The Journey to Becoming a CCIE

Antonio Cunanan is an engineer with the Cisco Technical Assistance Center (TAC) team in Richardson, Texas. Two-and-a-half years ago, when Antonio was part of the Cisco TAC team in Australia, he embarked on a journey to attain his Cisco CCIE® Routing and Switching certification with his friend and colleague Andy Wang. When they completed their journey, Antonio and Andy assembled this slide deck to present to their fellow TAC engineers. Antonio created the presentation, which he and Andy have presented five times, so that they could share with their peers what it was like to prepare for the CCIE exam. Antonio and Andy found that partnering up to study was very helpful. "You have all the motivation in the world that first week, that second week. Then, life catches up with you," Antonio says. Studying together made it easier for them to stay focused and motivated.   Over the course of four months, Antonio and Andy studied every weekday from the time that they got home from work until late in the evening, and then all day on the weekends. Antonio even set up a sleeping bag in Andy's lounge, so that they could begin studying first thing in the morning. This rigorous schedule left them with little time for socializing. They missed parties and nights out with friends, who would ask, "You already graduated?why are you still studying?" Balancing family and friends (not to mention their sanity) was challenging. Studying for the CCIE left Antonio and Andy emotionally and physically exhausted, with no time to do anything else. Slide nine of their deck shows one of their methods for staying motivated. They wrote down the CCIE numbers that they thought and hoped they would get and the amount of money they would potentially earn as CCIEs. They posted these motivators on the wall behind their work area and often looked to them for inspiration. Antonio and Andy took their CCIE exam on the same day. Both failed their first attempt. After taking a weekend off, they immediately returned to their studies. Though Andy's apartment where they studied had sliding glass doors and a view of the airport, Antonio says it "started to feel like a little prison." He admits that he wondered how much longer he would be able to keep up with this commitment and this lifestyle. To stay positive, he reminded himself that with every attempt he was one step closer to passing. "I knew my technical skills were definitely more developed than they were before starting on the journey," he says. "I knew I was becoming a better engineer." He adds that studying for the CCIE is a "test of your character." "After failing it the first time the journey to the second attempt was much different," says Antonio. "It was definitely more a mental/emotional challenge then a technical one. I felt after the first attempt I was definitely there technically but my exam technique was lacking." He worked on his time management techniques. "I made it a key point to question the proctor on anything I was unclear about on the second attempt. My thinking was even if the proctor does not help at least I know deep down I had done everything I could to give myself the best opportunity to pass." Thirty days later, both men passed the exam on their second attempt. Their happy celebration is captured in slide 13. When giving their presentation, Antonio and Andy try to emphasize the emotional side of the journey. You need to have "everybody on board" as a team, especially spouses or partners, they say. Andy's partner would often cook for them while they studied. Antonio, engaged at the time, had little time to spend with his fiancée. (We were glad to learn that they have been happily married for a couple of years now.) Slide 12 shows "The Team" taking a well-deserved break. Lack of time for family obligations is something with which Antonio is all too familiar. He tells the story of his mentor, who passed his certification exam after a full year of studying. When he called his wife to tell her the good news, she was so overwhelmed with emotion that she almost got into a car accident. Another of his female colleagues said "I got my life back" after passing her certification, to which her husband replied, "I got my wife back."   As difficult as the journey toward obtaining his CCIE was, it has become a very fond memory for Antonio. He is proud that he was able to "overcome the obstacle and get through it." And after having a couple of years to recover, he is studying for his CCIE Voice with a group of his coworkers. "The power of doing it as a group is a lot stronger than doing it yourself," he says. Click the attached Powerpoint document below to view The Journey. [The Journey to Becoming a CCIE_final.ppt](#)