

ETCP certification creates strong educators in addition to industry leaders

I WAS ONE OF THE FIRST forty-five riggers to pass both the arena and theatre exams back in 2005 at the first sitting, yet one of my primary roles in the entertainment industry is in education, as the TD and a full professor at Northern Illinois University. One of my TD colleagues from another university recently asked me why I am so passionate about the ETCP certifications and recognitions, and our conversation got me thinking. While the original intent of the certification program was to raise the level of professionalism among entertainment technicians and create a community of professionals to discuss, debate, and agree on best practices, I think that there is a strong argument to be made for encouraging a strong connection between those discussions, standards, and best practices, and the process of educating the next generation of professionals.

As an educator, I feel that my role as a certified technician, recognized trainer, standards writer, and subject matter expert gives me the ability to sit at the same table as the giants in the industry, as well as the responsibility to share ideas with them as equals. While the actual physics of what we do doesn't really change over time, how we relate to it and how it relates to us DOES change. Rather than teaching directly from a syllabus that has been recycled from one I had in grad school in the 80s or a book that was written before Y2K, I am proud to be a part of a vibrant community of industry leaders who are on the cutting edge of new ideas, revised current standards, and updated

best practices that I can bring directly to the classroom. I have lost count of the number of times I have started a class with something like, "Well, we were going to talk about beam loading today, but in the Rigging Working Group this weekend, we had an interesting discussion about outdoor stages, and I think this is way more important . . ." I feel that weaving current ETCP topics and events currently happening in the industry into my curriculum makes my subject matter more relevant, draws my students closer to the profession, and provides new and unique viewpoints for my students to consider as they absorb the information.

One of the helpful practical tools provided by ETCP for the educator is the wide array of educational resources. While they are primarily aimed at practicing professionals whose goal is certification, they are a great starting point for people who are just getting into the business as well. When I first started rigging, many gray hairs ago, Rocky Paulson pointed to a beam, nodded at a rope, clipped me onto a fall arrest line, and told me to do what the guy next to me did. When I first started teaching about 25 years ago, I would have my students sign up for the Stagecraft Mailing List (remember that one?) and have them watch for and participate in any discussions about our current class subject matter. Nowadays, we have the ETCP exam content lists created by subject matter experts, which provide a well-organized list of topics which create a reasonable road map to follow for the mastery of the subject matter. Also, the

various social media study groups create a (usually) collegial atmosphere where folks can ask questions, see good (or bad) examples, or watch us old folks snipe at each other. Having that direct level of access to the information being used at the highest level of the industry and the people actually doing the work is a tremendous benefit to those seeking answers to questions, wanting to know more about a specific subject, or just looking to get a feel for the ebb and flow of the movers and shakers in the field.

Additionally, I think having free online access to all the ESTA Standards is an incredible resource for educators at all levels. Whether a high school teacher is looking for the best answer to a problem, a university faculty member is seeking information on best practices, or a student is searching for the most current information on a specific topic, being able to access this information at no cost is simply amazing. In my travels, I've come across a great many venues or facilities that could benefit from access to the standards, and I am not at all shy about passing along the link. Even for something as simple and common as inspections, for example, so many people tell me that their administration simply will not approve time or money for inspections. A simple search of the standards yields results for inspections of rigging systems, orchestra pit lifts, stage winches, and many others. With these standards in hand, those folks can not only make a solid case for having the inspections, but they also have a guideline of what all the inspections should entail.

In chatting with my colleague, I also laid out some of the benefits of becoming actively involved in the ETCP. While some folks who are parked firmly in the educational world only get occasional exposure to the profession, maybe a professional certification is not a reasonable goal, but for those with professional projects, summer stock opportunities, or tenure track work, walking the path to an ETCP certification is a worthwhile endeavor. In addition to the benefits listed above, having a professional certification lends a great deal of credibility to the work done at the institution. Rather than calling in a certified rigger or electrician, they already have one in the house. Having a certified technician on the faculty also lends credibility to the training provided by the institution, and the recruiters are usually excited to fly that flag when attracting new students. While the altruistic qualities of an ETCP certification for an educator are many, let's not leave out the benefits to

the one actually holding the certification. Involvement in the ETCP community allows this national-level certification to be listed on the faculty service report every year, and membership in ESTA is a valuable credit to list under "membership in professional organizations." Attending quarterly working group meetings and serving on task groups creates opportunities for national level service through the ANSI-Accredited Technical Standards Program. Earning and maintaining an ETCP certification puts your name on a searchable database of certified technicians who are available for work in your area, which opens the door for scholarship opportunities that would have otherwise passed right by.

In summary, I can honestly say that becoming involved in the ETCP community has been, and continues to be, one of my favorite professional communities. Becoming involved will take up some of your oh-so-valuable evenings and weekends, but the payoff can be exceptional. For those

educators who have a desire to expose their students to a more professional approach to their craft, who want to connect with the people who are leading the industry, who would like to be aware of current standards and practices, who would like to extend their professional scholarship work, or who are eager to add some dimension to their climb up the tenure and promotion ladder, getting involved with the ETCP community is a great choice. The ETCP community welcomes everyone. ■



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