Go To The Head Of Your Class
by Alan Sadowsky

It is generally understood and agreed that in order for TPF to flourish three things must occur:

1. The product must evolve to include the latest technical features and functionality. The demands for inter-platform symbiosis, and e-commerce capabilities are key elements in today's technological blueprint for success.

2. There must be an ongoing effort to insure a public awareness of TPF and its place in the business world. There is no point in continuing to invest in an unknown product.

3. There must be a continuous effort to educate current and future users of TPF. It is imperative that the global knowledge base of the TPF technical community keeps pace with any enhancements to the product.

While each of these issues is important in it's own right, I believe that there is a practical way to satisfy each of these items with a single common solution - TPF Technical Certification.

The Case For TPF Certification
The concept of technical certification is not new. Companies on both sides of the educational fence have been using certification programs successfully for many years. The certification provider benefits from the sale of educational materials (manuals, textbooks, preparatory reference, etc.), as well as the formal classroom instruction to prepare the candidate for certification testing. The company sponsoring the certification recipient benefits from the enhanced skill set of the employee, and the validation of that skill set by an impartial testing process. This is a classical win-win situation that provides both parties with a positive financial return on their respective investment.

In TPF-specific terms, technical certification lends itself nicely to addressing many issues faced by IBM, by TPF-based customers, and by individual TPF technical professionals. For example, consider just some of the following potential "solutions" :

· A formal certification program demonstrates IBM's ongoing commitment to TPF. This sends a clear and strong message to the TPF customer, the TPF technical professional, and the potential TPF user that the technology is alive, and thriving.

· Certification of multiple TPF disciplines would drive the development of new training courses for IBM as well as other TPF-specific training resources.

· The development of new courses would spawn new training venues, i.e. formal classroom training, self-study, web-based CBI, and the development of new training materials.

· Individual TPF customers who currently provide and maintain their own in-house TPF training programs would have an alternative education source to turn to, saving them considerable dollars in instructors, materials, and classroom space.

· TPF technical professionals would have a wealth of new-founded educational opportunities open to them. The ability to refine old skills and acquire new skills would primarily attract the existing TPF technical population. Additionally, there is a vast untapped market of novice technical students who might look upon a new certification program as a ground floor opportunity for advancement and specialization.

· Certification would provide TPF customers with a formal criterion for measuring the technical competency of their employees. The definition of clearly defined career paths would be simplified greatly.

· Certification would provide TPF technicians with recognition, stature, accelerated career advancement, and improved compensation.

In order to give the reader some insight into the potential areas of specialization that could be certified, just consider the following list of curriculum subjects that has been *suggested* so far:

· IBM Certified TPF Systems Specialist - covering system internals, control program, I/O subsystem, etc.

· IBM Certified TPF Communications Specialist - covering SNA, TCP/IP, IIOP, MQ Series, etc.

· IBM Certified TPF Database Specialist - covering storage subsystems (DASD), physical and logical database configurations, FACE/FACS, RIAT, utilities (RECOUP, Capture/Restore), TPFDF, etc.

· IBM Certified TPF Performance Specialist - covering performance measurement and analysis, Data Collection/Data Reduction, etc.

· IBM Certified TPF Operations Specialist - covering functional literacy, running of utilities, system resource management, system recovery, automation concepts.

· IBM Certified TPF Web Server Specialist - covering web server technologies, TPF Mail, TCP/IP, SSL, firewalls, JAVA, PERL, XML, etc.

· IBM Certified VisualAge TPF Specialist - covering implementation, maintenance, administration, and use.

· IBM Certified TPF Programming Languages Specialist - covering S/390 Assembler, TPF macros, ANSI 'C', C++, PL/I, etc.

The fee for taking the certification exam would be built into the overall cost of the classes. Candidates who pass the certification exam would receive their notification by mail. In addition, their Manager would also be notified that their employee has been awarded IBM certification.

There will always be cases where an individual chooses to focus on only one area of specialization, thereby minimizing his or her participation in further certification. In those cases, it is more than likely that the individual has no desire for technical growth beyond his or her current interests. The individual may be very happy doing what they are doing. They may feel there are plenty of opportunities for growth and advancement where they are, or may be closing in on a well-deserved retirement.

In this case, and in cases where certification in several disciplines wouldn't greatly effect someone's opportunities

for advancement, or increases in compensation, IBM could provide two major incentives for potential certification candidates.

The first would be a "test only" option where the candidate could bypass the preparatory class and opt to just take the certification test.

The second incentive is what I call "The Holy Grail". While certification in one, or even two or three TPF disciplines would be notable, there should be an even higher level of technical excellence to strive for, namely "TPF Technical Fellow". This designation would be granted upon successful certification in a pre-determined number of TPF disciplines, and would carry the highest degree of professional recognition within the TPF community.

So Where Do Things Stand Right Now?
I am very pleased to announce that since our initial meeting with IBM in September, the proposal for TPF Certification has been generously embraced by the TPF Business Development and TPF Education organizations. The TPF User Group Board of Directors has agreed to set up a Task Force to assist in establishing the guidelines and criteria of an "Open Standard" for TPF education providers.

If you are a provider of TPF Education, and would like to participate in the evolution of a TPF Certification program, please consider attending the next TPF User Group Conference in Toronto, Canada, April 23-25, 2001. Your attendance is desired, and your involvement is highly valued. Together we can really make a difference!