCNP, Jared noticed that wireless was starting to explode in his environment. His firm started a move from autonomous wireless APs to a Unified Wireless Network Solution (controller-based wireless). He was asked to make a big change in the wireless environment. It seemed only appropriate to pursue a CCNA Wireless certification. This time, the experience of deploying 18 buildings came first. He is convinced that experience really helped him pass the CCNA Wireless exam and some of the CCNP Wireless exams.

The Best of Both Worlds

After enjoying the benefits of both experience and certification, Jared explains how he sees them working together, “I have always been of the opinion that certification was never meant to stand alone. Certification alone does not get you hired or qualify you for a job. Experience alone may not get you an interview, even though you know the technology. Certification and experience combined will bring you success!” He recommends that, to take your career to the next level, you should apply what you learn, allow it to become experience, and let your experience take you to deeper learning.

In his case, it has worked. When he first got his CCNA, he had very little networking experience, but applied what he could. He says, “I could not consider myself a network professional because I lacked the experience. When I finally decided to get a CCNP, I had the experience, and that helped me along the way.” In his opinion, “People become professionals because of the experience they gain. Certification only helps add to that experience.”

Through the application of the things he has learned, Jared’s experience has grown to areas like security, design, and voice over IP (VoIP). These are all areas he plans to pursue a certification in. He expects these further certifications to help deepen his understanding and give him ideas to apply so he can gain more experience, and to take his career to the next level.

For More Information

To learn more about how Cisco certifications can prepare you for the next step in your career, visit www.cisco.com/go/nextlevel.

