

SUCCESS STORIES

SHRM Certification

Resource Group TESTIMONIAL



Leilani Decena SHRM-SCP Certification Earned: SHRM-CP

My decision to pursue the SHRM-SCP did not come from a single moment. It came from a realization that I wanted my experience, leadership, and perspective in HR to be matched with a credential that reflected that level of impact.

My “aha” moment happened in the edit bay. Before HR, I spent years as an award-winning television supervising producer. I understood storytelling, strategy, and how to deliver the right message at the right time. When I transitioned into Human Resources, I brought that lens with me, but I wanted the credentials to match the conviction. This was not just about advancement. It was about proving to myself that I could operate at a senior, strategic level.

Preparing for the exam was one of the most challenging things I have taken on. I studied for months while balancing work, board commitments, and life. I am not a natural test taker, so I could not rely on memorization. I had to understand the material. I structured my study across the SHRM BASK, built my own frameworks, and focused on what I got wrong, not what I already knew. That is where growth happened.

What no study guide prepares you for is life happening at the same time. During this season, I was displaced from my home for nearly a year due to a house fire, navigating a marriage that was falling apart, facing a job loss, and caring for my mother. There were days when just functioning felt like an accomplishment. But I refused to let a hard season become a permanent excuse. I always came back and kept moving forward.

I also made a decision that mattered. I put the exam on my credit card during one of the hardest financial stretches of my life. This was not an expense. This was an investment in me.

The biggest challenge was not the material. It was the mental game. Learning to trust my preparation and think strategically was everything. What surprised me most was that my real-world experience became my advantage. On exam day, I flagged my first several questions. My heart was racing, and self-doubt hit hard. For a moment, everything felt gone. But I paused, reset, and told myself, I got this. When I returned to those questions, the answers were clear. The knowledge was always there. I just had to trust it.

Seeing the word “Pass” on the screen was unforgettable. I leaned in, rubbed my eyes, and let it sink in. After everything I had carried, that one word meant everything.

If you are on the fence, start anyway. There will never be a perfect time. The SHRM-SCP will challenge you to think bigger, lead bolder, and show up differently. It is more than a credential. It is a signal of who you are becoming.

Certification was not the end of my journey. It was the beginning. It gave me the confidence to build something bigger through AI-HR Studios, where I hope to empower HR professionals with the insight, courage, and tools to lead in a changing world.

Build your future, even when your present is messy. And when you see that “Pass” on the screen, you will understand. It was all worth it.

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Alexis Koelle

Municipality of Norristown

Certification Earned: SHRM-CP

I earned my SHRM-CP certification to deepen my HR knowledge and bring a more strategic, informed approach to my role at the Municipality of Norristown. Working in the public sector, I saw how valuable it would be to have a strong foundation in HR principles and practices that align with both compliance and people-centered leadership. I wanted to grow professionally, contribute more meaningfully to our organization, and set an example of continuous learning.

My study journey started slowly – I purchased the SHRM Learning System and reviewed the material over the course of a year at a steady pace. This helped me build a solid understanding without feeling overwhelmed. Then, about three months before my exam date, I shifted into focused preparation mode. I created a structured study plan, increased my weekly study hours, and committed to practice questions and scenario-based learning.

One of the most helpful parts of my preparation was joining the SHRM Certification Resource Group. It was incredibly motivating to connect with others who had already earned their certification. They shared practical study tips, helped me get more familiar with the exam format, and offered encouragement that kept me going. Talking to people who had been through the process made it feel more achievable and less intimidating.

Balancing study time with a full-time job wasn't always easy - especially during busy periods - but I stayed consistent. There were moments of doubt and fatigue, but I kept reminding myself of the long-term value. I was fortunate to receive financial support from my employer, which helped make the investment more manageable.

On exam day, I felt a mix of nerves and excitement. Thanks to the preparation and support I had, I walked in feeling confident and ready. Passing the SHRM-CP has been incredibly rewarding - it's boosted my confidence, sharpened my skills, and opened new opportunities for growth.

To anyone considering certification but feeling unsure due to time, cost, or difficulty: you can do this. Start where you are, take it one step at a time, and don't be afraid to ask for support. The journey is challenging, but the personal and professional rewards are absolutely worth it.

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Lilla Fehér, MSHRM, SHRM-CP **PAISBOA Health Benefit Trust** **Certification Earned: SHRM-CP**

My motivation to pursue the SHRM-CP was really a combination of several factors. Coming from a background in employee benefits, I wanted to broaden my understanding of the full HR landscape and strengthen my overall skillset. Earning my SHRM-CP felt like a meaningful way to continue my education and advance my career as well.

I studied for about 8 months, which was longer than I probably needed, but I wanted to feel extra prepared – and I did. I studied most days after work for at least 30 minutes and usually incorporated some studying in on the weekends, depending on my schedule. Breaking the material into small, manageable sections helped me balance exam preparation with my work/life.

The practice quizzes and exams were the most helpful for me because they helped me anticipate what the real exam questions would be like. The online modules were helpful overall – being able to read/listen to the material and answer practice questions intermittently was beneficial. I took two practice exams before I sat for the real exam, and I would recommend doing this. It gives you a good idea of what the exam day will be like and how to pace yourself. My manager also teaches a virtual SHRM preparation course, and she invited me to join a few sessions. Being able to ask questions and talk through scenarios in a classroom setting helped me comprehend difficult concepts better.

Finding the time to study was the hardest part. After a long day of work, it wasn't always easy to muster up the energy or concentration to study. The situational judgement practice questions were typically the hardest for me, so practicing these types of questions before the exam really helped me prepare. I worried that I'd need to memorize specific details about laws and dates, which was not the case. The legal exam questions are relatively high-level. I also expected to see some formulas on the exam, such as turnover rate, cost-per-hire, etc. However, no calculations or formulas were a part of the exam.

While it may seem daunting at first, the benefits of attaining the certification outweigh the effort. If you feel like you don't have the time, making a study plan breaking the material up like I did can be a huge help. There's no right or wrong amount of time it should take to prepare for the exam – everyone's learning style and schedules are different. Being consistent and focusing on comprehending the material rather than rushing through it is best. If you're hesitant due to cost, it never hurts to ask your employer to sponsor your exam. Make the case about how it'll benefit not only you, but also for the value it will bring to the organization. If you're hesitant because of the difficulty, don't worry – there are study groups (like GVFHRA) and other resources available to help you prepare. If you're an HR professional today, you might already know a lot of this information. Preparing for the exam can help reinforce concepts you might already be familiar with, while helping you understand them in a more strategic and analytic context.

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Matthew Calise, MS HRM, SHRM-CP **Cadence Design Systems** **Certification Earned: SHRM-CP**

I attended my first SHRM Symposium in March of 2025 and had a substantial experience. After participating in workshops and networking with other HR professionals, I decided to pursue the SHRM-CP credential for its strategic benefits, including learning best practices and applying my skillset to real-world situations.

After completing my MS HRM program at the end of Summer 2025, I registered for the SHRM-CP exam while the material was still fresh. Studying started off slow, as I wasn't sure where to start, let alone how to start. I connected with colleagues and friends who had also, or had been in the process, of studying for their own exam, which proved very helpful.

I used the SHRM Learning System, SHRM Bask, Pocket Prep, and HR EXAM PREP with ANGELA (YouTube) to prepare for the exam. While these were helpful, the SHRM Certification Resource group was considerably instrumental to my success. The group provided helpful tips and feedback for studying, but it also reduced stress by creating a supportive community beyond just sharing exam advice.

I began studying slowly, unsure of how to start, but after it was announced that my business unit would be included in an upcoming acquisition, I made time management a priority. A friend and I, both preparing for exams, set up regular study sessions that helped us stay motivated and accountable. Collaborating enabled us to share advice and remain dedicated to staying on track.

Since my exam was scheduled for the morning, I went to bed early and had a solid breakfast. I was nervous, but equally excited. I went into the exam and reminded myself that all I could do is my best, and that my best was enough.

If you're thinking about taking your SHRM exam, remind yourself that you can do this. Think of every time you thought you couldn't do something, and not only accomplished it, but surprised yourself in the process. It's okay, and encouraged, to ask for help. We are fortunate to have an incredible community in the Philadelphia area that is consistently rooting for each other. While preparing for the exam isn't easy, if you put the time and work in, you're going to soar.