

Continuing Education with NACM's Certification Programs

American author and business consultant, Ken Blanchard said, "All leaders are permanent learners." Many leadership experts like Blanchard have shared similar sentiments about why leaders must continue to educate themselves in their respective industries.

In the business credit profession, college courses on the subject are sparse. Although experience is an excellent teacher, several credit professionals said completing NACM's professional certification programs has not only improved their understanding of credit, but also has opened up new opportunities to become leaders in the credit department.

The certification process begins with the NACM National education department, which tracks progress, including courses completed and designations earned. NACM offers four levels of certification, which build off of each other:

- **Credit Business Associate (CBA)** is an academic-based designation, which signifies mastery of three business credit disciplines: Basic Accounting, Business Credit Principles and Introductory Financial Statement Analysis.
- **Credit Business Fellow (CBF)** is earned after the CBA and is an academic- and participation-based designation, which affirms recipients understand and contribute to the field of business credit. Courses include Business Law and Credit Law.
- **Certified Credit Risk Analyst (CCRA)** is also an academic-based designation, which signifies mastery in the analysis and interpretation of financial statements and the ability to make informed credit risk assessments.
- **Certified Credit Executive (CCE)** is NACM's highest designation and substantiates mastery of the credit function at an executive level. Candidates must pass a rigorous exam that tests their knowledge in the areas of accounting, finance, domestic and international credit concepts, management and law. Holders of a CCE designation must recertify every three years, further endorsing their commitment to continuing education, self-improvement and advancement in the business credit profession.

International designations are comprised of the Certified International Credit Professional (CICP) and the top-level International Certified Credit Executive (ICCE). To earn the CICP, candidates must successfully complete the International Credit & Risk Management online course and exam.

"Credentials add a level of credibility and trust to the work that you do without ever having to explain to people what you know and how you know it," said Teresa Silva, CCE, of Simple Sums Accounting. "There is an immediate understanding to clients and business professionals of what it takes to obtain and maintain the credentials. They immediately present you as a knowledgeable individual in your chosen profession."

Veteran Credit Manager Anne Scarcella, CCE, CCRA, said a credit professional's credentials show their commitment to the profession. Today, more than 10,000 credit professionals hold certifications.

"Honestly, I couldn't be as effective in my role without the knowledge I have gleaned from NACM during all of my years of participation in the certification program," said Scarcella, who is

currently the territory credit manager for Crawford Electric Supply. “My participation has increased my knowledge and helped me to become a better credit manager. I have been incredibly fortunate to join to an incredible network of credit professionals that are as passionate and interested in credit as I am.”

“A designation indicates a commitment and passion for the profession,” said Ed Bell, CBA, CICIP, ICCE, senior manager for Grainger’s credit administration. “It also indicates you have been properly trained in the principles of credit, which are not really taught in college courses.”

In the year and a half, it took him to earn his designations, Bell proved to his company how beneficial they were to his department and he eventually made NACM designations a requisite for his staff.

The effective management of company resources, specifically credit, is essential for a company to remain viable, Bell said. Credit education has earned him respect from peers and leadership within the company as well as a leadership role, he added. The knowledge he and the others in his credit department gained through credentialing has improved performance in the department and strengthened the relationship with other departments and senior leaders.

In addition to respect, Richard Worden, CBA, CBF, CCE, senior manager of credit and collections at Sidley Austin LLP, noted his designations have earned him trust from his internal and external clients.

“My designations have created opportunities for connection, and my supervisors have grown to trust my judgment and expertise,” Worden said. “I once had a situation where I searched for a new position, and I had an offer within two business days of my interview. The certification was important and the company agreed to financially maintain it.”

Becoming a leader means investing in yourself. Attaining designations means spending weeknights and weekends studying and completing homework, but it’s worth it, said Wendy Mode, CCE, CICIP, corporate credit manager for ROMCO Equipment Co. For example, several of her employers accepted her CCE designation in lieu of a bachelor’s degree, even preferring it because of its focus on credit management and the accompanying responsibilities.

“I was highly encouraged to get my credentials in order to learn more and become active in the NACM community,” Mode said. “Not only the education and learning, but the networking would provide far greater benefits than ever imagined.”

For more information on NACM’s Certification Programs, go to <https://nacm.org/certification.html>.