

Cisco Certifications

Tobias Caldwell, a U.K.-based lead network engineer for clothing retailer Gap, has a favorite saying: “There’s no point in sitting on a thistle and moaning about how thorny it is. You’ve got to get up and do something about it.” Tobias has embraced this as a personal motto in his own life. He took a desire to learn networking, and used hard work and certification training to build it into a successful career.

When Tobias first arrived at Gap, he was responsible for configuring and deploying workgroups throughout the company’s new distribution center in Rugby, England. Two years later, an assignment building out Gap’s European network brought him out to San Jose to work with Cisco’s Technical Assistance Center (TAC). The interaction with Cisco made him eager to be a more serious player in networking. A colleague suggested a Cisco CCNA® certification as a way to get ahead.

Tobias used Cisco Press self-study material to train for the CCNA exam. While he admits that gaining the certification took him a while, it paid off with a bona fide network engineer role on Gap’s network infrastructure team. The confidence that came from certification was not just about having passed an exam. “It was one thing holding the piece of paper, but another to be able to *show* my applied knowledge as part of my new promotion,” says Tobias.

With his CCNA certification, Tobias was now in the position to guide Gap network engineering projects, not just support them. Not content to remain at this level, however, Tobias studied for and earned his Cisco CCNP® certification. During this period, he was able to troubleshoot and resolve network problems that used to require the services of an outside engineer. “My name became more well-known throughout the organization as someone who was a go-to person for networking,” he adds.

Gap continued to see his value and rewarded Tobias with his current lead network engineer position early in 2012. In this role, he helps to devise strategic solutions for Gap networking projects, such as redesigning the Gap’s European network. He has worked on projects to increase company data center capability as well as on product approaches for stores in China. On top of that, Tobias has passed his Cisco CCIE® written exam and is studying for the lab portion.

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Tobias Caldwell,
Lead Network Engineer, Gap, Inc.

Tobias knows that his strong work ethic was key to making progress in the industry, but acknowledges that studying for and earning certifications has had a big impact. “I do owe Cisco a lot because they’ve allowed me to carve out a career,” he adds. “What I like about the Cisco certifications paths is that you really learn to think about how they are relevant. It’s not just ‘this is a Cisco router, and this is how you configure it.’ It very much goes into ‘this is why it’s done this way.’”

While someone with his networking skill might be expected to move to an IT company like Cisco eventually, Tobias has other plans. He says that by continuing to advance at Gap, he has been able to become immersed in the company as a global business. It is not unusual for him to travel to fashion cities like Paris or Milan in connection with projects. Although he might once have been labeled a “geek” for his interest in the “nitty-gritties of what’s under the bonnet,” he says that “geek is cool now.”

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