

Rigging Certification

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Pssst. Hey you. Yeah, you. Come here for a sec. Wanna have some fun? Like to see some sparks fly? Here's what you do. The next time you're doing a load in at the arena, take a stroll over to Rigging Land during a coffee break. Make sure you wait till one or two of the guys have coffee cups up to their mouths, and then casually drop the word "certification" into the conversation. Then duck or you might end up wearing some of that coffee.

Just what is it with you guys and certification, anyway? Why is it such a hot topic? Everyone I talk with has an opinion, and there doesn't seem to be any middle ground. People either love the idea or hate it. (Sounds like a recent election, eh?) My impression is that some folks don't understand the concept of certification or have a good sense for how it might affect them. For what it's worth, I have some first-hand knowledge on the subject and think a little Who, What, When Where & Why might be in order.

What exactly is certification? Certification is a tool used to measure how much a person knows about a particular job or task and how well they can perform the duties of that job or task. In other words, it's a way of finding out whether you really know what you are doing. The method most commonly used to establish a certification is a test.

The Why is easy. Look around you. Do you see shows getting smaller? Do you see shows getting less complicated? No, of course not. The American public is well known for it's "bigger and flashier than last year" mentality and we, as an industry, feed into it. So now instead of 15 – 20 trucks at your loading dock door, you now have 35-50. And you now have more 2-ton hoists on a show than you had 1/2-tons the year before. I mean look at some of this stuff. A hoist failure these days could get downright nasty.

Let's be honest with ourselves. We've got a bunch of riggers running around the country who profess to know what they are doing. A lot of them do and some, unfortunately, do not. Wouldn't it be nice to know who is who? As a professional rigger wouldn't you want to confirm what you do know and what you only thought you knew? Wouldn't it be better to discover you were wrong about something on a test rather than in the Super Dome? (Yeah, it would.) That's where the certification comes in. The test will help riggers identify their strong points and their weak ones and will help the rest of the country know who has the level of experience for the job at hand.

The 'who' is actually a two-parter. There's the 'Who is putting the certification program together' part and the 'Who is taking the test' part.

The folks over at ESTA (Entertainment Services & Technology Association www.esta.org) have put together the Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP) and charged that program with the task of developing certifications. The ETCP is made up of two groups: the Certification Council and the Working Groups. Both groups are made up of a bunch of hardworking individuals who have donated their time and money to make sure this program comes out right.

You have to know that developing a certification program is damned hard work. Many of the people involved have been at it since 2001. We didn't know then how involved the process was going to be or how long it would take, but we've stuck it out. The meetings have sometimes been, er, um...interesting, but the overriding goal has always been to develop a program that works. It has to be honest, fair and must accurately reflect the level of professionalism that this industry requires, and that takes time.

Another group of people who have recently signed on to help us with this program are the Subject Matter Experts (SME). This is a group of riggers who have been chosen to help write the test. They, along with the certification administration company that's been hired to shepherd us through all this, have been meeting to develop a job analysis and task delineation to insure that the tests accurately reflect what riggers actually do. (By the way, the certification administration company is made up of people who are called psychometricians. Honest!)

The ETCP, in answer to the second part of the 'Who' question, has determined that the first round of certifications will be for riggers and electricians. The Rigging Skills Working Group (RSWG) has determined that there will be two certifications in the first go-round: one for Arena Style rigging and one for Theatrical Style. The Arena style test will be directed toward those who work the high steel and those who supervise. The Theatrical Certification will encompass those folks who work as a flyperson on load-ins and load-outs and also those who run shows. The electricians certification will most likely target Master Electricians and those who are responsible for doing temporary power tie-ins.. This is not to say that there won't be other certifications in the future. I'm, sure there will be, but this is what we felt we could handle at this stage of the game. The first set of tests for riggers is scheduled for the fall of 2005.

Lastly, here's my impassioned plea for this program. You can probably tell that I am strongly in favor of certification, but don't take my word for it. Between the Council, the RSWG and the ESTA administration, there are about 100 people who also strongly believe in this program. Ask some of them. They have put their

brains, muscle and money into it knowing this is a program that we desperately need. The events of the summer of 2003 alone should make it very clear why we need this program. (In case you had forgotten, there were a couple of spectacular truss failures.) We all know we've been very lucky so far, but we cannot continue to rely solely on luck. Will certification stop all accidents? No, unfortunately, it won't, but a certification program will help us better identify the problem areas we have and help us avoid the catastrophic accidents that we most certainly will have without it.

Certification is a train on the right track at the right time. When it pulls out of the station, I'll be on board. I think you should be, too.

Thanks
Be well
Bill

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