

BY RAY JANSON

ETCP certification is an investment that pays long-term benefits

Commitment to safety and training is a win/win for all

JANSON INDUSTRIES IS A 75-YEAR-OLD theatrical rigging company that I own with my brother, Eric; we represent the third generation of family ownership and management. The company's primary focus is stage rigging and the manufacture of stage curtains, tracks, and acoustical clouds.

Like many rigging companies, Janson Industries previously relied primarily on on-the-job training to ensure that our technicians were working at high standards.

This was an easy task when we were smaller and one of the owners was at job sites all the time to teach and guide our employees. As we have grown, this task has become more difficult.

To compensate for this lack of direct control, we have undergone a number of training initiatives. My brother and I have face-to-face conversations with our installers in our headquarters and visit job sites to monitor workplace quality. Our foremen

lead weekly job-site toolbox talks to discuss workplace safety topics. We have turned an 800 square foot room in our building into a training center and invite both internal and outside guest speakers to lead technical and safety seminars and demonstrations. We also have company meetings to establish internal best practices and procedures. However, we had never developed a method for formally assessing the breadth of technical knowledge obtained by our technicians.

When the Entertainment Technician Certification Program was initially established, we intentionally delayed committing to the process. We first wanted to

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Janson Industries holds regular in-house training for their staff in their on-site training center.

gauge the market's acceptance of the Certified Rigger designation and to get a sense of how our direct competitors were reacting. We also had no idea how much effort it would take to get our people up to test-taking form, we weren't excited about the cost (both of the test and, particularly, the cost of on-the-clock preparation time), and we didn't want to go through the logistical complications of fitting testing into our installation schedule.

Using this gutless yet practical approach to the certification program, it took until 2008 before it became obvious to us that the market was embracing the concept. The ETCP Certified Rigger designation had started to arise in conversations with our customers and we were beginning to see it in stage design specifications.

After we concluded that we needed to investigate the certification route, Janson Industries needed a guinea pig to take the examination and debrief the group about the experience. While we have over a dozen very competent and experienced theatrical riggers who were qualified to sit for the exam, ultimately, Eric and I concluded that the most logical guinea pig—was me.

There were a number of factors that led to this decision. My brother and I didn't want to ask any of our people to go through a process that was new, different and, potentially, uncomfortable that one of us wasn't willing to undergo himself. We, additionally, felt that the best way to understand what was involved in becoming certified was to experience it personally. Frankly, I was curious whether I'd stand up to our profession's gold standard; there had never been a benchmark before.

From an employee relations standpoint, we didn't want to subject any of our employees to the added pressure of being the first to take the test (they are under enough stress already) and wanted to avoid the potential adverse affects to them, their peers, and their self-confidence if they failed. On the other hand, if I didn't pass the test, we could chalk it up to my lack of recent field experience (it's been some time since I strung wire rope) and, as an added



By providing in-house training for their employees, Janson Industries demonstrates their strong commitment to safety and continuing education.

benefit, it would give our folks a source of amusement at my expense.

I called some contacts at J. R. Clancy, a company with which we have been doing business for more than 50 years, and got some advice as to study materials. In June 2008, with some trepidation, I took the

testing, that this is a source of anxiety, particularly with regard to mathematics. In order to help our people overcome this, we provide them with the appropriate rigging books, set up posters featuring ETCP questions of the week, and hold individual and group work sessions and practice

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ETCP Certified Rigger – Theatre test and proved to myself and our people that it can be passed.

Since then, we are committed to the examination of all of our technical people. Eric and I have made it very clear to our installers about our desire to have them become ETCP Certified Riggers. In addition to encouraging them through providing company resources to learn any material with which they need help, we pay for study time and the examination itself. We also pay a bonus to everyone who passes the examination and, at the same time, a bonus to their direct supervisor.

Most of our installers haven't taken a test in years and we found, after initial practice

examinations. Our guys even come in on the weekends for study sessions.

We now have eight people with the ETCP Certified Rigger – Theatre designation at Janson Industries. We celebrate here whenever anyone passes the exam; it's an achievement for them and an affirmation that our training and safety programs are working. The testing process also gives my brother and me a level of confidence that our crews are being managed by foremen who have been independently evaluated as technically competent. Furthermore, training is an ongoing process (both pre- and post-examination) and the testing process helps us to understand where people stand so that we can cater our educational

programs accordingly.

Our customers have clearly accepted the validity of the ETCP Certified Rigger designation. For instance, theatre designers are increasingly emphasizing the use of ETCP Certified Riggers at construction sites. When we made the decision to work toward

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certification for all of our technicians, the specifications that we evaluated for new theatres and theatre renovations had just started to call for at least one ETCP Certified Rigger at job sites. We now see this requirement in over 90% of the significant jobs on which we bid. From a design standpoint, this makes sense—theatrical consultants and architects routinely name particular products and installation companies in their specifications; the ETCP designation gives them the ability to set standards for the people who physically work on these projects.

Having the number of ETCP Certified Riggers that we do has also helped Janson Industries from a marketing perspective. We work on

a national scale from one office in Canton, OH. With a geographic scope that large, we are exposed to many potential customers who know little about our company. The ETCP designation helps a great deal to alleviate concerns about the ability of our installers; their technical competence has been independently verified. Furthermore, given that we have so many certified riggers, I think it helps new customers understand the scope of our operations (we're not just a small, local company) and gives them confidence that they will ultimately be satisfied with the work we do.

The certification process hasn't been easy but, without question, it will pay long-term benefits to Janson Industries. I truly believe that it should be a key component of every rigging company's training program. ■



Ray Janson is a partner at Janson Industries, a 75-year-old theatre stage rigging company in Canton, OH, where he spent his formative years crawling over fabric rolls in the sewing shop. He has an MBA from the University of Chicago.