

On Friday, April 4, 2008, Tribune Media Services released the PMP-focused column by Joyce Lain Kennedy -- the nation's first syndicated careers columnist. Her "Careers Now" column reaches more than 100 newspapers, including the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Philadelphia Daily News*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Daily-Herald*, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, *Southern California Post-Enterprise* and *Hartford Courant*.

Can Project-manager Credential Give You An Edge?

By Joyce Lain Kennedy *April 4, 2008*

DEAR JOYCE: I am 51, have been in construction for 25 years, hold contractor licenses in four states and have five years of college (no degree -- I twice changed majors). I'm very good at what I do, which is general and electrical contracting, but job offers are slowing down.

A friend suggested that I seek certification as a project manager professional (PMP) from the Project Management Institute. I looked into the PMP and it's no breeze. Heavy learning goes into achieving it, not to mention a fair amount of cost. Would becoming a PMP really help pull my career out of the can? -- R.T.

DEAR R.T.: Lots of people call themselves project managers but lack the discipline's gold-standard certification, the PMP. It's similar to the status comparison between an accountant and a CPA (certified public accountant). Your issue boils down to whether, from a marketplace perspective, your PMP designation would be wallpaper or worth it. My view: Anything you can do to stand out, especially in this murky job market, is a big plus. But perspectives do differ concerning the PMP certification.

PRO. Ryan, a friend who was in similar circumstances a half-dozen years ago, invested adequate midnight oil and money in suiting up to take the PMP credentialing exam. Not only did Ryan pass the rigorous test, the outcome was exactly what he'd hoped for. He accepted a six-figure job offer with generous benefits, including a new SUV, from an employer who found his name on the Project Management Institute rolls. In Ryan's case, the PMP experience changed his life.

CON. Not all in project management circles agree that the PMP designation is career magic. I made a quick [Google](#) run on the topic, turning up several opinions that the PMP is nice to have but not as essential in snagging a new job as your knowledge, references and proven work history. The differing views may, in part, stem from experiences in the observer's functional area and industry. As the saying goes, "Where you stand depends upon where you sit."

WIDE ANGLES. Project management, once confined to construction and mechanical engineering projects, has spread like flowers after a spring rain across an array of industries and career fields. Examples of where you'll find project management jobs: information technology, computers and software development, financial services, telecommunications, business management services, engineering, education and training, defense, aerospace and utilities. The look of the profession has changed, too: About 40 percent of today's Project Management Institute members are women.

What does the now ubiquitous project manager do? He or she works on unique and temporary ventures with a defined beginning and end. The basic idea: The manager plans, organizes and manages resources to bring in large- and small-scale projects on time, on budget and on quality. This is not easy work, but it can pay very well. Moreover, PMPs, on average, typically out-earn non-credentialed managers. By how much?

PAYDAY. A 2007 Project Management Institute survey of U.S. salaries for PMPs, compared with non-PMPs, shows differences measured by years of experience.

At three years' experience, PMPs make, on average, \$3,000 to \$4,000 more yearly than non-certified project managers.

At seven years' experience, PMPs earn an average of \$7,000 more annually than their non-certified competitors.

And at 14 years' experience, PMPs pull in an average \$10,000 to \$11,000 more each year than project managers who are not certified.

The PMP advantage adds up to serious money over the years; you do the math.

EMBARK. Start researching your PMP-or-not decision at the Project Management Institute (pmi.org). Continue by looking at college programs leading to the credential. And finally, work the Web for comments and opinions. That's where I found my favorite quote. It's by veteran project manager Milt Haynes, writing in a blog essay, "So You Want to Be a Project Manager?" Haynes wrapped up the essence of project management:

"Good project managers are good planners who refuse to give up when it comes to following up tasks to make sure the work gets done. And great project managers use their project management skills to plan their own project management careers.

"Do you have a career development plan? Have you mapped out where you are today, where you want to go and how you are going to get there? Does your plan include task descriptions, dates and resource requirements? If not, this is a good place to start to develop expert project management skills."

You are the project.

(E-mail career questions for possible use in this column to Joyce Lain Kennedy at jlk@sunfeatures.com; use "Reader Question" for subject line. Or mail her at Box 368, Cardiff, CA 92007.)

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