

## A Work in Progress

By Jeff Jardine, CMA, CPA



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**A**s an undergraduate accounting student at Brigham Young University in Utah, I worked part-time teaching Spanish to adults who were headed overseas for Christian service missions. I was amazed at the capacity of these adults to study and acquire a new language in their later years, often decades removed from formal studies. I repeatedly asked myself, “What are the characteristics of those who successfully accomplish their language-learning goals?” Over time, I noticed a pattern: Those students who continued to learn and, most importantly, learned *how* to learn were best able to grasp the principles associated with learning a new language. I also noted that their various advanced degrees often didn’t correlate with language-learning success. Indeed, only those who hadn’t remained stagnant and had continually increased their learning beyond a bachelor’s degree seemed best able to adapt to a new intellectual and cultural paradigm.

This lesson remained on my mind as I began my career. Once I achieved an initial foothold in my first job in public accounting, I began to think about my additional learning goals beyond my formal education years. Thanks to the influence of a remarkable management accounting professor, I knew about the CMA® (Certified Management Accountant) designation and soon investigated the requirements for the certification. I invested in CMA review materials and carved out time in the early morning hours to study. This effort was challenging,

but I found these study periods to be a welcome respite amid the demands of daily work. In due time, I attained the CMA designation.

A short time later, I became aware of an internal position where I could employ the skills gained in studying for the CMA exam and get additional learning opportunities to continue to grow in my career. Recently, I spoke with one of the managing partners of my organization who agreed that learning how to learn has been critical for his career progression. Before he attained his current position, he would take a class or two at a local university every semester. What he learned in these classes directly benefited client relationships. I intend to follow his example, and I’ve been grateful for continued chances to apply CMA concepts. As I consider future projects, a key question I consider for each is “What can I learn in this position, and how will I learn it?”

These days, I occasionally speak to student groups at my alma mater and at student conferences. In each instance, I relate to students my experience as a Spanish teacher and ask them to consider lifelong learning goals. We discuss how a college degree is a worthy goal, but it shouldn’t be the end of learning. Current labor trends indicate the need for individuals to constantly learn new job skills. The ability to learn and teach ourselves new things is a fundamental skill. I recognize that my career is an unending work in progress; I look forward to continuing to learn. **SF**