

## The Benefits of Industry Certification

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To maximize the benefits of SSPA Certification, it must be managed as a process. The process is initiated by identifying the skills that, with improvement, can increase performance results at key levels within the service and support operation. The next step is to evaluate the workforce to determine if improvement is needed in the skills identified as critical for success. If skill gaps are identified, a training program is initiated. With the completion of training, the knowledge is verified by an industry standard SSPA Certification Test designed for a targeted level. The final step is to observe that new skills are being demonstrated in the work environment. Thus, SSPA Certification represents a step in a process designed to improve customer service skills which have the potential to impact performance and make improvements to the bottom line.

The SSPA continues to identify the skills necessary in service and support operations that will lead to improvements in customer service. By improving such skills through the certification process, the following improvements may be realized:

- 9.5% increase in customer satisfaction ratings
- 10% reduction in call handling times
- 8% higher first call resolution
- 9% less call escalations\*

\*data was provided by Impact Learning Systems and was based on average performance improvement rates and independently measured and validated.

In addition to these improvements for service and support business units, the utilization of certification can clarify job roles and the career paths for the individual.

### SSPA Industry Certification

For individuals, the SSPA currently has identified four certification levels. The Official SSPA Certificate is readily identified by the SSPA logo and the signature of the Founder of SSPA, Bill Rose.

The four levels for the Official SSPA Industry Certification for individuals are:

Customer Service Qualified (CSQ)	Certification for non-technical customer service representatives
Certified Support Professional-I (CSP-I)	Certification level for newer support professionals
Certified Support Professional-II (CSP-II) <i>(in development)</i>	Certifications level for advanced support professionals
Certified Support Professional – Supervisor(CSP-S)	Certification for team leaders

The SSPA Industry Certification includes a designation for the non-technical Customer Service Representative. It is the **Customer Service Qualified Certification (CSQ)**. The skills identified for CSQ are customer service skills such as: dealing with challenging calls; customer relations; responding to upset customers; opening, diagnosing and closing a call; building rapport; and using appropriate language with a customer. This is an excellent certification to achieve for those who have customer contact.

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The first technical level for industry certification is the **Certified Support Professional -I (CSP-I)**. This level is for new support professionals or more advanced ones who wish to improve their customer services skills to leverage their technical knowledge in order to maximize results. The skills for CSP-I include establishing a relationship with the customer, understanding customer needs, documenting and managing the call, and handling pressure.

CSP-I certification helps support professionals to focus the customer on solutions and strive to achieve customer satisfaction by quickly and effectively responding to callers. If it is necessary to direct the call to another person, one learns to route the call in a professional manner. Support professionals learn to sense a caller's frustration level and respond in an empathetic manner, while helping them focus on moving toward a resolution. A technical support professional must understand company policy to know when to escalate calls. They learn to develop a plan to resolve issues and maintain appropriate contact with the customer.

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**The Certified Support Professional-II (CSP-II)**, is being developed currently. It will focus on trouble shooting skills and other advanced service and support skills. The SSPA is working with industry representatives to identify the critical skills at this level. Those wishing to make contributions to this process may contact [kanderson@thesspa.com](mailto:kanderson@thesspa.com).

When a support professional assumes the responsibilities of leading teams, new skills are needed. The **Certified Support Professional-S (CSP-S)** recognizes the skills that are needed for supervisors. Leading a team requires one to assist employees in setting goals, monitoring and documenting performance, and taking corrective actions when needed. Good leaders will model positive behaviors, be empathic listeners, and recognize individual differences. By learning these skills, one may achieve certification at the CSP-S level.

Utilizing this process for certifying ones service and support professionals, including validating that the skills are being demonstrated in the work force, can impact the bottom line by improving customer satisfaction for your company. For more information on the Official SSPA Industry Certification, contact [kanderson@thesspa.com](mailto:kanderson@thesspa.com).

Currently, the SSPA concludes SSPA Industry Certification at the supervisor level. To learn about the SSPA advanced programs for managers and directors, see the [Wharton School/SSPA Technology Support Services Management Program \(TSSM\)](#)

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