

Why lighting?

I've always wanted to play the piano but never could get the hang of it, so I took up theatrical stagecraft instead as an art elective in school. We had huge dance concerts every semester, 40-plus pieces, and you can only be so creative with a two-scene pre-set light-board, 15 PAR cans, and maybe six different gel colors. Most creativity came from manual dimming and timing, so all the lighting was played live, which meant we played the board like an instrument. After that first semester playing the light-board, seeing in real time how I was in sync with the action on stage, the "magic" of all the elements coming together to create something that's never the same each time—unbelievable. I never looked back.

Favorite project?

Probably the one I'm working on now, a steampunk-style casino and hotel opening this year outside of Boston. Not only do I love the décor, but it's also my first major project since I've been promoted to senior lighting designer. It's a lot of leadership and management and design challenges. Work-life balance wise, 2017 was the worst year I've had to date, but also the best because I learned and dealt with so much that has really made me that much more confident.



ASK AN EP

Krystle Smith, Illuminating Concepts

Best part of your job?

I'm going to gloat a bit here. The people in my office are the best, most intelligent, hard-working, and skilled and silly lighting nerds. We have random dance-offs and foam-core weapon fights, make weird faces at people when they're on conference calls and poke fun at people's sketches as they try (and fail) to convey intent. When we get frustrated we're usually laughing off the frustration with pantomimes of knocking stuff over or eating our feelings

with random stress chocolate someone always has at their desk. I know I'm working, but most of the day I'm laughing so it doesn't feel like work.

Biggest obstacle you've encountered?

Most recently I would say management. It's pretty common for good designers to be promoted into senior positions that require people management but rarely be given the tools to do so. We wear so many hats, and it's one thing to manage a

project, but most of my work has been managing relationships, conversations and personalities—including my own. I was more frustrated with my lack of preparedness, skillset and authority to be in a managerial position, especially when I realized I had no real power to make effective change. It's still a work in progress.

Most important thing for the future of the lighting industry?

Education lifts the veil of mystery behind this stuff. Education separates those who can *do* from those who can *do well*.

Dream project?

I'd love to work with Amazon. The prototype stores where you pick what you want and then just walk out. What's the geofencing like in there? Is it in the lights? Should it be? There's going to be a new Whole Foods where it tells you where to find stuff and automatically adds up your total as you place things in your cart... then you just walk out and it charges you. How fun! Now who doesn't want to be a part of that?

The Emerging Professional column explores issues affecting younger lighting professionals and those new to the industry.