How Fast Forward and IT Certifications Got an IT Career Back on Track

ShareThis✅

by Janet Pinkerton on March 29, 2012

In early 2010, Melanie Moody had IT skills, having worked in the field for decades, but her skills were outdated because she had left her last IT job in 2005 due to health reasons. Fast Forward, a community technology center in Columbia, S.C., helped Moody earn CompTIA A+ and Network+ certifications to resume her IT career.

Melanie Moody

"Technology moves so fast in the IT field, when I tried to get back into it, I had a hard time; my knowledge was behind," says Moody, who worked as an office manager for two years before being laid off in January 2010.

Amid recent high unemployment rates, employers can be choosy about who they hire. After she was laid off, Moody was determined to earn her IT certifications.

"You really have to have something to make yourself stand out," she says. "By having the certifications on my resume, I would be one step up over some of these other candidates. "

In the spring of 2010, Moody learned that Fast Forward had partnered with CompTIA's Creating IT Futures Foundation to offer online IT training and exam vouchers, and she quickly applied to the program and began to earn her A+ and Network+ certifications. In August of 2011, Moody was hired as a systems operator for Intralot, the company that administers the South Carolina Education Lottery.

Now in its 13th year, Fast Forward offers technology programming to veterans, seniors, preschoolers and adults with special needs, using federal, state, local and private funding sources. Over the past five years, Fast Forward has administered roughly 150 scholarships—primarily for veterans— through the CompTIA Creating IT Futures Foundation.

"It's really changed a lot of lives in this area," says Fast Forward Executive Director Dee Albritton.

Moody came into Fast Forward's program with experience repairing computers and helping people use computers. Out of high school, she earned a two-year certification in computer technology from an Atlanta technical school (Control Data Institute in Atlanta, which since closed). Her IT career included work as a computer technician for several companies in Atlanta and seven years as an IT support technician for the South Carolina Department of Mental Health.

Even with that background, Moody says, "I really believe the certifications helped me to get the job I have now."

She has high praise for Albritton and the Fast Forward staff. "They were instrumental in helping me get the job I have now," she says. "At one point, I was really struggling financially and had to turn off my Internet access. But I was able to come in to Fast Forward and get online to take my classes."

Now Moody is preparing to take the CompTIA Security+ exam in April. She wants to continue to improve her IT knowledge and skills and increase her earning potential. The next goal? A Cisco certification.

"A Cisco certification is one of the best you can have right now in this industry, but it's pretty expensive and time-consuming to get," she says. "That's why I was so thrilled to get the certifications I have now through Creating IT Futures and Fast Forward. These certifications are going to help me back into a position where I could pursue other certifications on my own."