

What have we done?

ETCP and the coming of age of entertainment technicians

HERE'S AN ETCP PRACTICE EXAM for you. Was the Entertainment Technician Certification Program:

- A. An evil plot to create a revenue stream for ESTA
- B. Dreamed up by an employer to make it harder to get and keep jobs
- C. Created by union officials to insure their jurisdictional dominance
- D. None of the above

Answer "D" on this multiple choice exam—is true!

The fact is, the ETCP certifications were conceived by concerned technicians and employers who saw two problems in the entertainment industry: 1) there were many inadequately trained people working at both high and low level positions. And, 2) the industry was continuing to evolve toward more sophisticated and technically demanding types of entertainment technologies.

The use of qualified technicians has become a necessity and an obligation, not just a luxury, but until now there was no definition of what qualified meant, and the only way to measure a technician was by reputation, resume, or some other anecdotal information.

“The use of qualified technicians has become a necessity and an obligation ...”

In most places there was no impetus to guarantee or even ask if the work force was up to speed with the industry's demands. There were serious gaps and inconsistencies in training, if there was any training at all. And, if you did care enough to ask, there was no standardized way to assess the knowledge level of anyone in the industry.

This group of technicians and professionals, led by leaders within ESTA, set out to try to remedy this problem. Needless to say, it was a lot to bite off, and, as it was the first attempt to do any such thing in the entertainment industry, no one was even really sure where to start. The journey from the moment of conception to the current state of Entertainment Technician Certification has been a long and interesting one.

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What methods are there to measure a person's qualifications? Do you create a training program and hand out certificates? Who knew there were such enormous differences between a certificate program and a certification program? Most of those involved had never heard of psychometrics or the modified “Anghoff method.”

To begin, the right players were put in place. The strategy was measured and scrutinized by certification experts. The seed money to start was raised. The obstacles were overcome and the program was established.

When the certification exams were finally completed and the first exams launched, a new expectation was created in the community of technicians. Someone cared that riggers knew what it took to do the work safely. Someone had written down the qualifications for an entertainment electrician so that everyone could see them, feel them, and work toward them. With that, a new sense of professionalism began to arise.

The unspoken (but quietly intended) consequence of this effort has been that everyone involved in the industry has begun to seek more and better training and knowledge. Those who have been in the industry for years have taken to the books and attended classes to bone up on the finer aspects of their crafts. Those who are relatively new to the industry have set certification as a goal and

are studying more and asking questions that went unasked before. Event centers, unions, and employers are all looking to provide more and better training for their entertainment workers. Insurance companies are beginning to recognize that employers who use certified technicians are taking steps to address the risks inherent in the industry.

The spoken consequence has been a free flowing discussion about professionalism. Groups of "juicers" create discussion groups to talk about the knowledge needed to be qualified. Riggers stand around at venues bouncing ideas about the rigging they see. Whenever there is a group of entertainment industry workers together the conversation turns towards not only training needed for certification, but what other training can they get? What else do they need to know? How can they make themselves safer and better?

This has created a sense of professionalism that is important to our industry. In the not so distant past the only way to learn your craft was from the old salts you met on the job. Much of what was done for many decades was passed that way exclusively. Now, with the expansion of the industry we don't have the luxury to only learn from others on the job. Our industry has matured so significantly in the past 30 years that just passing the knowledge along from one worker to another is no longer sufficient. In an era where someone who has a little practical knowledge, a good attitude, and shows up on time can move quickly up the ranks, we need a more disciplined approach to assessing our workers.

In addition there are areas of the country that only have entertainment jobs a few times a month. Technicians in these markets who have a passion for this kind of work don't mind that it is a part-time, extra cash job. Those same people must still demonstrate a level of professionalism that protects the audiences and their fellow workers. Touring shows and venues in out-of-the way markets now have a simple way

ETCP web-based practice exams now available

The fifty-question web-based ETCP Practice Examinations launched on July 15, and within the first six weeks, over 100 people signed up to take advantage of the opportunity. Here is what people are saying about the practice exams.

What is your initial reaction to the idea of a practice exam?

"I feel the Practice exam is an excellent tool to help technicians understand not only the material covered, but the style in which it is presented. It is a big step toward demystifying the entire exam process and I strongly encourage all lighting professionals to take the exam, whether they are planning on becoming certified or not."
Martin Crawford, Cirque du Soleil

Did the fact that the practice exams are now available help you take the step towards certification?

"Yes, it did give us that push and I was glad it was available. The practice exam helped me understand the process of how the exams are given. After working in the convention and theatre trades for 29 years I am glad that there is finally a standard of testing which stage technicians can now be evaluated on. For my rigging company I find it necessary to now certify myself and my technicians not only to refresh the basics but to make sure we are all following common practices in our trade."
Paul M. Goldman, LED Services

Did you find the exams user-friendly?

"Using the ETCP Practice Exams is generally user-friendly. Reading the directions reveals that by selecting an answer to each question, the software will give you the correct answer. This makes it a useful study tool that you can return to and go over as often as you like until your month's subscription is up. Maybe the best part is that it gives people with little or no testing experience a feel for what the exam will be like." Jim Utterback, I.A.T.S.E. Local 22

What did you learn about yourself/your skills afterwards?

"I learned that I believe I would do rather well on the real exam. It reassured me that if I were to take the exam it would not be a waste of money. It also provided me with a good study tool so I now know where I need to learn more and study. It also reassured me that what I have learned in school and on the job will come in handy for this exam."

Andrew Penney, Cirque du Soleil

Was the score report at the end helpful to you?

"Yes the score report was excellent! I really learned my weak areas and I think I'm ready for the real thing soon! It's super helpful to have that breakdown and not have to do that myself! I think it will really make the test more approachable to those who may have been skeptical about their ability to pass it! Thanks!"

Ben Price, Freelance Entertainment Lighting Specialist

As a trainer, what value do you see in the practice exams?

"During a training seminar in Boston, we discussed the practice exams in class. When the class was over, one of the attendees came up to me and said that learning about the practice exams was the best part of the class. The people that I've spoken to who have had the chance to take the practice exams have all said that it's a huge help. I think it really helps to alleviate a lot of the fear of taking a test, regardless of how well prepared you might be for it."

Richard Cadena, ETCP Recognized Trainer

The practice exams are available for \$35 per exam at <http://etcp.esta.org/etcppracticeexams> or you may go to the ETCP Homepage and follow the link to the exams.

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to help assess their riggers and electricians. While certification may not be the definitive mark that a technician is appropriate for a specific job, it certainly helps in making good choices.

The net result of the certification program has been a coming of age in the crafts; a long overdue acknowledgement that professionals in the industry need knowledge, experience, and training to handle the risks inherent in the work. That kind of professionalism is the key to long, healthy, and successful careers. ■



Eddie Raymond is Vice President of IATSE Local 16 in San Francisco and assistant to the Business Agent with a primary focus on training. He is Chair of their Education Committee of San Mateo County Central Labor Council, serves on the ESTA Board of Directors, and as SME Rigging Skills Co-Chair on the ETCP Council.



Kent Jorgensen has been a Motion Picture Grip since the mid-eighties. He is the Safety and Training Representative for IATSE Local 80, Chairman of the IATSE Safety Committee, and a member of the ETCP Council.

All three ETCP examinations will be offered during the LDI

Entertainment Electrician Exam • Friday, November 20, 2:00 p.m.

Rigger – Arena Exam • Saturday, November 21, 9:00 a.m.

Rigger – Theatre Exam • Saturday, November 21, 2:00 p.m.

Interested applicants must submit their application, along with supporting materials and fee, to the ETCP office no later than October 26. Space is limited, so submit your application today!

Candidate information, including eligibility requirements and applications, is available on the ETCP website at <http://etcp.esta.org>. If you would like the information mailed to you, please contact Meredith Moseley-Bennett, ETCP Certification Manager, at 212.244.1505 or certification@esta.org.

Total Structures' summer hoist school provided 16 renewal credits towards ETCP rigging examination re-certification. ETCP Certified Technicians may find more credit earning opportunities on the ETCP website at <http://etcp.esta.org/>.

80%

In the past two years, the number of ETCP Recognized Employers has increased by 80 percent. These employers are investing in safety because they know it is responsible and ethical — and a distinction that can help their business.

ETCP Recognized Employers are committed to hiring ETCP Certified Entertainment Technicians, encouraging their employees to get certified, or both.

ETCP Certification provides independent confirmation of individuals' knowledge and abilities. Hiring these technicians not only gives employers a direct path to the industry's most qualified, up-to-date entertainment technicians — it also helps them distinguish themselves from their competitors.

Take advantage of this resource and give yourself a competitive edge by seeking out certified technicians. Insist on ETCP Certified Entertainment Electricians and Riggers for the top spots on your team.

For more information about becoming an ETCP Recognized Employer, visit etcp.esta.org or e-mail certification@esta.org.



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