From the desire to get ahead in the profession to just having a passion for learning, professionals know that there are an array of reasons to earn valuable certifications.

In any field, professional certifications are clear indicators that the people who hold them are committed to their chosen paths and believe that taking the extra time to earn them are worth it. Many professional organizations, from accountants to doctors, offer certifications. Certification gives people seeking specific services a way to recognize that someone meets the standard level of skills for a particular job.

Because of how important certification is to the profession, NCRA has designated May as “Celebrate Certification” Month. We celebrate all NCRA members as they show pride in the certifications they have earned, are working to earn, or are intending to earn. The month-long campaign is also designed to help encourage those who haven’t considered earning one of the Association’s many nationally recognized certifications to rethink their decision.

The campaign also offers members the opportunity to share with their clients and potential customers the reasons why choosing a professional who holds one or more professional certifications helps guarantee the delivery of high quality products and services.

**CERTIFICATION SHOWS COMMITMENT**

“I think professional certification is important because it shows a commitment to the profession and sets one apart from the ‘average’ reporter,” says Angela M. Mathis, RPR, from Jacksonville, Fla., a 23-year veteran of the business who also provides CART services. She notes that she earned her certification as a way to solidify her commitment to the profession and for personal achievement.

“My certification has helped me earn the respect from fellow reporters and to have preferred job opportunities at the company I work for,” adds Mathis, who is currently working toward earning her Certified Realtime Reporter certification.

Jennifer L. Peirson, RPR, of Eastville, Va., says she earned her RPR straight out of school, taking the WKT while actually still in school. She passed the skills portion about a year after she graduated and says earning the certification that quickly was drilled into her while in school so that she could take advantage of still being used to taking speed tests.

Professional certification not only helps those who hold them to enhance their professional skills and stay ahead of the competition, they also keep professionals current on trends, up-to-date on the latest in technology, and enable movement into other areas of the profession.
CERTIFICATION GETS YOU NOTICED

“As a freelance reporter, I’m not sure that having a certification has actually gotten me a job that I wouldn’t have otherwise gotten, but it has been commented on favorably to me personally by attorneys (that they prefer to use NCRA-certified reporters),” Peirson says, who worked as a freelance court reporter for nearly 15 years before recently making the switch to providing CART. “As a CART captioner, it has gotten me to the higher pay scale for one company I work with, and I know there are companies out there that only use certified captioners,” she adds.

“I had always planned to move to Florida after completing court reporting school in Texas, but once I learned there was no minimum standards set for court reporters in that state, I felt it would be best if I did something to distinguish myself in some way, so the RPR was one of my goals early on as a student,” says Kimberly Xavier, an official court reporter from Arlington, Texas.

After returning to live in Texas, Xavier said she tested for the RPR as a way to practice for the state’s required certified exam. “Once my boss knew I had set that goal, he offered me a cash bonus out of the goodness of his heart if I passed the RPR and that was the beginning of what would be a continuous journey of test taking and improvement for me,” Xavier says.

Not every employer offers bonuses for earning certifications, but many states require certification to work in the state, and some courthouses offer bonuses for certifications, especially realtime-related ones. In fact, numerous NCRA membership surveys have found that court reporters, captioners, and legal videographers who hold NCRA certifications make more money and are often in higher demand than their competitors. A 2015 survey performed by NCRA showed that 51 percent of the people who earn RPR are more than likely to earn $75,000 annually than those who haven’t earned the RPR, and 81 percent of those who hold the CRR credential are likely to earn at least that much. Earning higher certifications and specialty certifications is highly correlated to increased earning potential.

CERTIFICATION GIVES YOU CONFIDENCE

Professional certification gives you confidence in yourself and encourages a greater piece of mind for the person who holds it and the organization they work for. Earning a professional certification also offers a personal challenge.

“More than anything it has increased my confidence in my own abilities, just to know I can provide a stellar service. I was appointed to report a high-profile change of venue case years ago due to my realtime capabilities and having advanced certifications definitely made saying yes a lot easier and stress free for me,” says Xavier.

“I’m one that does feel that certification is important. I know that’s a hot-button issue with reporters, but I feel it’s important to strive for certifications for myself as well as helping me get my foot in the door with new companies that I want to work with,” says Peirson.

JUST DO IT

Whether you are a student or a working professional, earning a professional certification can be tough. But advice from those who have earned certifications agree, just do it.

“There is so much self-gratification when you achieve a professional certification. You are not confined to a specific region. You can travel the world and everywhere you go your credentials signify a high level of competence and expectation that you know what you’re doing,” Mathis says.

“If you get knocked down, get up again!,” says Peirson. “I recently bombed the CRR which was supposed to be my slam dunk so I’d be more relaxed for the CRC skills test. The second it was over, in my head I screamed, ‘Wait, let me do it again!’ It’s a lot riding on five minutes. I’m still trying to conquer my nerves, but I’ll be back,” she adds.

“I believe professional growth is important,” Xavier says. “In order to stay excited about any career choice, I think you have to have room to grow. Advanced certifications offer court reporters a way to quantify that growth and a way to identify weakness and measure improvement.”

NCRA has made available resources for state associations and individual members to use to help Celebrate Certification Month at NCRA.org. For more information about the campaign, contact pr@ncra.org.