

## Robert Stalzer

Certified Software Development Professional

### *Success Story*

Robert Stalzer didn't start out in the software development industry. His bachelor's degree in mathematics led him to a career as an actuarial consultant, but his search for a more interesting profession eventually brought him to the "software side of the house."

Robert has been an IEEE member since he was a student at DePaul University. He first became aware of the Certified Software Development Professional (CSDP) program because of his membership, but it wasn't until he'd met a CSDP and learned more about the credential that he got comfortable with the idea that he could apply for, and pass, the exam.

And why did he become CSDP certified? As Robert explains, "One reason was to upgrade from being yet another degree-holder to having professional recognition from an international body. In many fields, professionals don't even state their degrees on business cards or show them in email signatures, so a professional certification is more formally visible where appropriate. Because I had also transitioned out of day-to-day coding, I thought it worthwhile to secure a lasting acknowledgement of my experience base. As a software project manager I also wanted the certification as a strategic differentiator: the CSDP distinguishes me from other project managers in the eyes of developers and upper management, and in software engineering contexts it implies greater depth than 'former developer' or 'just a project manager.' I also wanted the weight of a continuing professional certification from IEEE, rather than a seminar-completion document from a training vendor."

Since becoming certified, Robert has managed larger projects that resulted in new products or significant new functionality. These projects have been more challenging, and their value gives them higher priority and visibility within his organization. With the CSDP, he says, "I've gained more internal mobility, and twice I've been able to migrate to areas that fit my aspirations better -- internal interviewing is becoming more common as companies redeploy their talent among new initiatives. As awareness of the certification expands, it will support my positioning for future opportunities."

Robert believes his company benefits from having a CSDP on staff because a strong software engineering orientation is important in an environment filled with temptations to "manage by deadline" or overemphasize the role of available technologies. A CSDP also helps bring a software engineering base to teams with specialty skills, thus improving functional interactions among contributors with different roles.

Much of Robert's preparation for the CSDP occurred before he even knew about the exam because he had elected to pursue an MS in software engineering at DePaul while working as a developer. As he later worked to align his education with the Software Engineering Body of Knowledge (SWEBOK) references, he read technical books that were available online through his memberships in the IEEE Computer Society and the ACM. He borrowed books through interlibrary loans, bought new and used titles over the internet, and even drove to Northern Illinois University to read a book he couldn't get quickly any other way.



**Current Job Role:**  
Software Project  
Manager

**Location:**  
Des Plaines, IL, USA

**In his own words:**  
Since becoming certified, I'm now able to use better judgment in areas where I previously relied on instinct, and I've been better able to formalize my input when discussing solution trade-offs. Applying these skills benefits my stakeholders in my current role as a project manager.

Since getting certified, he has become chair of the Chicago Software Process Improvement Network (C-SPIN <http://c-spin.net>). This volunteer service provides him a great opportunity to contribute locally to software process improvement, and it helps him accumulate the professional development units he needs to maintain his CSDP certification. Robert also holds a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification, and he believes the combination is important because “although many PMPs are working in software-intensive businesses, more companies are seeking project managers who have some subject matter expertise in addition to their PMP certifications. I'm pleased to carry both certifications because they show preparation for the work I'm doing now and they give me concurrent career threads for the future – but I'm more rewarded by the technical challenge that went into earning the CSDP.”