

Help Me Learn: Persuading an Employer to Invest in Your Continuing Education

By Accountemps

To reach your full career potential as a financial professional, you'll need to earn in-demand certifications, learn new skills, and build on knowledge and talents you already have. Deep down, you may already know this. But, you also may feel you lack the time and resources to pursue what may seem like “extracurricular” activities. Looking to your employer for assistance is an option — although financial support may be harder to come by than it used to be.

Reimbursement for continuing education is a perk many employers used to offer — and employees often took for granted — until the Great Recession hit. Since then, this benefit has been slow to make comeback. According to a [recent Robert Half survey](#), 42 per cent of employers do not offer their staff full or partial reimbursement for continuing education required to maintain professional certifications.

In this environment, persuading an employer to channel resources into your educational pursuits will likely take some work. Here's some advice for making a strong case:

Try to address a specific need at the firm. You may not make much headway by walking into your boss's office and announcing, “I think I might want to take some classes. Would the company help me out?” But if you present a more specific plan — and explain how you could add value to the organization by learning new skills — you may find a more receptive audience. An example pitch: “I know our firm wants to grow our forensics accounting practice. I'm very interested in being a part of that. Could we discuss the possibility of the firm assisting me in earning the certified forensic accountant designation?”

Conduct thorough research. Approach your boss with all the pertinent details about an educational opportunity. If you'll be taking a class, for example, prepare a fact sheet that includes everything from course timing and cost to expected outcome of the training. If participating in continuing education would somehow impact your everyday routine at the office — such as requiring you to leave work early a few days a week in order to get to your class on time — make that clear up front. Also, if possible, consider presenting a couple of options at different price ranges so that you, and your employer, have more flexibility to negotiate an arrangement that makes the most sense for both sides.

Be a co-investor in yourself. While it would be ideal for your employer to say, “Don't worry. We'll take care of everything,” more than likely you'll only receive partial reimbursement from the firm for your continuing education. Determine how much of the cost you could comfortably shoulder and include that information in your pitch. Showing that you're prepared to invest in yourself could make all the difference in convincing your employer to help you realize your goals.

If, despite your efforts, the firm won't (or simply can't) provide even partial reimbursement for a learning opportunity, don't abandon your determination to grow your skills and knowledge. Some business continuing education can be expensive, but there are affordable options — from webinars to courses at community colleges to workshops presented by professional associations. It may cost more than you planned to earn the credentials you need, but in the long term, it's likely to be money well spent.

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