

## Taking Baby Steps

By John Dykeman, CMA



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I started my journey toward becoming a CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) in 2009 after discussing my professional development goals with a colleague. I was determined to earn a recognized certification in management accounting. My specific goals were to achieve professional growth, improve my skill level, and realize the satisfaction of earning a professional and globally recognized credential.

While researching several options, I became attracted to the CMA program for a number of reasons: the highly comprehensive and challenging exams (testing various subjects in Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), economics, finance, management, strategic planning, and ethics, to name a few), the professionalism and ethics standards, continuing education requirements, and the network of professionals I had already met through the local IMA® chapter.

When I started the program, I knew it wouldn't be an easy journey after looking at the requirements of the exam, so I developed a "baby steps" approach to eventually finish the exam. I couldn't envision finishing the program when I looked at the exam as a whole, so I developed a detailed plan to study for one small part of the exam at a time. I would set weekly goals (the baby steps) and give myself rewards along the way (every Saturday night I would treat myself to movies and ice cream, which I really enjoy). Over time I became more confident and felt I was walking and eventually

running along the road to the CMA. I studied for the exams using an online course completely by self-study. When I began the program, I reached out to my manager, Bob Dieterich, SVP & CFO, who was very confident in my abilities and supported me fully. Thank you, Bob, for your inspiration! I also

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contacted IMA directly and spoke with a professional coach who also offered positive support.

The greatest challenge during this process was time management because I needed to manage work, family, and civic responsibilities and still find time to study. I would study several times per day so I could progress toward my goal. Although studying required a great deal of effort, I enjoyed the learning process so much that it turned into a challenging game that I found fun—at least that was the attitude I decided to take every day.

I am truly surprised and pleased with the results. I passed Part 1 in 2009, then Parts 2, 3, and 4 in 2010. I can't believe I passed each part on my first attempt! I am now very proud to be recognized as a CMA and look forward to participating in IMA chapter events and continuing education in the future. Very special thanks go to my wife Kristine and my son Paul, who fully supported me in my efforts. **SF**