

A CERTIFICATION JOURNEY Q&A With Courtney Lewis, a Certified Safety Professional

Attaining a safety certification is an educational and professional development journey for many safety professionals. Courtney D. Lewis, CSP, a senior consultant at Orbit Consulting LLC and former EHS manager at Toyotetsu North America, discusses her journey in attaining her ASP and CSP certifications.

Courtney D. Lewis
Courtney D. Lewis, M.S., CSP, is a senior consultant at Orbit Consulting LLC. She holds an M.S. in Safety, Security and Emergency Management, Occupational Health and a B.S. in Environmental Health Science from Eastern Kentucky University.

PSJ: Why did you decide to attain safety certifications?

Courtney: I am a highly motivated individual, especially when it comes to learning. I constantly seek out knowledge on just about anything to do with environmental, health and safety (EHS) or process safety management. Many years ago, a manager told me to spend as little as 10 minutes a day learning, and I was sure to be successful. I thought he was silly for saying that, but I understand it now. There are so many automatic email subscriptions you can subscribe to with automatic regulatory updates and other safety information to keep yourself up to date on the EHS field. So those 10 minutes a day really do keep an EHS professional on track, and I take that very seriously.

I received my bachelor's in environmental health science and then my master's in safety, security and emergency management, both from Eastern Kentucky University (EKU). It was actually at EKU that I learned more about certifications. To me, a certification shows another level of competency. It shows that I kept going to maintain it

and that I still have to keep going. You have to do certain things to maintain a CSP or ASP certification, which can include going to trainings and furthering yourself. Most of my experience was in oil and gas for 5 years in Texas. In that state, oil and gas companies take credentials very seriously, and some even require safety professionals to have a CSP or a certified industrial hygienist (CIH) certification.

Another reason for attaining these certifications is that a credentialed individual may be considered for open positions over those without credentials. In addition, the salaries tend to be larger, and while money isn't everything, we work to make money to support our life and family so why not make the most of it that you can.

PSJ: At what point in your career did you realize you wanted to obtain your certification and what was your experience after making that decision?

Courtney: I knew early on during my studies at EKU that I wanted to obtain the credentials and that the CSP was the gold standard. Many of my professors, ones that I still look up to today, were credentialed individuals. I had the chance to hear their stories and see the successful careers that they had led and were still leading and I wanted to be like them. So, I stayed on top of the BCSP requirements to keep my path and my vision very clear. Over time, the BCSP requirements changed so I had to continue staying on top of it.

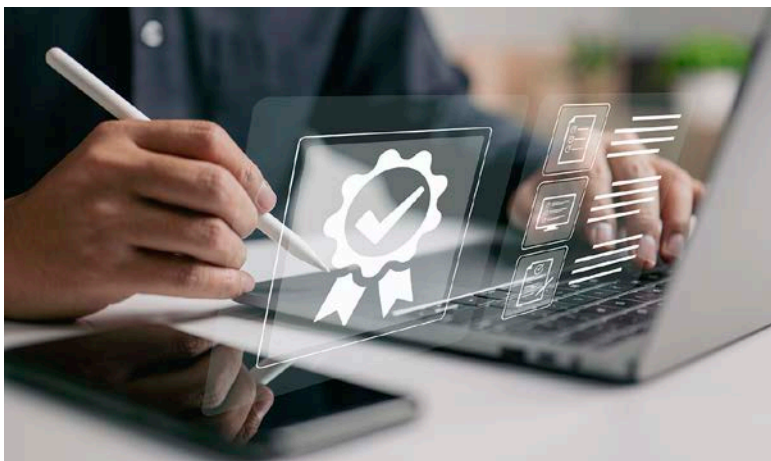
Back in 2015, I pursued the ASP certification first and I knew that I wanted to pursue the CSP certification shortly after. Being an ASSP member for so many years helped me connect with many professionals to understand even more about credentials and the importance behind them. Many ASSP members guided me on how to make that path and have a successful career.

PSJ: How did you prepare for your exams and were there any differences in preparing for the ASP versus the CSP exam?

Courtney: The study experience for the ASP exam was much different. I studied a lot, and I utilized multiple organizations' study materials. BCSP offers some test materials that you can review, and I also went through two other companies to get their workbooks and flash cards to help me study. When I was preparing for the CSP exam back in 2016 and 2017, I studied even more and utilized resources from those same organizations. However, I

TIPS FOR EARNING A SAFETY CERTIFICATION

- **Dedicate 10 minutes a day to learning.** Use daily habits such as reading safety updates or subscribing to regulatory email bulletins to stay current and build knowledge consistently.
- **Invest in various study tools.** Combine official BCSP materials with workbooks, flash cards, and online practice exams from multiple sources to prepare effectively.
- **Attend in-person preparation workshops.** Especially for CSP exam math content, in-person or live workshops offer personalized help that can make a critical difference in exam performance.
- **Align certification goals with career vision.** Define long-term objectives early and use them to guide your certification path and professional development strategy.
- **Leverage professional networks and mentorships.** Join organizations to gain insights, find mentors and receive guidance throughout the certification journey.
- **Do not let setbacks stop you.** Failing an exam is not the end; use it as a learning opportunity, seek support and adjust your approach to keep moving forward.



"Take the time and study. Being credentialed is something to work hard for and be very proud of when you do achieve it and it is well worth the time."

went a few steps further because there is a lot more math on the CSP exam, and you have to really know your formulas.

I utilized workbooks for self-study and did a lot of online practice tests. In my opinion, the very best thing that I did was attend an in-person ASSP exam preparation workshop, which my company encouraged me to do. The workshop included an entire day of math review, and it was very personable and personalized. The preparation courses provided the one-on-one time that I needed, especially when it came to the math formulas.

PSJ: Was there anything that surprised you about getting your certifications or that you wish you knew at the start?

Courtney: I actually failed the first time I took the CSP exam. This was when I was only using the study manuals and self-study. The test was 5 hours long, and the test centers have a very thorough biometric process. Every time you get up or go use the restroom, you have to go through many processes to show that you aren't cheating and that you are you. For example, you show your empty pockets, show that you don't have anything around your ankles or tucked in your shoes, and you have to do a scan of your palm. At the time, I was pregnant, so I had heightened emotions and, while it is stressful to take any type of exam, I had to take frequent breaks. Overall, it was not a good time for me to take the exam and I wish I had waited.

After I failed, I picked myself up again. I had support from the company I worked for at the time, and that is when they sent me to the one-on-one study workshop.

PSJ: When transitioning from the ASP to CSP, did you decide to keep your ASP after attaining the CSP and what went into that decision-making process?

Courtney: When you attain the CSP certification, you do not need to hold the ASP certification anymore. I actually kept my ASP certification until about 2021. When making that decision, I knew what I wanted to do, but I posted a question on LinkedIn to get others' opinions on why they kept

it or let it go. I mostly kept it out of pride because I had worked hard for it. I found many of my peers kept it for that same reason but eventually gave it up. In my opinion, there is not really any good explanation or reason to keep the ASP. You passed it, put it behind you.

PSJ: What advice would you give to someone who is going through the process or thinking about attaining their ASP or CSP?

Courtney: Set your career path and vision, stick to it and understand what it takes to get there. I knew that I wanted to achieve certain things in my life before I had any children. After I had failed the first CSP exam and after I had my child, I was very fortunate to have a good support system at home to study for the exam. It is hard to find time to study for anything when you have children in addition to a full-time career, especially one that includes frequent travel. In addition, being in safety in the oil and gas industry is very demanding. If I had not had that support and determination, I wouldn't have achieved it. If you have a lot going on in your career and home, don't let that stop you. Find a support system. Put yourself out there and try to get help to find the time to study because you need it.

PSJ: Anything else you'd like to add?

Courtney: There are so many organizations and people out there willing to help and mentor safety professionals, and there are many mentorship programs available, even at ASSP. Also, make sure to subscribe to magazines, bulletins, and emails to stay on top of safety and regulatory information. Lastly, if you're horrible at math like I think that I am, do not let that stop you either. Take the time and study. Being credentialed is something to work hard for and be very proud of when you do achieve it and it is well worth the time. **PSJ**

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