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Can You Lay Claim to These *Other* Certifications?

What if you could be certified in soft skills just like technical ones?

Here are a few you'd want to pursue.

Legal administrators know how important certifications are to their careers. The Certified Legal Manager (CLM) designation, for instance, signifies that legal professionals have demonstrated mastery of the body of knowledge necessary to successfully manage a law firm or office.

Professional accreditations also help individuals advance their careers by differentiating them from their peers. In addition, legal professionals who have earned a certification often command higher salaries than colleagues who have not sought external validation of their credentials.

Despite the importance of industry-recognized certifications, other qualifications such as strong communication and interpersonal skills are equally integral to career success. These so-called soft skills cannot be verified through a certification process, however. But if it were possible to offer validation that legal administrators possess the necessary soft skills, here are some certifications we'd like to see:

Obstacle Removal Specialist (ORS) – Legal administrators must excel in random troubleshooting related to human resources, information technology, facilities management and operations – to name just a few typical areas of oversight. Professionals who have earned this designation would be universally recognized as having the knowledge, resources and interpersonal skills needed to remove any number of workplace obstacles or annoyances that can hinder productivity and deflate morale.

Typical duties of an ORS might include helping staff members resolve problems with benefits coverage, hiring a new office receptionist and helping staff members obtain keycard access to the office building beyond core business hours. For the legal administrator who specializes in obstacle removal, addressing such varying requests would be all in a day's work.

Certified Team Player (CTP) – The ability to work well with others is a prized attribute in any office environment, but especially in the deadline-driven legal field. Professionals who are certified team players would regularly go beyond their job description to offer staff members in different areas of the firm the additional support and resources they need to serve clients and meet business goals.

Legal administrators who have earned the CTP designation would demonstrate a consistent ability to relate well to all employees in the firm or department, from the legal secretary with an administrative procedural question to the partner who has an urgent

staffing request. Certified team members also would be adept at collaborating with others in the office to identify solutions to problems ranging from technology to personnel issues that may be hindering the firm's overall effectiveness.

Accredited in Office Diplomacy – Legal administrators accredited in office diplomacy would be frequently asked to represent the interests of others in the office, such as attorneys who need access to additional legal research products, secretaries who want time away from the office to attend a training seminar and information technology staff seeking to increase their budget. As diplomatic professionals, these legal administrators are well versed in office personalities, politics and work styles. They know who to approach, when and how if they or others in the office need additional resources or information to carry out their responsibilities.

Professionals who hold this designation would have a well-earned reputation for being fair, nonjudgmental and receptive to others. They would excel at listening to individual requests, identifying and prioritizing the needs of different constituencies, researching the feasibility of colleagues' requests and presenting information to other decision makers within the proper context.

Certified Deal Maker (CDM) – Attorneys are not the only ones whose job descriptions entail persuading outside parties to accept agreements or offer more favorable terms. Legal administrators who are certified deal makers would regularly call on their well-developed communication skills to negotiate contracts and terms with vendors and outside service providers.

As a CDM, legal administrators may need to persuade a vendor to offer enhanced service at no additional cost or negotiate a frequent customer discount with an airport limousine service. Professionals holding this credential would be skilled at making a convincing case for their requests, overcoming objections and finalizing agreements in a manner that ultimately satisfies both parties.

Accredited in Lifelong Learning – Anyone who has worked in the administrative profession knows that the demands of the job can change quickly. Technological trends alone have made it challenging to keep one's skills current. The database program implemented a few years ago may soon be replaced by a newer version or a different one altogether, requiring legal administrators to continually expand their knowledge and skills.

Individuals committed to ongoing education don't just seek out learning opportunities when they're required; they take proactive measures to stay at the leading edge of their profession. Those accredited in lifelong learning would stay involved with organizations such as the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) to learn of emerging trends and pursue continuing education.

As a successful legal administrator, you already possess the essential knowledge and professional skills needed for your position. You may even have one or more

certifications. Your ability to advance will be limited, though, if the softer side of your skill set is lacking. To prevent your career from stalling, look for ways to “earn” the professional designations described here by strengthening your aptitude in each area. Although these certifications may be hypothetical, the skills they call for can have a very real impact on your career success.

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