

ETCP: The beginning, not the end

AS I BEGIN MY SEVENTH SEASON as the Gaffer/Master Electrician on PBS' *Antiques Roadshow*, I find myself sitting in the front office of our trailer, helping my assistant and the tour's generator op begin to study for his electrical exam. It reminds me of my own experience in preparing for the electrician's test, and how being an ETCP Certified Technician has played a role in my career since that point. It has brought to light the idea that certification isn't the end, but really just the beginning. I remember being at LDI, in 2006, and two Boston house electricians, who I still look up to today,

were taking their paper and pencil exams. They were the first people I knew who were taking the test. It was then that I decided that someday I too would like to become certified, but I knew I had my work cut out for me.

Growing up, I was fortunate to know what I wanted to do at an early age. It was in middle school that I began to work at the Millis Massachusetts Cable Access station through after school programs and summer vacation classes. I was hooked. I especially enjoyed lighting, but worked in audio and video production as well.

In high school, I mixed audio for school functions, ran lighting for theatre and musical performances, and managed the technical aspects of the school's talent show for several years. After graduating from Xaverian Brothers High School, I attended Emerson College, where I would later receive my Bachelors of Science in Audio/Radio. Up until this point, my lighting and electrical knowledge was rough and self-taught. While sound was the core focus of my college major, I spent much of my time in the theatre during my four years at Emerson. My first educational experiences

PHOTO COURTESY ANDREW BOUCHER



Andrew Boucher served as master electrician for *America's Ballroom Challenge* in Columbus, OH, 2014.

in lighting outside of the classroom were as an assistant master electrician and assistant lighting designer for various shows. As my experience grew, I went on to be a master electrician and a lighting designer for other college productions. Those experiences helped cement and refine my true passion for the lighting field. Then, in the fall of 2004 during my senior year, I began to freelance for High Output Inc., headquartered in Canton, MA. Later, in 2005, I accepted a full-time position with the company shortly before graduating.

During my first few years at the company, my focus was primarily on our audio and video department, which was in its infancy at the time. As the years went by, I shifted into more of a project management role for various types of events. My skillsets grew to handle larger lighting programming needs, a more diverse understanding of power distribution, and lighting design for special events and broadcast. I began to work in supervisory roles on some of the company's touring/out of town productions including CNBC's *Mad Money Back to School Tour* and ESPN's *Homecoming with Rick Reilly*. While interacting with all of the local crews on these productions, occasionally they would call into question my directions or methods of performing the work required. I knew I didn't know everything, but I felt that I had built up enough practical experience to be confident in those particular decisions and instructions, perhaps it was because I was the young kid from out of town, and looked even younger? These interactions were the last little bit of motivation I needed to move forward with preparing for my ETCP Entertainment Electrician certification.

As I began to study for my exam, it became clear that my experience had already provided much of the information required, but there were also several areas I really needed to brush up on as well. I spent several months reviewing the recommended materials, reading *Electricity for the Entertainment Electrician* by Richard Cadena and the *Set Lighting Technician's Handbook* by Harry C. Box cover to cover multiple



PHOTO COURTESY CHAS NORTON

Load in for the *Antiques Roadshow* stop in St. Louis, MO, 2017.

times. I spoke with friends and peers who had taken the exam and tried to get a sense of the areas where they struggled or felt they could have done better. I made sure to spend extra time reviewing those topics. I took the practice test a couple times during the process which helped me get accustomed to the way questions were worded and the format of the test in general. I was nervous. I felt confident in the amount of preparation I had done, and I knew that worst case I could retake the test, but I wanted to do well the first time. It had been seven years since I had taken an exam, it was a bit daunting. In the spring of 2012, I finally took the test at a local testing center. I remember taking nearly the full amount of time, making sure I had read everything carefully and thought everything through. After I finished, I felt pretty good about it, but the anxious person in me wasn't sure. As the proctor at the test center handed me my results, I held my breath and carefully turned over the sheet. I had passed! I was extremely proud.

Shortly after that, I took over as Production Electrician/Gaffer for PBS'

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Antiques Roadshow. This allowed me to again work alongside Chas Norton, the production's lighting designer of 23 years now, who was also the LD for the majority of the ESPN *Homecoming* shows I had done prior. I started this project with an increased confidence in my own knowledge and abilities as a production electrician, thanks to my recent ETCP certification. It wasn't a feeling that I knew everything there was to know about entertainment electricity, but quite the opposite. I was confident in the knowledge I had built from my previous experiences, and ETCP studies. I was able to distinguish what I was comfortable with, and when I needed to do further research to solve a problem or to execute something safely. ETCP created the idea for me that sometimes it's just about



PHOTO COURTESY CHAS NORTON

Set for ESPN's *Homecoming*, 2010, at Wake Forest University.

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knowing what you know, knowing what you don't know, and knowing where to find the answer. I routinely ran into situations on the road that were the victim of a technician's years of experience of doing things the wrong way and getting lucky, where the individual clearly lacked the knowledge of how to do things the correct way. I remember one instance at a tier 1 convention center where a veteran house electrician jokingly took the set of cam tails from me to tie us in and asked, "Hey how do you use these things? Just kidding," and then proceeded to connect the hots before the ground and neutral to our disconnect. Luckily, I had done the work properly and I had made sure the disconnect was off before I had handed the tails to him and all my breakers were off, because he did

not ask or check before tying in. While he had years of experience, many more than I did, he lacked the proper training and knowledge to complete the task safely. It's important to try and make use of unfortunate situations like this one. They make good teaching moments for both the technician making the error, and the rest of the crew onsite. It's important to find a way to stress the seriousness of the mistake without causing the offender to be closed off to learning from it or alienate them in front of the rest of the crew. The goal is to get everyone to learn from that mistake at that point. ETCP has helped me formally recognize that to be a good technician you need both experience and knowledge, and that the two by themselves only get you part way.

I've always been the type of person who enjoys learning new things, and it was around this time I felt as though things had plateaued a bit in my professional development. I was in search of a way to continue my growth. In the summer of 2012, I joined the New England Studio

Mechanics Local IATSE 481 in an effort to continue learning and to explore another segment of the industry. I've day-played on several features and commercials over the past five years, putting to good use my electrical and power distribution skills, while also learning a bit more about film lighting techniques. ETCP's requirement for continuing education continues to foster new areas of expertise for me. Local 481 has a tremendous training program, and many of those courses have helped me with those renewal credits over the years. The importance Local 481 puts on safety in the workplace, and performing work in accordance with existing standards, is very much in line with the same principles that the ETCP program was founded on. The Local and the IATSE District have put in place compensation programs to cover a portion, or in many cases, all of the costs of the application and test fees, depending on numbers of applicants in a given year. This has been great for the members who'd like to become certified, have the practical experience, but haven't

been able to cover the costs themselves. It's a great show of support for the ETCP program and its importance to the industry. Taking advantage of those incentives myself, in 2014, I began preparing for the arena rigging exam and passed shortly thereafter.

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For me, ETCP continues to be an important puzzle piece in my professional career. In 2014, I began to take on more formal sales responsibilities at High Output Inc. In performing these new duties, I constantly rely on the experience and knowledge I've accrued through the years, along with the formal education provided by preparing for the ETCP exams and the continuing education requirements. That foundation has allowed me to effectively plan and successfully design projects of all types and sizes. My ETCP certifications provide me an extra bit of confidence and basis to insist on doing things in a safe and proper manner. I enjoy being able to share that knowledge with my clients in a productive and proactive way. More often than not, they find it helpful and informative. It helps build a stronger relationship and trust. Whether it's in respect to electrical or rigging, the more complete your knowledge, experience, and understanding are, especially at the start of the project, the easier and smoother the entire process will be—from the first sketch to the doors closing on the truck at the end of the job.

It's really amazing to think about how I've grown with help from ETCP during my career, but also how ETCP has grown with the industry over the years as well. I remember when there were only a few certified technicians in the Boston area, and now there are over 120 in the New England region alone. Not only has ETCP

grown as an organization, but the feeling of community among technicians has flourished as well. The various Facebook groups provide great resources for those preparing as well as those certified. As I mentioned before, no one has all the answers, so the group is a great resource for fellow technicians to seek out solutions to some of the more obscure questions, or even obtain peer advice about particular situations that one may be struggling with.

As I've grown to be a senior member of the High Output family, I've had a chance to share my knowledge and experience with a new generation of technicians. I really enjoy being able to have the opportunity to help folks prepare for their exams. As Production Manager at High Output, I've been able to play a significant part in implementing training programs for our freelance pool and in creating an incentive program for our own full-time production staff members to become ETCP certified. I'm proud to say High Output as a company now has five certified technicians across various departments, carrying a total of seven certifications. I'm even more pleased that there is an even larger number of staff in the process of studying for various ETCP exams. The appeal for technicians is there now, I'm happy to see it really taking hold, not just at High Output, but in the industry as a whole. Being an ETCP Certified Electrician and Arena Rigger has made me a better technician, project manager, designer, account manager, mentor, and industry professional across the board. For me, ETCP wasn't the end but just the beginning. ■



Andrew Boucher is the Production Manager, as well as an Account Executive, at High Output, Inc. where he's been a part of the company for more than 13 years. He is a graduate of Emerson College and is a member of IATSE Local 481. Andrew is an ETCP Certified Electrician and Arena Rigger. He also currently serves as Gaffer/Master Electrician on PBS' *Antiques Roadshow*. Andrew is an Emmy Award winning Lighting Director, awarded for his work at NBC Sports Boston.

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