



## What Makes a Trainer “Professional”

When I initially wrote this article, I was asked whether a qualification or a certification is the final ingredient that makes a trainer professional. That question never seems to go away and has been resurfacing more frequently recently with clients I have spoken with. I thought I would share my “personal” thoughts on the matter.

I hope my answer encourages you to consider what being a “professional” Facilitator, Trainer, or Tutor means to you. This could be extremely important for freelancers or associate trainers, as the brand we perceive ourselves to have, compared to the brand others perceive us to have, may not be the same.

I believe that we need to learn what makes us professional, achieve that, and then advertise why we deem ourselves professional trainers.

First, let’s seek to establish the meaning of the word professional. As we can see below, there are several different perspectives on this topic, including how we use and perceive this word.

Some examples include:

1. Relating to or belonging to a profession, such as a professional builder, teacher, glassier.
2. Worthy of or appropriate to a professional person; competent, skilful, or assured:
  - Their professional expertise.
  - A true professional at what they do.
  - That person is a professional in their field.
3. A person who is certified or qualified in a skill set within a recognised profession:
  - Professionals such as lawyers, doctors, surveyors...
  - Engaged in a specified paid occupation rather than as an amateur.
4. Examples of such professions include:
  - a professional boxer
  - a professional musician
  - a professional footballer





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In my opinion, there is no absolute definition of what constitutes a professional. It may be a matter of personal perspective on professionalism and, therefore, differing opinions. If so, we must try to cover all perspectives to be recognised as a professional by anyone.

My main point, however, is that there is sufficient, if not overwhelming, evidence to suggest that trainers must demonstrate their professionalism in a way that satisfies all perspectives, perhaps more so if we are associate or contract trainers or consultants.

Also consider this question: “What will make **you** either stand out from the others, or be outshone by those you may be in direct competition with when it comes to an interview for a job or when bidding for that new contract”?

I read an article that stated, “Those qualified professionals among us are probably the ones we should discuss this with.” This suggests we can be professionals without qualifications or certifications in our chosen occupation!

What makes a professional footballer a professional? With my limited knowledge of football, I would suggest that their skill, experience, club history, goal-scoring ability, defensive capability, and so on determine their status as a professional, rather than a qualification.



However, playing devil’s advocate, if I were to ask parents whether they prefer their children's teachers to be qualified or not, the response would not just be qualified, but I am confident that they would insist on it. I would suggest most parents find the concept of having their children taught by an unqualified teacher ridiculous and even irresponsible! So, how many people think the same about trainers?

What about the builder, plumber, or tradesperson working on your home? Would you not check that they are certified, affiliated, or registered with a governing body such as the Federation of Master Builders, CIPHE, CORGI, or NICEIC?



Look back at those parents and ask what they wanted to see in terms of teachers' qualifications. I would suggest their main focus was not on whether teachers were qualified in geography, history, or science, but whether they were qualified to “**teach**”!

So, becoming a “Professional” trainer does not just mean I have vast experience regarding my subject matter expertise; it also means we must be certified, qualified, or both to **train** others, proving our ability to transfer skills, knowledge, and understanding effectively.



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Getting certified proves your skill and commitment to your professionalism.

If we wish to be treated as professionals, should we not earn that title by being professional, rather than just saying, “I have been delivering training for X years”? What does that prove?

I have been in the training arena for over 40 years, but my experience does not necessarily prove the quality of my work. Experience adds credibility, but what is the whole package that makes us a “professional” trainer/facilitator in the eyes of others? Do I “have” to gain a qualification/certification to be accepted by all? I think we should! Better safe than sorry!

I believe I am regarded as a “professional” facilitator/trainer of learning due to a combination of factors. This includes many years of experience, the positions I have held, the certifications and qualifications I hold, the well-known brands I have been trusted to work with, and, particularly, my investment in renewing those certificates, which demonstrates my commitment to being a professional trainer and facilitator.



As trainers, we know all too well about “skill fade”, so why ignore our own? To add to all this, I have statements from people who regard me as both passionate and professional in my work. It creates my personal brand as an experienced and trusted professional trainer/facilitator and coach.

As a health check, try answering the questions below and see what you think. After all, only you can decide whether to invest in a membership, certificate, or qualification if you think it is worth it, regardless of what anyone else says. But be conscious of what others think.

1. Are you a member of a professional organisation or governing body that recognises you as a professional in your field?
2. Do you have a certification or qualification specific to delivering **training** to prove your skills, knowledge and understanding as a facilitator/trainer/tutor?
3. Do you demonstrate your commitment to CPD by having your skills regularly assessed and monitored? (Addressing “Skill Fade”).
4. Can you provide references from other recognised professionals who support, prove, and enhance your credibility?
5. Are you subject to, and do you adhere to, codes of professional conduct that promote ethical and even moral obligations?



All the above ingredients contribute to our claim that we are professionals, but it does not necessarily mean that we will always act professionally simply because we possess them. We need to be honest, diligent, do the right thing, and care about all those we engage with throughout the entire training journey.



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However, if you had a choice between two taxis that were both experienced, but one had no driving licence, and the other did, which driver would you choose and why?

I would recognise both drivers' experience, but I would wonder why one didn't have a licence. I would wonder what risk I would be exposing myself to with the unlicensed driver, so I would choose the licensed driver, as they have been measured and passed. Food for thought, perhaps. What would you do?

I personally think the answer about being a professional is clear for a few reasons:

1. Investing your time and effort in your own CPD demonstrates your commitment to continually pursuing quality and standards and showing that you are acting responsibly and professionally.
2. Work opportunities in our world will not wait! If you have certifications and qualifications that you don't need, it doesn't matter, but if you need them and haven't obtained them, it matters a great deal and could impact your employability.
3. Gaining qualifications and certifications takes time, so act now to avoid disappointment or being deemed second choice because you lack certification in delivering training.

Ultimately, I believe what makes you a “Professional” may not be so much about what you think of yourself but **more** about what others think of you.

**"The opportunity to learn is a gift; the opportunity to teach is a privilege."**

~ Mac Macdonald ~

