

## Embracing My Passion: The Journey to Becoming a Certified Construction Manager (CCM)

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Embarking on a career in the built environment presents individuals with a spectrum of opportunities, and the decision between becoming a Certified Construction Manager® (CCM®) or a Professional Engineer (PE) involves careful consideration of personal inclinations, career goals, and the desired impact on the construction industry. The credentials are not mutually exclusive, and many pursue and obtain both. In this article, I will share my own journey and delve into the reasons that led me to pursue a path as a Certified Construction Manager instead of a Professional Engineer.

### Passion for Construction Management

As a 12-year-old, I set my sights on a career in engineering, fueled by the dream of joining the Army to build bridges. Fast forward to obtaining my Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering and being commissioned into the Army as an engineer - I was on the path I had envisioned. However, the journey took an unexpected turn when I discovered my passion for construction management during my tenure with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's Mobile District.

My initial education in scheduling, estimating, and planning construction projects came from my Army assignments, shaping my love for the intricacies of construction management. This passion only grew as I transitioned from construction management to quality management, relishing every day spent on projects.



### Choosing Construction Management over Professional Engineering

I contemplated obtaining a PE license, I grappled with the time commitment and my dedication to engineering. Designing and engineering consulting didn't align with my aspirations; my heart belonged to construction management. The realization that the PE exam didn't assess proficiency in construction management further solidified my decision.

My journey took a pivotal turn when I left the Army, seeking to pursue my passion outside of the military and embark on a construction management career with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The unconventional decision to forgo obtaining my PE didn't hinder my progress at first. However,


it became evident that without a PE, I would be limited in USACE. Along the way I met Bruce D'Agostino, past president of the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA). Attending sessions led by Bruce opened my eyes to the CCM credential, a path that perfectly aligned with my aspirations.

### **Certified Construction Manager Journey**

My employer's commitment to having several employees obtain their CCM provided the impetus I needed. With a paper application in hand and a dedicated study group, we delved into the world of construction management two evenings a week after work. The camaraderie and shared commitment among the group not only facilitated our learning but also contributed to a remarkable seven out of eight passing the exam on the first try.

Earning my CCM didn't serve as an instant career catalyst, but it did open doors to a network of like-minded professionals who shared my passion for construction management. The CCM certification became a testament to my proficiency in managing construction projects, while my association with CMAA provided continuous learning opportunities, enabling me to stay abreast of evolving methods and tools in the field.

### **Conclusion**

In retrospect, choosing the CCM over the PE allowed me to forge a career that aligned with my true passion. It wasn't about following convention; it was about following my heart. The CCM became more than just a certification – it became a symbol of my dedication to construction management and a gateway to a community that fueled my continuous growth in the field. While the path of a professional engineer offers its merits, the choice ultimately lies in understanding one's unique strengths and goals, paving the way for a fulfilling career journey in the construction industry. 



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## About the Author

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Dennis Milsten, CCM, is the director of federal programs at [Siris](#). He is an experienced professional with a diverse background in capital program management, construction quality management, construction procurement, and business development in both the public and private sectors.

With over 40 years of experience, he has held various key roles in government departments such as the Army (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), Veterans Affairs (Office of Construction and Facilities Management), and Treasury (Office of Procurement).

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