Lines & Letters
Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

From the Editors – March/April 2016

Lynn Nickels and Jeanette Evans, Co-editors

As we move toward spring, we have some great events planned. March brings us the return of Neil Perlin - one of our most popular speakers. On Thursday, March 10, 2016, Neil addresses the topic of **How Mobiles Will Change Tech Comm.** It is easy to agree, as our program announcement states, that mobiles have "permeated society in the last decade." Don't miss Neil's take on how "tech com is only now following" with his presentation including material based on field experience and research.

A social event on Wednesday, March 23, 5:30 to 9 pm, at the Rock Hall of Fame should make for a great evening. Some of the wonderful volunteers of NEO STC planned this activity at the Rock Hall, so it is easy to say that NEO STC rocks.

Tuesday, April 12, starting at noon brings us an NEO STC lunch at Bar Louie at Crocker Park, 9 Main St., Westlake. Thursday, April 14, brings an evening presentation on the use of your expertise in writing to promote technical products and services through blogging.

We hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter. If you plan to attend the STC Annual Summit this year in Anaheim, we look forward to an article from you. Please don't forget when you submit an article, your name goes into the drawing for a $50 gift card. Two lucky people will win.

STC Renewal

If you haven't renewed your STC membership yet, you can still do so and get a discount. Enter promo code **STCRENEW** in the Dues Discount box of the checkout page and receive 10% off your renewal.

Vote through March 9 in the 2016 STC Elections

See http://stc.org/election for details about the 2016 STC Elections. You can vote through March 9.

The STC Nominating Committee (composed of members Cindy Currie, Donn DeBoard, Viqui Dill, Marta Rauch, and chair Alan Houser) is pleased to announce the slate of candidates for the 2016 Society election:

President

Adriane Hunt will automatically succeed from the office of Vice President

Vice President

Alyssa Fox
Rhonda Truitt

Secretary

Jackie Damrau
Kirsty Taylor

Director (two positions to be elected)

Alisa Bonsignore
Todd DeLuca
Rajdeep Gupta
Liz Herman
Robert Perry

Nominating Committee (two positions to be elected)

Rick Lippincott
Lori Meyer
Elizabeth O'Neill
Becky Todd

NEO STC Board Opportunities 2016/17

NEO STC continues to be one of the strongest and most active chapters in the society. As with most organizations, chapters are only as strong as the members who pull together to help the chapter succeed.

This is your opportunity to join the board and help run this amazing chapter!

Who is on our chapter board?

♦ Chapter Officers: Chapter President, Vice President, Immediate Past President, Treasurer, and Secretary

♦ Committee Chairpersons: Currently, this includes our Programs, Sponsorship/Advertising, Website, Workshop, Membership, Book Club, Networking, Public Relations, Newsletter, and Academic Relations committee chairpersons

Responsibilities:

♦ Chapter Officers: Perform tasks as defined for the respective roles

♦ Committee Chairpersons: Perform tasks as defined for the respective roles. Defines a plan for the committee during the summer.

♦ Attend twice-yearly chapter board meeting to share plans and progress

♦ Work individually (or on a team, depending on role) to carry out tasks during the year defined during the planning phase

♦ Transition duties upon completion of term

Commitment:

♦ All board members are asked to commit from July 2016 - June 2017. The monthly tasks typically take approximately 2-10 hours a month, but this varies based on the role.

Who we're looking for 2016/17:

♦ Chapter Vice President

♦ Chapter Secretary

♦ Programs (co-chairperson)

♦ Membership

♦ Workshops

If you are interested in any of the other chapter officer or committee chairperson positions listed above, please indicate that when you apply. We can put you in touch with that team/chairperson.

Qualifications:

♦ Current NEO STC chapter member in good standing

♦ Passionate about wanting to play a role in the future of your chapter. Passion over years of experience plays a critical role.

♦ Interested in having fun, networking with fellow professionals, and putting plans into action!

♦ No prior experience necessary, but a desire to learn and apply skills

Benefits of being a board member:

♦ Increase your professional networking opportunities inside and outside the chapter

♦ Develop your leadership acumen

♦ Build on a skillset in a specific area

♦ Be a part of a team that has for over 10 years received recognition from STC International for its outstanding service to its members

Next Steps:

Aside from our members (you!), our all-volunteer board is the lifeline of the organization. If you or someone you know may be interested in joining the board, please complete the survey, and a current chapter officer will be in touch with you. All applications must be completed by Friday, March 18.

The current NEO STC officers will carefully evaluate each application and follow up with candidates.

Apply Here:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2WQFCPV

Contact for More Info or Questions:

Questions are welcome and may be directed to:
NEO STC Vice President
Jill McCauslin

NEO STC Immediate Past President
Lisa Mileusnich

Kim Lindsey Honored as STC Associate Fellow

Sincere congratulations go to Kim Lindsey who achieves the rank of Associate Fellow during the STC Summit in June. What can we say about Kim? There is so much! What follows is adapted from her nomination for Associate Fellow.

Career Overview

Kim has been called a "poster child" for the Society for Technical Communication – and this is why. In 1999 she changed career paths, and employment testing directed her toward "technical communication." Learning that Cleveland had a local STC chapter, she registered for a meeting to see what the people were like and to hear about their jobs.

Right from the start, Kim felt tech comm – and STC in particular – were a good fit for her.

All four of the positions she's had since her career change have been as a result of STC involvement, as she's advanced from entry level writer to senior instructional designer.

Since STC has meant so much to her professionally, it has been her pleasure and privilege to give back to the Society in numerous ways through the years.

Most of Kim's contributions have been at the level of our local community, NEO STC – practical and innovative approaches to keep the chapter strong: designing a new fundraising program that's considered a model by the Society; guiding efforts to provide member value with quality programming; coaching younger and unemployed members in their job search; and representing STC when interfacing with other professional groups.

In all, Kim's career is a great illustration of the value professionals can find in STC.

Able to think creatively

Kim's ability to think creatively and develop new strategies has benefitted NEO STC in multiple informal ways through the years. She has advocated consistently for sustainable involvement: keeping realistic expectations of volunteers' time and effort so as to avoid burn-out that is all too common in professional organizations.

This philosophy has, in some measure, contributed to the fact that a large proportion of NEO STC's past leaders have stayed active in the chapter and the Society.

Biography

"Always remember what it's like not to know." Kim's tagline embodies her philosophy toward technical communication and instructional design.

In her position as the eLearning & Instructional Design Manager at Cinécraft Productions Inc., Kim designs learning experiences on a wide range of topics for the company's clients. She is recognized for her unique ability to use both sides of the brain – creative and analytic – to empathize with each audience, then develop a training approach that effectively and imaginatively meets the project's business goals. Prior to her position at Cinécraft, she held several technical communications positions at organizations in the northeast Ohio area.

Kim has held numerous leadership positions in the NEO STC chapter, including President; currently she is the chapter's Webmaster. Now moving into the role of a thought leader and conference speaker, Kim continues to give back to the Society that has played such a critical role in her professional success.

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In the Spotlight: Sara Buchanan

Lynn Nickels and Sara Buchanan

Fellow NEO STC members, I am pleased, this month, to introduce Sara Buchanan!

Sara describes herself as a "new professional" in the technical writing industry. "I received my first professional job as a Technical Writer at LCS (London Computer Systems) in February 2015. LCS develops the property management software, Rent Manager, for which I create the help file documentation. My previous jobs were get-me-through-college positions that you can see on my LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/sbuchanan24. The only job of note was my contract position at Telesis in which I had to acquire a security clearance; it's a scary process for the timid, young me. I had to be interviewed by a federal official and was asked random questions such as what was my alcoholic drink of choice. I assume my answer was correct, because I obtained my security clearance for the three-month contract."

Sara says she has been aware of STC since she was an undergraduate taking professional writing classes. "I took full advantage of many of my resources as a student and would read the STC publications (and other professional journals). I, however, didn't get an STC membership until recently (December 2015) when I was able to talk my employer into funding my membership to provide me and my colleagues with many needed resources for developing our documentation and training materials. Since December, I've spent a lot of time trying to take full advantage of the resources available. I haven't had the opportunity to work on any committees or projects in relation to NEO STC, but I hope to involve myself moving forward."

She explains that her proudest accomplishment is her education, "because it took time, perseverance, and student loans that I will be paying years to come (I'm not bitter at all). I graduated with my M.A. in English and graduate certificates in Composition and Rhetoric, Professional Writing, and Cultural Studies and Discourses in December 2014 from Northern Kentucky University (NKU). I did my capstone project on identity in a digital age by looking at the relationship between avatars and identity in the online role-playing game World of Warcraft. Admitting this fact at my interview for my current position was the tipping point for getting the job because I would be a good fit for the company culture! I also served as a Web Editor and Editorial Assistant for the Licking River Review (literary/art magazine operating under the auspices of NKU) for the Fall 2014-Spring 2015 publication. I received my B.A. in Psychology and English in December 2010 from NKU. As the result of a course I took in 2010, I was published in the April-May 2011 issue "Engineers and Engines Magazine." My education has provided me with five diplomas that still haven't managed to make it to my wall. I'm a procrastinator and an over-achiever; those contradicting qualities allow me to meet ridiculous deadlines with quality results."

Sara is an avid reader with a preference for the fantasy genre. "I love "nerdy" games such as Magic the Gathering (MTG) and World of Warcraft (WoW). My latest foray is cooking authentic foreign foods. I now have a pantry full of exotic spices and condiments that helped me win the best "traditional" chili competition at LCS last year. My cat, Sir Tipperton Grayson (aka Tipper), keeps me company through it all. I am tattooed, have rocked blue hair in the past, and I put the amateur in 'amateur photographer.'"

Welcome, Sara! We all look forward to getting to know you better and hope to work with you soon on a NEO STC committee or project!

What's Up with Upwork/Elance

Jeanette Evans

When people ask about my experience with the Elance/Upwork online freelancing platforms, I admit it's

been a mixed bag including work with a major West Coast tech giant (where I signed a nondisclosure agreement and did not know at first who the client was) to work with smaller clients.

Maybe my experience is similar to others, where some experiences are less than ideal, and others make up for the less than perfect ones.

The 17 Tips for Boosting Your Success on Upwork article might be of interest if you want to work with Upwork (which recently replaced Elance). See the 17 tips article at the https://www.upwork.com/hiring/for-freelancers/17-tips-for-boosting-your-success-on-upwork/ location.

Here are some of the highlights from the 17 tips article.

1. **Reputation counts** - Upwork keeps a freelancer's history to show past success and encourages clients to look at this.

2. **Be selective** about projects and clients - Focus on projects where you can perform well. "Interview the client while they interview you."

3. **Make clear** you are a good fit - Make it easy for the client to choose you when you bid.

4. **Be proactive**- Communicate with your client after accepting an assignment. Let the client know about your progress even if they do not request an update. Ask questions to make sure you are on the right track.

5. **Be responsive** - Do the best you can to get back promptly when a client reaches out. Clients appreciate this.

6. **Do five star work** every time - Repeat work can happen often with Elance/Upwork clients.

This all seems like good and even obvious advice. It does not hurt to be reminded of these basics. This may be a newer way to work but the basics stay the same.

Speed Interviewing Provides College Students with Valuable Career Information

Lynn Nickels

NEO STC representatives were invited by Walsh University Professor Ron Scott for a second year to participate in a Career Day for English majors at Ursuline College on Feb. 6th. Last year a consortium of northeastern Ohio liberal arts colleges and universities put together a Career Day for a group of about 50 soon-to-be-graduating English majors as a way to meet and speak with writing professionals.

NEO STC Members Lisa Mileusnich of Parker Hannifin and Lynn Nickels of Rockwell Automation participated this year and spoke one-on-one to students about technical writing and marketing careers and the many benefits of joining STC while still in school. The students were split into two groups and rotated between two sessions. One session helped students learn how to write effective resumes; the other session was formatted like a scavenger hunt. Students were given a set of questions and had to do speed interviews with as many professionals as possible in a 45-minute time frame. Questions for the professionals included things like: "Where have you traveled?", "How long have you been a writer?", and "What is a typical day like?"

Students were also encouraged to distribute their resumes to the professionals in attendance. Other companies that participated included American Greetings and Oracle.

Education and the Market

Jeanette Evans and Charles Dull

Let's look at some ways of thinking about online versus traditional education to see where we have been and where we could be going. You might enjoy a related read at [The Market Is Sending a Message About Modalities](#) (graphic comes from this site.)

Ways of looking at online and traditional learning

Those who have moved from traditional to online teaching know the warnings of the past – students cannot learn properly online, teachers cannot teach properly online, online will not last.

We have found that online is here to stay, but let's look at why. The reason is that for some students, online is the only modality that lets them go to college. Of course, we can compare what is best for the learning process while we keep in mind that online is not meant to replace traditional. Each modality has its benefits.

We could best serve students by asking what works best for each modality. If we are working, for example, with veterans, how do we best serve veterans when they are deployed. A traditional classroom may not work best for this student. The same is true for the single parent who does not have transportation and would benefit from online classes.

- When we judge quality, let's look at the idea of meeting the needs of the student. Online can provide the best quality. It could be the only alternative that meets the needs of the student.

- A practical and useful approach would be to research how to improve both the online and traditional learning experience. Each modality serves a population and purpose.

- Let's figure out what works best for each instead of having a focus on which is better.

The market is sending a message

Alternative modalities for education have emerged due to student demands and technology options. The reason for the alternatives is market driven. The reality is that institutions must cover costs, attract students, and think about the bottom line.

Since students want options in education, those institutions that fail to respond could fail. Not all schools must be totally online, but all schools should tap into technology options if they want to respond to the requests of students. As an example, students now use the Web to get immediate information access. They do not just wait for class to start. Schools should acknowledge this.

Schools should not ask whether they should respond, but they should ask how best they can respond. For example, in the workplace webinars are popular. Why should schools insist on face to face? Market forces are influencing schools to respond and adapt. A blended approach in education can better prepare students to join the workforce.

- We currently see a service economy, so education should respond to this as education also moves to provide alternative modalities.

- Education should deliver high quality products and outstanding infrastructure.

Access, education, and online

When we think about online, we should consider that when online was first developed it reflected what students wanted. Today, we see students choosing to go online or traditional based on practical decisions of which option is even possible to a student. Online provides access and is a primary goal with other goals being convenience and flexibility.

Students needs determine how a student evaluates a program and its quality, at least in part. If a student prefers online, their evaluation of an online program reflects this preference. If a student prefers a traditional approach, that student evaluates a traditional program accordingly. Both online and traditional are good options, depending on the preference of the student and a bit like comparing apples and oranges.

- To evaluate online versus traditional, we need to think of how the two options fit the needs of the

student. To eliminate online options would not make those students go to traditional programs.

♦ Online could be their only option.

♦ When we run studies comparing the two, we should take into account differences in expectations and culture.

Looking at a market-based approach can help us with evaluation and movement in the future. We can look at how education is a market that is changing and maturing to fit the technology that is available and what students expect.

Book Review: The Insider's Guide to Technical Writing

Jeanette Evans
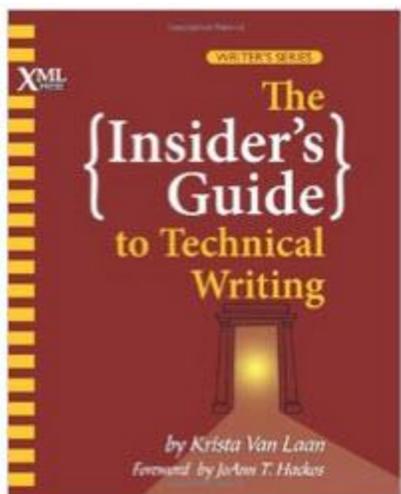
The dark side of technical writing appears as one of the topics that author Krista Van Laan tackles in what she calls an insider's view of the field of technical writing. She says documentation is sometimes an endeavor that is not much respected and explains how "documentation always comes last" and what challenges writers have due to this approach. She goes on to say she feels deadlines are either aggressive or insane – and neither of these is a great choice, of course.

That is not all there is to this book that gives a good overall picture of the field. The author works in Silicon Valley and provides what she calls an insider's view – full of tips and ideas – about the field of technical writing. If you are teaching a class on technical writing, this could be a good read for your students and a good read and review if you work in the field.

Another of what she calls the dark side is that there is no "upward mobility" for many technical writers. Sometimes writers move from company to company just to keep from getting bored.

On the bigger picture of the field, the author explains how product users need to have an explanation of the products they use and technical writers provide that needed explanation. These technical writers – also known as technical communicators – are part of what the author considers a growing field. Those who work in the technical writing field must have skills that include an understanding of technology, the ability to write, and the ability to get along with teams and people.

The book provides a good overview that could help both the novice and an experienced technical writer. Here are some of the topics the author covers:

♦ What does it take to be a technical writer

♦ What skills can help you get started in the field

♦ How do you manage projects, including setting up schedules

♦ How do you stay on track to deliver what is needed on time

♦ How should you approach issues such as templates, layouts, style guides, and indexes

♦ How should you approach issues of localization and translation

Insightfully again, the author notes – "Tech writing jobs have always been plentiful for writers who work in high-tech areas like Silicon Valley or New Jersey's pharmaceutical belt, but others don't have the option of moving on to a new job." This is the kind of observation other books on the subject do not give. We can say it really is an insider's view and worthwhile for this and the general overview the book provides.

The Insider's Guide to Technical Writing, by Krista Van Laan, Publisher: XML Press (2012), 331 pages with index.