Stop making excuses

WE ALL KNOW INDIVIDUALS who should have their ETCP rigging certification but don't. There are LOTS of individuals out there who are qualified and good enough to be considered one of the top third of riggers in the industry, but for some reason, they haven't pursued ETCP. When considering topics for this article, I started as any good millennial would; I hopped on Facebook and in three different groups I asked, "What are some of the reasons you have heard why people don't try to get their ETCP certification?" The responses I got were a lot of the excuses I've heard before and a series of arguments that are firmly planted in misinformation. I decided to comment on some of these reasons and point out the counterarguments.

For some reason, the rumor persists that being certified raises your own personal liability and that you will be held responsible for anything that goes wrong—even if it's in a different room than the one you are working in. THIS IS 100% FALSE. I am not a lawyer, but I have seen written responses from multiple lawyers on this topic, and they all say the same thing. Claims against an individual rigger are based upon two different legal theories: (1) an Intentional Tort and (2) a Negligent Tort. An Intentional Tort means the rigger knowingly and intentionally caused harm. In this circumstance, the rigger deliberately did something with the goal of harming someone or damaging things. In this situation, it doesn't matter if you are certified or not; the entire court case is based on whether you did it on purpose. In a Negligent Tort, the entire case is based

on whether a properly trained "average" rigger would have done it in the same way. In this case, being an ETCP-certified rigger is exactly the kind of evidence that would help a defense attorney prove that you were, not only properly trained, but better trained than the "average" rigger you are being compared to. So, in fact, being certified LOWERS your liability.

The next false claim is that the ETCP means nothing since any new kid who tests well can take an exam and have "status." To take the exam you must be 21-years-old and meet a high set of benchmarks. Eligibility is determined through verifiable work hours as a rigger. Higher education degrees can supplement some work hours, but the focus is on hands-on work that has been performed. According to the ETCP program manager, Christina Smith, candidates tend to have 2,500 to 3,000 hours of verifiable work as a rigger, with most exceeding the 3,000 mark by a wide margin. If one of your co-workers is still just the "new kid" after 3,000 or more hours of rigging, then you have way more qualified riggers than any geographical region I am aware of, and you should thank the stars that your rigging calls are always filled with nothing but expert level riggers.

The same people who make the above claim tend to also claim that it's easy to just falsify your work history and then learn the stuff that's on the exam and pass it. Clearly, these people have never been through the vetting process. When you turn in your application, the program manager will verify everything on your application, and if something smells fishy... best of

luck. As far as just studying for the exam without real-world experience, the exam is specifically designed to trip-up people who don't have the real-life experience. I run in the same circles as some of the original writers of the rigging exams, and I can tell you that they intentionally wrote questions to weed out those textbook riggers. So yes, it is technically possible for someone to pull this off, but it is also physically possible for a human to hold their breath for 11 minutes and 35 seconds. Just because one person can do it doesn't mean it's common.

> **" There is no shame to have a failed attempt at something that is supposed to differentiate between the good and the great. "**

The next argument is the "I have been rigging since before there were certifications, why should I get one now?" This one might be valid if you are within a few years of retirement and are just coasting into your golden years. I mean, why would you want to waste your time trying to differentiate yourself from your peers? While it is true that you may not care about beefing up your resume at this point in your life, maybe you'd like to set the bar a bit higher for your successor? A good way to do that is to go get certified.

Cost is one of the few valid reasons that people mentioned. Yes, it costs money to take the exam. Once you've got your certification, you need to do continuing education courses, which usually aren't free. That being said, if you are a member of

IATSE, or work under one of their contracts, the IA Training Trust Fund will reimburse you after you pass the exam and there are more than enough continuing education courses that the Training Trust will also reimburse for. If you don't have any union affiliations, see if your employer will spring for it, if not, then yes, you will have to pay for the certification on your own.

Another reason people gave is that there is no return on investment. Well, some IA contracts give certified riggers up to an extra 10% for having their ETCP. Some IA contracts require that the lead rigger be certified (which makes the list of people who can fill that slot pretty short). Some non-union employers also pay more for certified riggers, some even require an ETCP certification for some positions. Personally, I can tell you that I was once hired to supervise a rigging contractor because a general contractor required that the rigging company have a dual-certified rigger onsite to make sure things were installed correctly. It was a very lucrative few months, and I didn't have to turn a single wrench.

Test anxiety is another common reason people who are more than qualified don't take the exam. This one I'll give some credence to. The exams are intense, and when I say intense I mean some of the best riggers in the country were reduced to mental jello by the end of their exams. So to someone who already has some anxiety about taking tests, this exam must be absolutely terrifying. If I had a solution to this one, I'd be independently wealthy and not sitting at this computer right now.

In the same vein of concern is the math portion of the tests. Most riggers these days are dependent on apps, Excel sheets, cheat sheets created through trial and error, and calculators. Good news: you can use a calculator, and they give you a sheet of formulas. Don't get me wrong, "numbers are hard" has been one of my taglines since elementary school, but being able to do the math manually is one of the ways to prove that you actually understand the physics behind what you're working with. Personally, I hate the formula sheet they give you, but then again I am the guy who breaks every rigging calculation down to relative triangles. If you understand and can remember $A^2 + B^2 = C^2$, you can handle the math on these exams.

One of the reasons least mentioned, but I suspect is the underlying drive behind the rest of the reasons is simple: fear of failing. Riggers are conditioned to be right 100% of the time. In the courses I teach, I always remind people, "Rigging is not rocket science, but it is a zero 'oopsy' profession. If you screw up, the best case scenario is you are only worried about getting fired." The idea of an exam that is so hard that 2/3rds of riggers are expected to fail is not something that people who are used to always being right are eager to try. I know some people fear that if they do fail, not only would they be embarrassed, but it'd be a black mark on their career that could be used against them. This is ridiculous in my opinion. There is no shame to have a failed attempt at something that is supposed to differentiate between the good and the great. You've got to be good to even sit for the exam and, honestly, failure has relatively low repercussions compared to the life and death consequences riggers are used to. Also, unlike many of the things a rigger normally does, you can always just take the exam again. So why on earth are you afraid of it?

In conclusion, the only 100% legitimate reason to not take the exam is if you don't qualify for it. I suppose just not wanting to take the exam is technically a legitimate reason as well, but if this is the case for you, please stop making excuses. ∎

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.