

Benefits of Earning Payroll Certification Are Abundant



BY TONYA CALDWELL, CPP

Are you contemplating becoming certified as a payroll professional? Wondering what's in it for you? If you have thought about it at least once, you should do it! As the job market becomes more competitive, having the Fundamental Payroll Certification (FPC) or the Certified Payroll Professional (CPP) designation will definitely leave you with a feeling of accomplishment, allow you to demonstrate your expertise, open doors for advancement or better opportunities, and help distinguish you from the rest of the competition.

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How I Did It

I remember making the decision about eight years ago to get certified. I had just received my bachelor's degree in management, landed my first position as a payroll manager for a restaurant company, and was ready to take on the challenges of the ever-changing payroll world. My drive to be successful was at its peak. I joined the APA in January 2008 and set a goal to become certified by 2009. I wanted to increase my payroll knowledge and eventually become an expert in my field. I went to my boss at the time and discussed with her my personal development plan. She agreed that it was a great idea!

After reviewing the credentials and the eligibility requirements for both the FPC and CPP designations, I immediately aimed for the CPP certification because I knew I had enough experience and knowledge to pass the FPC, so why not the CPP? My confidence level was so elevated. I didn't

mention to my boss or anyone else on my team when I would take the CPP exam for fear of failing it and being embarrassed. I secretly ordered *The Payroll Source*[®] (spent my own money) and took off a few days at a time to study for the exam. My PTO days became my study days. I even went to the extent of getting a hotel room (away from my children and home) the day before the exam where I studied the entire day and night. I was so determined to pass the exam.

Feeling of Accomplishment

In 2010, I took the exam on a Saturday morning and passed it! I immediately called my boss after I received my results to let her know that I had passed. She could hear the excitement in my voice. Not only did I pass, but I passed on the first attempt. This was an accomplishment I would forever be proud of. Having those three initials behind my name was such a great way to show off all my hard work and preparation.

Subject Matter Expertise

Becoming certified definitely helped my organization recognize my high degree of knowledge in my field, as well as my dedication to the profession. It didn't come overnight, but as the months went on, more people started to look to me as being the subject matter expert. I eventually gained additional respect and trust from the C-level management teams. I was even sought out by others outside of my company interested in learning more about my expertise to solve specific problems or help meet particular technical challenges that they were facing. This gave me so much satisfaction. Although development as a subject matter expert takes time, experience, and intense research and study, obtaining an FPC or CPP designation will certainly help you get there.

More Money, Advancement, Better Opportunities

Although not guaranteed, it is more common that a certified payroll professional will receive a higher salary than a non-certified payroll professional. I was promoted to Senior Payroll Manager in 2010, shortly after I became certified.



The compensation package was truly a nice one! Not only did I receive a promotion and an increase in pay, I was also pursued (more than in the past) by outside recruiters for open payroll positions after I updated my LinkedIn profile with the CPP designation. At that moment, I realized I had just made myself more marketable. Although I turned down those opportunities because I enjoyed working for my company at the time, it was good to know the opportunities were presented to me. In 2013, just 3½ years after my first promotion, I was promoted to Director of Payroll, HRIS, & Benefits and have been in the director role since. I continue to do what I have to do to keep growing in my profession, including maintaining my CPP designation. This includes attending webinars and conferences, speaking on panels, and volunteering with the APA.

When looking to obtain the FPC or CPP designation, my advice is to go for it! It will all pay off in the end. It is more than just the financial rewards, but also the feeling of accomplishment, the chance to become a subject matter expert, and the opportunities that will come knocking at your door. Get certified! ■