

My CEBS Journey

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I'm likely the Canadian record-holder for "longest to obtain a CEBS designation," because I enrolled in my first course in August 2009 and completed my last in December 2016. Seven years! But, like most things in life, there's a story behind that, and here is mine.

In 2009, I was new to a role in the Training and Development Department at Green Shield Canada (GSC), and learning more about health and dental benefits fit well into my individual development plan. GSC is known for being a health and dental specialist. If I was going to teach it, I had better know it!

It had been a few years since my university days, so I opted for the online study course for GBA 1, hoping it would be easier to stay on track with direction from our instructor. It was. The weekly reading schedule, the practice quizzes and the fun games were great resources. The variety of tools to satisfy different learning styles earned an A+ from this trainer. The live review sessions made it feel like school (a good thing!) even though I was often logged in from the kitchen table in my pajamas after I'd put my two young sons to bed. I learned a ton and brought that back to my job with confidence. Mission complete.

When I moved into a new role in administration a few years later, I resolved to complete my GBA designation. I continued online study with great success and, in 2013, was the proud owner of the GBA designation. I thought I was done but, as my career progressed, I recognized the benefits to be had by continuing with the program. In early 2015, I once again found myself at the kitchen table tuned into the

live review sessions. With support and encouragement from my leader at the time (also a CEBS graduate), I challenged myself to finish the last five courses and obtain my CEBS within two years. My boys were a bit older at this point, and it became routine for us to do our homework together at the table. They got a kick out of it. I was living the Dr. Seuss book I had read to them a thousand times: "The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go!" After I came home from an exam, they'd run to meet me. "How was your test? Did you pass???" I was proud to demonstrate that learning is important and that, no matter your age, it's essential to continue to grow.

I attended the Symposium in Baltimore, Maryland in 2016, when I was just weeks away from my final exam. It was then that I realized the magnitude of the community and the tremendous amount of support and knowledge available to me. I connected with many peers that week and established some great friendships. I celebrated my graduation with them at this year's Symposium in Denver, Colorado.

I'll caution you that it will be very easy to find a reason to postpone signing up for that next class. We are all busy. We all have more than enough to occupy our days. Who has extra hours to study? Don't give in to that. Don't cheat yourself and be fooled to believe that "next spring" or "as soon as the house renovations are complete" will be the right time. I encourage you to sign up, book your exam date immediately and stick to the weekly readings. Invest in yourself and your future.

Reflecting back to the start of this journey, I never imagined that I'd be a CEBS graduate writing this article. As I grew in my career, I recognized the value in furthering my education to support it. I learned benefits—relevant not only to my job administering them but also as a consumer of them—as an employee and a Canadian citizen. It may have taken me seven years to complete this designation but, like most things of merit, it was worth the effort.