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When it comes to data centre and network infrastructure training, Mel
Chambal is one of the industry's leading lights. Rob Shepherd recently
to her about her career and why she is committed to raising the profile
qualifications and certifications

▶ **RS: Tell us a bit about yourself –
who are you and what do you do?**

MC: My name is Melissa Chambal and I'm currently CNet Training's US technical manager. I joined the company in January 2013 to assist with the technical aspects of its course content, and to develop its presence in the US market.

As an avid believer in the importance of industry training, qualifications and certifications, I'm delighted to be working for a company that is clearly as committed as I am to this part of our industry.

RS: Why did you decide to enter the IT industry?

MC: I guess I can start off by saying that I didn't choose this industry, it chose me.

I'm a small town girl from Texas who moved to the Big Apple to seek a career in finance. However, due to a series of events, victories and defeats, I found myself managing large trading floor installation projects in New York. The mission critical nature of the finance industry is extremely demanding and rigorous due to expensive downtime – I was hooked!

After doing this for a while I moved to the contractor side where I was given the opportunity to work in almost every facet of the business. I worked in a variety of roles including estimating, project management, project engineering, and operations management.

It was quite an education but I still felt I needed to learn more to better understand the competitive world I was in. I enrolled in the first construction management programme at NYU. It gave me an insight and appreciation for the entire scope of participants in the installation of these mission critical systems. It was invaluable

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knowledge and allowed for more successful interaction with the project team members.

During all this I got married, had two kids, moved to Connecticut and pursued my education in structured cabling, networks, data centre and installation practices. After becoming a BICSI RCDD and NTS, I taught at Connecticut College and became a BICSI Master Instructor – all the while searching for my dream job, which I'm lucky enough to now have.

RS: Does being a woman in what is traditionally a male dominated sector create any particular challenges?

MC: Ha ha! There are challenges no matter the gender. Keeping up with the rapid changes in technology is demanding for everyone and for every specialised sector of this incredible industry.

Very rarely did I encounter any adversity or intentional resistance to my participation in a project no matter what capacity I was in. I was always given the opportunity to apply myself and create mutual respect that is essential in all aspects of daily life.

I was grateful for all the on-the-job training I had with some very well seasoned, salty old journeymen who took the time to explain to me the some of the basic principles in some of the most unforgettable ways – these men did not mince words! There is nothing like field experience!

Regardless of whether you are a man or woman, the most important way to overcome any challenges is to be a person of integrity – honest and willing to do the work to get the job done. A project's team needs its best players to be successful and they come in many shapes and sizes. I tried to be a good team player.

RS: What differentiates a good trainer or instructor from a not so good one?

MC: It is essential that the instructor

has professional experience in the field of content they are teaching. This brings the 'been there, done that' to the content taught. The students can connect with some of the instructor's experience and apply the best practice in a practical application.

An effective instructor will get to know their audience and have enough experience to reach out and touch them about a specific piece of information that could benefit them.

Having a sense of humour is a must. Being able to laugh at yourself and not take yourself too seriously allows for a more relaxed environment, encouraging more student interaction. I cringe when I think of students subjected to an instructor reading slides in a monotone voice. It does nothing for the student and the instructor acts as little more than a live version of an audio book.

Lastly, knowing that your students have knowledge that you will never possess, experiences that you will never experience and that they can teach you a thing or two is, I think, the most important thing to remember.

RS: Is training taken seriously enough and should more be done to encourage individuals to gain relevant qualifications and certifications?

MC: Each individual should be encouraged to actively pursue and enrich their careers through professional qualifications and certifications. It is important to make sure the right people are getting the right training.

It is only when the design or management team has the knowledge it needs to design or manage a facility in a safe, effective and productive manner, that the overall success of the business

and data centre is realised. Skilled and experienced employees ensure smooth operations and will be pivotal in migration to new technologies.

I recognise the fact that education is an expense that must be incurred. Both time and money, for many companies, is a luxury they cannot afford. Technology is changing rapidly and the successful enterprise will understand the training to needs to happen to adapt to these changes. Both the employer and employee, leading to productive and efficient operations and the minimising of expensive mistakes – or even worse – downtime, can enjoy the return on investment.

RS: Do the data centre and IT networking industries offer ambitious individuals a good career path?

MC: Absolutely! The potential in the

mission critical and IT industry is endless. IT is here to stay and the only question is where will it go?

RS: If you could change one thing about the industry that you work in, what would it be?

MC: I would change the ever-increasing dependency on technology and the demand for power necessary to make the technology accessible. This makes us increasing more vulnerable, and could be our single point of failure. Ironic, I know. There is no doubt I am passionate about this industry I am in, but it also gives me cause for concern as we grow ever dependent on all things powered.

Living in Connecticut, we have had several extended power outages in recent years – days even weeks without power. It has become painfully apparent how everything can and does come to a screeching halt when infrastructure and technology is compromised. Banking and finance markets are vulnerable as are utilities.

The electric grid, banking, FAA and other government agencies have been subject to breaches and vigilance is a 24/7 operation, in order to keep the physical and cyber threats in check.

RS: What's the most useful piece of advice you've been given and how has it helped you during your career?

MC: Love what you do and do what you love! I enjoy the sharing of ideas, discussions and experiences, as well as the dialogue amongst students. I have always ended the class with more knowledge and more 'colleagues' than I began with.

RS: Who is the industry figure you most admire and why?

MC: I would prefer to think more in the plural, as I admire the countless volunteers around the globe who participate in the development of codes of conduct, standards and best practices for our industry.

These industry professionals dedicate much of their personal time in addition to full time jobs and families. They meet, discuss, research and contribute to documents that can be used in whole or in part for the betterment of a particular system, application or concern around the globe.

It is through their time and passion that we are making advances for more effective designs and energy efficiency.

It truly is a labour of love, and for that I admire all who volunteer for the constant improvement of our industry. ❏