



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### Technical Certifications from the Staff Perspective

There are many certifications available in the market today. You may have a hard time deciding which certification is right for you or for your employees. The answer really depends on the stage of your career, the certifications you already have, and your chosen technology area. Since many certifications require experience, you cannot literally pick any one you want. So, your background helps drive some certification decisions, while the desire to change your career path might also drive your decision process.

There are some certifications that can substantially improve your career prospects. This might be because there is a big gap between supply/demand in those specific areas. For example, just a few years ago, the Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) certification promised large salary jumps for IT professionals. It is still the most popular certification and is still in-demand. However, so many people now have the certification that it has become more of an entry-level requirement.

Another reason that particular certifications improve salary or career prospects is because they are difficult to achieve. For instance, many top-end certifications require a few years of job experience in addition to training. Because of their level of difficulty, these certifications can increase your salary by 20% to 30%.

It is important to keep in mind some do's and don'ts when it comes to choosing a certification program.

#### Do:

- **Think about where you want to work.** Target a set of employers or check with your own on whether they value a particular top-level certification. This is imperative before you invest time and money. Otherwise, you may find yourself relocating to leverage the certification.
- **Plan on recertification requirements.** You may have to take recertification tests every two to three years or attend a certain number of classroom hours, trade shows, or seminars over a several-year period. It may not be worth going through the work of initial certification if you do not plan on keeping the certification active.
- **Mix and match certifications, if possible.** More opportunities may be available if you can get certified in multiple disciplines. For instance, you could be both a certified database administrator and a certified project manager. This could be a very attractive combination to a perspective employer.

#### Don't:

- **Choose a certification in an area you do not enjoy.** Make sure you like that technology or professional area and can excel at it. If you're not good at it or don't like it, it will be a mistake to seek certification.



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- **Fall for claims of huge salary leaps.** Typically, obtaining a certification is beneficial to a person's salary, but not nearly as much as some sources would have you believe.
- **Forget you still have to deliver.** The certification holder must be able to actually perform the duties associated with the certification to be valuable to your employer.