

ETCP recognized trainers help Barbados raise the rigging standard

BY TYLER DELONG AND TRACY NUNNALLY

CULTURE IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST EXPORTS of the United States with approximately \$1.1 trillion worth of events happening all over the globe annually. Ask anyone who has toured with one of these shows and they can confirm US entertainment is ubiquitous. What often goes unnoticed is that we're not just exporting music, theatre, dance, or spectacle; we also are exporting increased audience expectations. Our shows are typically complex, heavy, and full of state-of-the-art technical equipment. For locations that don't have the same kind of production infrastructure that major cities in the US or Europe have, supporting US-style events can pose a substantial challenge.

This is especially true for rigging, where modern shows often have thousands of pounds of lights, sound, scenic, and video equipment to hang. Rigging is often thought of in terms of weight loads, hardware, and geometry, but there is also a human side to it. Responsible rigging requires knowledge, trust, experience, and teamwork. You need to know that the person next to you knows what to do and that

they've got your back. They need to feel the same way about you. That kind of mutual trust is earned through training, shared experiences, and a common commitment to do things in a responsible manner every time.

The National Cultural Foundation (NCF) of Barbados has recognized this challenge. They want to be able to host large international acts on the island, and to make that happen, they need to invest in better training of their local crews. Jamal Cobham from the NCF put it perfectly: "We wanted to empower our riggers with the kind of knowledge and hands-on experience that aligns with international best practices." There was no one in Barbados with the necessary expertise to provide that rigging training, so they emailed DeLong Rigging Solutions asking for assistance.

At first, Tyler DeLong, founder of DRS and an ETCP Recognized Trainer, thought the email might be a scam but replied anyway. Scam worries were quickly pushed aside, and plans were made to do two days of rigging training in May of 2025 at the Garfield Sobers Gymnasium, the largest venue in Barbados, which seats about 5,000 people.

Shortly after the dates were set, Tyler suffered a serious concussion from a slip at home which required substantial time for recuperation and therapy. (The countertop was not able to be rehabilitated.)



Image description: Six individuals work together on a jigsaw puzzle at a National Cultural Foundation Barbados event, fostering focus and teamwork in a casual indoor setting.

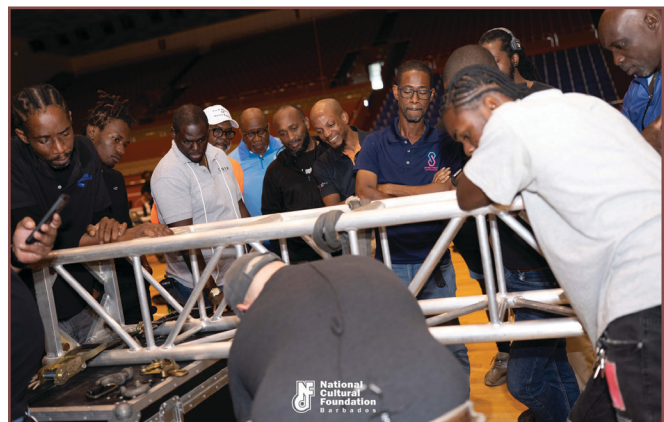


Image description: Participants gather around a metal truss structure during a hands-on demonstration, emphasizing technical skill-building in a professional event environment.

As the date for the class crept closer, he wasn't certain he could physically make it through the two full days of teaching on his own. Knowing that one of the best things about our industry is how we help each other, Tyler called another ETCP Recognized Trainer, Tracy Nunnally of Vertigo, who suggested they bring Jamie Nicklas and Gabe Nunnally along as well.

From the moment they landed in Barbados, they knew this wasn't a typical training situation. The students whom the NCF had assembled (venue staff, freelancers, and aspiring riggers) represented a wide gamut of experience, but all were there with an earnest desire to be better. That mindset matters more than most people think. Technical production is rarely glamorous; it's physically demanding, mentally taxing, and often thankless, but it is essential to any show. That's why investing the time and money to have this kind of training available can be life-changing, particularly in locations that haven't previously had the opportunity, and using ETCP Recognized Trainers means the expectations stay high. Tracy and Tyler have worked on Broadway and arena tours, in academic settings, and in a variety of non-traditional venues. They know what quality work looks like and can adapt their teaching to best serve the students without watering down the content.

Day one was all about the basics: overall rigging safety, personal protective equipment (PPE) selection and use, fall protection and prevention, planning, communication, and emergency response. Tyler said it best: "If you aren't being safe, you still won't accomplish the task when you fall from the sky." The trainers emphasized that safety isn't only about preventing falls; it's also having a plan in place should someone fall.

The focus of day two was rigging equipment and applying rigging skills in hands-on scenarios. Using some of DeLong's training videos as a foundational resource, the instructors demonstrated the various equipment and commonly used knots. Each attendee was given their own length of rope, and there were plenty of objects available to tie knots to and around. Over the course of the day, the content progressed through the use of rigging hardware and demonstrating faster, safer methods for pulling motor points, building connections, and hanging truss. The attendees then had hands-on opportunities for practice. Even folks who had worked in that venue for years found new ways to do their jobs in a safer and more efficient manner. One of the Barbadian riggers said of the US method of hanging points, "That is so much easier and safer than what we have been doing." It was the kind of "Ah-ha" moment every trainer lives for!

An interesting part of the class was an exercise Tyler designed to mimic the kind of interdependent thinking required for good rigging. You don't always know what is needed until someone else tells you what they need. Using puzzle pieces, the attendees learned the value of accurate communication to determine an entire set of obstacles to complete the given situation. This exercise showed how effective communication and teamwork makes rigging safer and more efficient for all involved.



Image description: Workers in safety gear stand on a platform beneath a network of steel trusses, highlighting teamwork and engineering precision in a large architectural space.



Image description: Individuals help each other adjust harnesses and helmets during a safety workshop, exercising safety protocol in a controlled training setting.



Image description: Trainers manage laptops and headsets at a long table filled with gear and water bottles, orchestrating technical operations in a live event setting.

“ There’s an opportunity to build a web of safety and professionalism across the Caribbean. ”



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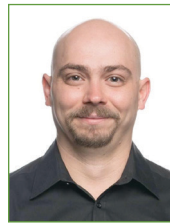


The trainers also learned from the Barbadian trainees. By carefully listening to their concerns and past practices, the trainers tailored their instruction to best meet the students' needs. Both Tyler and Tracy have been riggers for a long time and remember when the standard practice was to free-climb a beam with no PPE. By bringing the techniques and standards currently used in the US to Barbados, they helped them up their game.

Looking ahead, there's an opportunity to build a web of safety and professionalism across the Caribbean. Imagine a network of trained, certified professionals who can move between the islands, supervise each other's events, and raise the regional standard for live production. Imagine Barbados becoming a hub for technical arts dedicated to bringing students and professionals from across the region to a place for learning and mutual benefit.

So, when there is talk about the biggest exports of the US, perhaps the people are even more important than the cultural events. Skilled, passionate people who are willing to go anywhere, teach anyone, and raise the bar for everyone will make things safer and better for all involved. That's what happened in Barbados, and if we're lucky, we'll see the same thing happen in other places soon. ■

All photos courtesy of the National Cultural Foundation of Barbados.



Tyler DeLong is an ETCP Certified Rigger in both Theatrical and Arena Rigging (Certification #2771) and an ETCP Recognized Trainer for both. He is also a voting member of the TSP Rigging Workgroup. He earned a BA in Theatre with a Concentration in Technology from Indiana University (class of 2010). Tyler spent the majority of his early career working as a touring technician, primarily as the Tour Rigger/Automation Tech. He is now the Managing Partner of DeLong Rigging Solutions, a people-oriented rigging company based out of Bloomington, IN that provides inspections, training, repair/installation services, and consulting.



Professor **Tracy Nunnally** earned his MFA from Florida State University and has worked in professional entertainment since the 1980s. His expertise spans theatre automation, motion control, rigging, pyrotechnics, special effects, and technical design. He is a tenured professor, Technical Director, and head of both the Design and Technology Area and graduate theatre tech program at Northern Illinois University.

Tracy is an ETCP Certified Rigger Theatre and Arena (Certification #108), Recognized Trainer, Subject Matter Expert, and Recognized Employer. He is also an OSHA MEWP and

Forklift trainer. He serves on the ESTA Rigging Working Group, helping develop safety standards.

He is president of Vertigo™, a performer flying effects company whose work includes Broadway productions, NBA mascot effects, and a zipline for Machine Gun Kelly's *Sold Out Tour* at Cleveland Brown's stadium tour. Vertigo also does inspections, training, repairs, and installations for all kinds of venues. He also leads the TOP Flight Academy and regularly presents at national and international conferences.