

Make Your AHA Certification Work for You

by Lenora G. Knapp, Ph.D.

Are you making your AHA Certification work for you? By increasing the visibility and recognition of your certification, you can increase its value. Here are some tips for enhancing the value of your credential and leveraging greater benefits from your accomplishment.

1. **Request that the AHA-CC send your employer a letter announcing that you have been awarded an AHA certification.** In the information packet you receive from the AHA-CC after passing the Certification Examination, there is an Employer Notification Form. Simply fill in your identification information and the names and addresses of employer contacts, return it to the AHA-CC and it's done. The AHA Certification Center will send a letter to your executive management, human resources director, supervisor or other employer contacts that you identify. The letter describes the rigorous eligibility requirements you have met and the comprehensive Certification Examination you passed. And don't worry, no scores will be included!
2. **Send a news release to your facility and association newsletters and local newspapers.** Also in the information packet you receive from the AHA-CC, there is a copy of a news release that you can use for this purpose. Many communities have business newspapers and free local newspapers that publish announcements about professionals. Don't forget to send a news release to these publications as well the big name newspapers. To ensure your news release gets to the right source, find out who edits the newsletter or the section of the newspaper where such announcements are published and direct the news release to that person. This step will take only a few minutes of your time and it will greatly improve your odds of getting the information published.
3. **Make sure that your personnel file includes information about your AHA certified status.** Does your file contain an employer notification letter (see #1 above) or a copy of your certificate? Has your file been updated to include a confirmation that you have completed your certification renewal requirements? Ask your human resources department to place this information in your personnel file. By doing so, you can make sure that your AHA Certification will be upfront and center whenever your file is reviewed.
4. **Always use your designation after your name and spell out what the acronym stands for whenever possible.** Include your designation on business cards, e-mail signatures, letters, reports, presentations, articles, organizational/company directories, resumes, job applications, etc. Don't miss any of these opportunities to highlight your accomplishment and make your AHA certified status more visible within your organization. The AHA-CC also can provide you with a certification logo that can be used to personalize your business cards and stationery
<http://www.aha.org/aha/Certification-Center/files/08logoorderform.doc>.

Spelling out the acronym for your AHA Certification also is important. For people who don't know what the acronym stands for, the letters after your name are just that – letters. To enhance the value you receive from having the designation, include the full title of your Certification under your name or in another prominent location on business cards, stationery, documents, publications, etc.

5. **In e-mail signatures, hyperlink the acronym to the AHA-CC page describing the Certification or include a brief description of the Certification beneath your contact information.** Providing additional information about the Certification draws further attention to your accomplishment and helps to inform readers of what it means. For example, your e-mail signature could incorporate the following statement, “The Certified [insert correct title] is an elite national designation awarded to individuals who have satisfied educational and professional experience requirements and passed a rigorous examination.”
6. **Explain to your current employer (or potential employer) the value-added of AHA Certification.** Connect the dots for employers so they will understand how *they* benefit from *your* certification. When employers recognize the value of AHA Certification, your credential brings greater benefits to you. Here are some points to highlight:
 - AHA Certification verifies that you have met educational and professional experience requirements. Be specific about how these requirements relate directly to your job and explain that this means you have the academic background and experience that experts have identified as being necessary for competent performance in your professional role.
 - AHA Certification confirms, through a rigorous examination process, that you have mastered the knowledge required for your professional role. Because you have the core knowledge required for the role, you can hit the ground running when starting a new job. Your employer will not need to train you in the basics of the job role and, instead, can focus training on what is unique about the particular organization in which you work (or will be working). It also is beneficial to point out the alignment between specific content areas/tasks tested on the Certification Examination and the key responsibilities of your current position (or the one for which you are applying).
 - AHA Certification requires that you remain current in knowledge essential to the professional role by participating in continuing education activities or re-examination. Participation in certification renewal ensures that your knowledge base continues to evolve as the field changes. Your knowledge is up-to-date and consistent with *today’s* requirements for competent performance.
7. **Cite your AHA Certification and its direct benefits to your employer when requesting a salary increase or seeking a promotion.** Your AHA Certification is of value to your employer and makes you more valuable as an employee. Be prepared with some “talking points” about this when you make your request. Use some of the points in tip #6 above for this purpose.
8. **During your performance appraisal, highlight the fact that you were recently awarded AHA Certification or describe what you’ve done to maintain it.** Point out specific links between these activities and your current position. Emphasize the alignment between specific content areas/tasks tested on the Certification Examination and the key responsibilities of your current position. Or explain how your continuing education activities relate directly to your job. Whenever possible, give examples of how the knowledge you have acquired has directly benefited your employer (e.g., “Based on what I learned in the financial management course I took to fulfill my certification renewal requirements, I was able to identify ways to reduce the department budget by 10%).”

9. **Display your credential and be prepared with a 30-second “elevator speech” when people ask you what it is.** Hang your certificate in your office, being sure to place it in a location where people can walk up to it and read what it says. Wear your lapel pin to industry meetings and meetings in your organization, including meetings with your supervisor. And be sure to have a succinct explanation ready when people ask you about your AHA Certification. See tip #5 for an example of how you might respond to questions about your Certification.

Regardless of whether you have just earned AHA Certification or have been certified for several years, the tips outlined in this article will make your AHA Certification work for you and will help to ensure that you continue to benefit from your credential for many years to come.

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