The Formula for Certification Success

BY Paul Claxton, CPBE, CBNT Certification Chairman Chapter 131

Obtaining SBE certification isn’t an easy task but it has plenty of rewards for both the engineer and their employer. The SBE was established in 1964 and eleven years later a certification program was created to recognize those engineers who met standards of the profession and showed a measured degree of competence.

SBE Chapter 131 in the Inland Empire of California was established in 1999 and quickly earned many SBE Statistical Awards for “Most Certified Chapter, Class B” with a dedicated program to stress the importance of education and certification through funding of the test taking, and assisting the engineer preparing for the test cycle.

Broadcast radio and television is like many industries in that it has seen an almost constant state of change. From tube to transistor, to integrated circuits, to large scale integration and surface mount technology the industry continues to evolve with ever more complex equipments. An engineer who is not continuing to learn and evolve with the equipment may soon find themselves overwhelmed by change and struggling to stay productive.

Chapter 131 stresses the importance of education and provides free of charge classes with curriculums written around the various certifications. Senior engineers have a responsibility to train their juniors and within the chapter we are blessed with a former SBE Educator of the Year to lead that effort. Classes run the experience range from CTO/CRO to Senior Broadcast Engineers. These classes are timed around the SBE’s exam calendar to prepare the engineer in time for each cycle. For the senior engineer certification the instructor will come up with impromptu essay questions to get the students practiced at how to best answer that tough requirement.

Joe Snelson’s February 2004 The Signal article “The (not-so-) daunting essay question” hangs on the chapter’s bulletin board to also assist in preparing for the essay question. Also on the bulletin board are the current exam schedule, blank applications, and a large flow chart displaying the certifications and their requirements.

For those looking to be hired, having a certification doesn’t mean a job is automatic, but having a SBE certification does help and can be the difference between getting an interview and not.

Recognizing the value of certification, companies like Taft Broadcasting of Riverside provide their engineers reimbursement for the cost of the first attempt at a certification and reward successful efforts with a small bonus. Chapter 131 pays for the cost of the certification for both certified radio and television operators.

Getting the word out is also important to creating a climate of successful certification. During each chapter meeting, the certification chairperson is given an opportunity to pass along information from the SBE, make announcements on upcoming certification calendar dates, and answer any questions from members.

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on the program. Those members with new certifications are mentioned and congratulated for their efforts. Any classes starting in the next month are mentioned and members seeking a certification are able to request a class if one is not scheduled. If three or four students show an interest, a class will be formed up for the next cycle.

All of this preparation leads to the all important test day. It is important to set the test taker up for success with a well furnished library of current reference material as published by the SBE with each exam cycle. Chapter 131 holds a morning and afternoon session to best accommodate the 24-hour work schedule of broadcasters.

The formula is simple, by stressing the importance of certification and education, and assisting the engineer as much as possible, qualified candidates are able to successfully meet the program objectives. By investing in the employee's education, a facility gets a better trained employee. Better trained operators and engineers are more productive and have more successful careers.

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Paul is a retired US Navy Master Chief Petty Officer currently working for the American Forces Network Broadcast Center as a project engineer helping to provide radio and television programming to the best (armed) customers in the world, the US military and DoD civilians, in 166 countries around the world and to the ships at sea.

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Note from the Certification Director: We would love to hear from you. What do you do at your chapter to promote SBE certification? E-mail me at mclappe@sbe.org