

# Taking the first step on the ETCP certification journey

PROTOCOL'S ETCP NEWS generally features technicians who have been certified for years and are asked to give advice, share wisdom, or highlight how being certified has served their career. While those voices are important to the ETCP story, this issue's column will feature the also-important voices of two technicians at the beginning of their certification journey.

Deciding to apply to take one (or more) of ETCP's four certification exams is a first step in committing to safety and expertise in the entertainment industry. Riggers and electricians who are eligible for an exam often choose to become certified for a variety of reasons. For some, it highlights their commitment to employers, colleagues, clients, and performers. For others, it's their chance to be the change they want to see in the industry. Even though a candidate has enough work experience to be eligible for the exam, they still spend time studying in preparation to ensure that they successfully pass the exam within the three-hour time slot. To pursue certification is to set a goal that serves both the candidate and the industry.

Kristine Eckerman is a current candidate preparing for the ETCP Rigger – Arena exam. For her, becoming certified will both further her career and increase the representation of women within event rigging. Kristine shared her thoughts on her reasons and goals for applying:

"As someone who recently submitted my application for the ETCP Rigger – Arena certification, I understand that the process can seem overwhelming. I know that I need

to leverage my industry knowledge, along with the available study materials, to ensure my success. I am fortunate that my employer sees the value of this certification and encourages its employees to pursue it.

"The number of women in the rigging field is low, with the number of ETCP-certified women being even lower. I am excited to start this journey and continue the growth in my career, and I hope to encourage other women to enter our field and show that rigging and production are open to everyone. While women are a minority in production, there is a kinship in this

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industry that encourages everyone to grow. Throughout my career in theatre and live events, I have been fortunate to have mentors who helped me grow my skills, and this certification will allow me the opportunity to pay that forward to the next generation of female riggers.

"I look forward to joining the ranks of the other elite individuals who have completed this certification process and seeing the doors it will open for me, and the other women who come along after me."

Kristine's goals are to be commended. She knows that not only will her certification serve her, it will encourage more women to

become certified. To expand the presence of women in the ETCP-certified community, women need to see themselves reflected in the certificant pool. The Facebook group Women of ETCP is a small but growing group. If you are a woman who is certified or who is interested in becoming certified, join that group to get some lively discussions going. Good luck to Kristine as she prepares for her exam!

Derek Epstein is Certified Rigger – Theatre #4343. He took and passed his exam on September 9, 2023. Derek chose to attend the 2023 Midwest Rigging Intensive as his final study preparation before sitting for the exam. As with many technicians in the industry, he has worked for both large-budget employers and smaller, leaner employers and venues. For Derek, studying for the exam represented the opportunity to consolidate the diversity of training and knowledge he had acquired to this point in his career. His studies also caused him to reflect on some incorrect rigging practices he had encountered throughout his career. Derek had the following thoughts to share as a newly certified technician:

"As someone who recently received their ETCP Rigging Certification, I quickly realized just how many bad practices there are out there. When you finally understand the meaning of 'best practice,' a lot of things fall into perspective. For example, you think, 'Wow, I shouldn't have done that thing once (or all those times),' or now, you cannot turn off your inner rigger when walking into any room with something suspended from the ceiling. 'Best practice' is a phrase that held

less meaning before studying for my ETCP certification. Studying for the exam taught me more than I expected.

“Having obtained the certification, it all came into focus. Like others, I had previously worked at places where I was instructed to do things a certain way or was told, ‘It has always been done this way.’ A few months after becoming certified, I was invited back by a previous employer to share with the crew what I had learned on the certification path. I was honored. I had the opportunity to present the standards and rigging best practices when it came to their field of work. I was able to bring to light practices that, if I still worked there, I would want to improve. The company leadership deserves a lot of credit for taking the opportunity to provide their employees with continuing education and to improve upon their knowledge. I was not embarrassed to share with them, as I do now with you, that I realize I did not know what the best practices were then, but I do now.

“You are always growing professionally, and the ETCP certifications are yet another badge of honor to earn as you keep learning. It is okay to admit how little you may have known at earlier points in your career, and that you have changed your practices as

you have learned. For those of you working toward gaining an ETCP Certification: focus on the basics, take training opportunities if you can, develop good habits, and find ETCP-certified technicians to learn from along the way. For those of you who are already ETCP-certified, share your knowledge, know that what you say now carries more meaning, and lead by example in the field.

“So, what is ‘best practice?’ I think the Midwest Rigging Intensive Trainers would answer that by saying ‘It depends.’”

It is exciting to share the stories of two people at the beginning of their ETCP journeys. I hope Kristine and Derek’s words will encourage more qualified technicians to apply for certification. The industry is safer with more certified technicians working every day. ■



**Kristine Eckerman** is the Area Rigging Manager, in Washington, DC, for Encore. She has held several positions in Encore over the past 13 years, including Project Manager and Director of Operation. Kristine spent her early career as a sound engineer working at regional theaters, including Arena Stage.



**Derek Epstein** is a Rigging Manager for Encore covering the New England area. He is an ETCP Certified Rigger and has spent most of his career in technical production working in many roles at regional theaters, universities, and production companies. He attended the University of Wyoming and graduated with a BFA in Theater and Dance with an emphasis in Scenic Design. Derek is a proud member of the United States Institute of Theater Technology (USITT) where he is a Chair of the Membership Committee.



**Christina Smith** is currently the Program Manager for the Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP). She built a career in entertainment, working in both theatre and live events. She is part of the leadership team for Long Reach Long Riders (LRLR) and has served on the Executive Committee of USITT Chesapeake. You can connect with her at [christina.smith@esta.org](mailto:christina.smith@esta.org).

# WHO IS YOUR SAFEST HIRE?

They may look alike on the outside, but only one of them is ETCP Certified — and that’s the one who can make your venue as safe as possible for audiences, performers and crew members. More and more employers are using ETCP Certification to fulfill their duty of care.

Computer-based testing is available.  
For more information visit: [etcp.esta.org](http://etcp.esta.org)

Employers who are serious about safety base their hiring decisions on it — or face increased risk of accidents. Whether you have entertainment technicians on your staff or others bring them to your venue, insist on safety. Insist on having ETCP Certified Riggers, Entertainment Electricians and Portable Power Distribution Technicians for your team.



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