

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter



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Celebrating 50 Years:
1953 - 2003

STC@50
Celebrating 50 Years 1953-2003

On the Front Lines

President's Notes: STC – preparing for the next 50 years

"The more things change the more they stay the same." This adage rings true for our personal life, our work life, and especially our STC organization. Conversations with STC members inside and outside our chapter and the leadership list serve make me aware of the anxiety that abounds regarding STC's transformation initiative. With any change comes anxiety, whether it's a new computer system, new job, new health plans, new management, etc. We should recognize our feelings, understand that they are normal, and look for ways to embrace the change. I believe the principles of coping with change are the same as those for coping with grief. We feel a loss, deny it, become angry, and finally accept it.

We will feel a loss with the way STC used to be. We've been denying the change is going to happen, and many of us are angry—so much so that special sessions have been created during this year's Leadership Day to help members give voice to their fears and anger. These sessions will be good. Having served as a Change Manager on technology implementations, a key component of helping organizations cope with change is to listen to the fears, anxiety, and anger of the employees and customers. Through dialog comes acceptance and buy-in.

Change will happen. As I once told my staff when our employer was merging with another company: "We either board the train or get left at the station."

Even though we, as technical communicators, work in an ever-changing field of technology, we seem to have difficulty time with change. Maybe because we have so many dynamic activities to cope with already (deadlines, technology, product features), we grasp hold to certain things as a life raft or anchor-- our processes, methodologies, and STC.

But these are false life rafts and anchors. We must grasp a hold of these anchors, instead: our skills, our professionalism, and our peers. Everything else must change. For example, my process for creating user

documentation is different from that I used 16 years ago when I physically cut out and pasted screen captures into my software documents. Now authoring, editing, review, and publishing can happen without even printing a sheet of paper. Our chapter has changed too over the last 16 years when I joined as a student. Change is inevitable.

STC as an organization must change. Our mission, vision, values, and goals that served us the last 50 years must change to get us to the next five, ten, even 100 years. So must our methods and tactics for helping us reach our goals. We should be proud that we have a leadership team that recognizes that change needs to occur. So often, businesses and organizations become defunct because they did not change. Whatever happened to Pan Am airlines or the WordStar word processing software?

So, we need to get aboard, and ask ourselves how can we help STC change? I think we need to:

- ◆ Develop our skills as professionals,
- ◆ Focus on how we can add value to our customers and the companies who pay us,
- ◆ Increase our visibility in the business community,
- ◆ Recruit our colleagues who are not members.
- ◆ And most important, volunteer at the chapter or SIG level to become change agents for STC

In this issue, Beth announces the candidates for the board and committee chairpersons. These people do not and cannot serve alone. They need assistance from us, the members. Whether you have a little time or more to offer, please consider volunteering some of to STC. Become a meeting greeter, search the want ads for the employment committee, write an article, help promote a meeting, etc. To keep STC and our chapter thriving, we all need to expend a little effort.

No matter the direction our Society takes, it's our Society. We make it what it is. We will always provide services to our members through education, networking, professional development, etc. The more things change the more they stay the same. So let's board the train and forge our future! We can do it; we have the power within us! STC @100 here we come!

Lori Klepfer, NEOSTC President

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News and Views

Election Results

It's my pleasure to announce that Mike Bates has been elected our 2nd Vice President of STC. He will become the STC president in 2 years. And, Bob Dianetti is the incoming Region 4 Director Sponsor, taking over Mike's seat. The Region 4 election was a tie. The first ever in STC history. The STC board broke the tie.

Please congratulate Mike and Bob when you see them. It is quite an honor to have one director-sponsor followed by another from our chapter. Our chapter will be issuing a press release to announce their achievements.

NEO STC is honored by Mike's and Bob's accomplishments, and I know they will serve the Society well and continue to represent our chapter well.

Chapter Awards

And there's more good news:

- ◆ Audrey Cielinski-Kessler has received this year's Distinguished SIG Service Award for the Policies and Procedures SIG
- ◆ Kris Henige has received the Distinguished Chapter Service Award for our chapter. She will be presented with her award at the May 21 meeting.
- ◆ Katie Stibora and her team received a Distinguished award in the International Online Communication Competition. Their entry will be on display at the International Conference in Baltimore.

Please congratulate our award recipients when you see them as well. Their accomplishments and service to the Society are great assets to us all.

Annual Conference - Baltimore

Congratulations to Brian Baddour and Robert Radcliffe for winning this year's conference registrations!

For those of you going to the conference in Baltimore, let's plan to kick off the conference with a chapter member dinner. If you are interested, meet us at the Hyatt lobby Sunday, May 9th at 6:00 pm. While we'll each pay for our own dinner, I think it will be nice to get together.

Web Site

NEO STC Web site announcement I apologize for the inconvenience of our Web site being down. Our chapter needs another host. I've asked Brian to research new

Internet hosts that can meet our current and future needs and prepare a proposal for the board's consideration. We should have that report in June, and be able to move forward. Moving our site is an effort that we don't want to make hastily. In the meantime, I will contact our current host to request a refund based on lost service. I'll keep you updated as progress is made.

STC @ 50 Anniversary Party

Mark your calendar: Our STC @50 anniversary party and awards dinner is May 21 at the Holiday Inn Rockside in Independence.

Region 4 Conference Wrap-Up

Region 4 Held Right Next Door

By: Stephanie Webster

The annual STC international conference is a few weeks away. Am I going to miss it? Unfortunately, yes. But luckily for me, we had the Region 4 conference right around the corner in Pittsburgh on April 17th. Was it worth the 2-hour drive? Definitely! We had renowned speakers, got to network with other members from different chapters, and experienced a town other than Cleveland for the day – some of the same benefits that you may experience at the international conference.

Keynote speaker, Cheryl Lockett Zubak, started off the conference and captured our attention through her talk on The Return of Content: What does "Content Is King" mean for Technical Communicators? She explained how technical communicators need to focus on the content that is being published to our audience. Does it really show the product use as it should, or are we focusing too much on styles, formatting, and "one space or two" issues?

She then continued to educate the attendees through An Introduction to Windows Longhorn Help. As technical communicators, we need to be willing to be flexible. Microsoft is starting to hire "non-technical writers" for online help as they are looking for more creativity, and with a generalization of tech writers – sometimes we aren't willing to bend.

Our own NEO members, Lori Klepfer and Beth Williams, presented a session on Essential Consulting Skills for Career Success. As both work in different modes of technical communication, they were able to present the idea of consulting as a freelance contractor/consultant and from within a corporation. Your selling skills must always be sharp, no matter where you are employed.

There was opportunity to view four different vendors demonstrations throughout the day. I was able to attend John Hawkins' presentation on AuthorIT. I had started evaluating this software last year and John answered many questions that had come up during my investigation. Rob Frankland, who demonstrated Veredus at our NEO STC April meeting last year, presented version 2.0 during the lunch hour. This Rascal Software too is an XML-based authoring application.

Other vendors that presented were Todd Wolpert from ComponentOne who demonstrated their Help Authoring tool and Rick Shinnors from Progressive Information Technologies. Rick showed Vasont, a product designed for structured documentation to move to a single source content management system.

Alan Houser spoke about FrameMaker and showed how to use this tool in single sourcing and XML publishing. Neil Perlin took the single sourcing idea in a more concept oriented discussion through defining the criteria for bringing a single sourcing tool into your environment. These ideas included:

- ◆ Outlining and defining your needs
- ◆ Completing a layout of how you should use single sourcing in your company
- ◆ Investigating consultant use: Is a consultant a better way to start? If so, when to get them involved.
- ◆ Determining and reviewing all cost factors
- ◆ Identifying how the documentation will be applied to different outputs (Hand-held devices, web, paper, online, etc).

Mike Bates and Whitney Quesenbery divided the topic of usability. Mike presented the high-level equipment that is available for usability testing and how it can be used in a lab or one-on-one. Whitney demonstrated the importance of identifying "persona". When you know your audience and all facts about how each individual is different, your product can be better geared toward their use.

John Hedtke closed the day with his inspiring speech on Enhancing your Creativity. We were certainly awake for our drive home as he sang Robert Frost to a Mexican tune and blew a horn at us out of the blue! These techniques demonstrated using creativity to brighten your outlook both in life and on your career path.

PROGRAMS COMMITTEE REPORT

By: Stephanie Webster & Danette Thompson, Members

April Meeting: What do Technical Communicators do in Northeast Ohio?

- ◆ When: April 19, 2004

Employment in the Northeast Ohio region seems to be picking up again. Are you prepared? The Programs, Employment, and Academic Relations committees are pulling together to present a worthwhile evening of communication and employment strategy.

We will be starting earlier in the evening to give you a chance to stroll by several different tables designated to discuss jobs, interviewing, resumes, and portfolios. Our experienced members will be available to speak with you and answer questions. Please come during this time if you are a student, or currently looking for a job to gain assistance in furthering your employment search.

We will have our traditional dinner meal as a second chance to network and speak to individuals on their experiences. The after-dinner discussion will consist of a panel of well-experienced technical communicators in our local area. Listen to the experts as they discuss their software and manufacturing writing, teaching, training, and consulting positions and what they have encountered "on the job".

We are hoping to see many students from Lakeland Community College, Tri-C, John Carroll, Case, and CSU in attendance. Please encourage any students you know that this will be a great opportunity to present themselves for internships and future jobs!

- ◆ Where: Local College Campus - if you have contacts, please let the Programs committee (programs@neostc.org) know of a location that is available.
- ◆ RSVP: programs@neostc.org

May Meeting

- ◆ When: May 21, 2004
- ◆ What: STC 50th Anniversary Party/Chapter Recognition. Reminisce with veteran and novice members of their chapter experiences. Review plans for the STC future with an update about the Transformation Committee agenda. Applaud for volunteer recognition, competition awards, and chapter achievement awards!
- ◆ Where: TBA
- ◆ RSVP: programs@neostc.org

June Meeting

- ◆ When: June 19, 2004
- ◆ What: NEOSTC Family Picnic. Join a day of fun in getting to know other members' families. Recognition of the 2003-2004 NEOSTC board, and introduction of the 2004-2005 board.
- ◆ Where: Brecksville Metropark
- ◆ RSVP: programs@neostc.org

Meeting Reviews for February, March and April

Programs Committee Report

Stephanie Webster and Dannette Thompson

We are happy to report that the last few meetings have been a huge success. If you weren't able to make the last few, we hope you can join us for the May and June meetings! Here's the wrap up of each of the last three months:

February

Harvey Wiseberg presented the creative idea of Competitive Intelligence. This topic is fairly new to a lot of technical communicators, but he showed us how we can use it on an every day level to increase our knowledge base and also gain the edge on our business practice. Through research on a small (journal articles, newspaper clippings, internet sites, etc.) and large (conducting personal interviews, trade shows, etc.) scale, you can build your competitive foundation.

March - Joint Meeting with Youngstown State and Pittsburgh Chapters

The joint meeting with the Youngstown student and Pittsburgh chapters in March was very educational and productive as we learned much about FrameMaker, RoboHelp X5, and RoboHelp for FrameMaker.

Alan Houser presented how to implement structured authoring into your documentation through FrameMaker. He first started with explaining the benefits of XML publishing including how structured authoring is beneficial and how we got to this point in technical communication. These include changes in technical publishing, such as paper to online, economics, audience expectations and new interfaces such as Interactive Electronic Training Manual. IETM interacts with the user and the database.

He defined the maturity level of delivering content in the following ways:

- ◆ Level 1: unstructured non-template
- ◆ Level 2: template-driven (style sheets, metadata)
- ◆ Level 3: XML, structured, content and format are maintained separately
- ◆ Level 4: levels 2 & 3 with content management systems

He then explained why FrameMaker is a great tool to use for structured authoring:

- ◆ Robust, reliable for long docs
- ◆ Template changes are easy throughout docs
- ◆ Auto-number, TOC, Index, and Tables are well-supported
- ◆ Conditional text is supported
- ◆ Multiple outputs
- ◆ Template-based paragraphs, character, master pages
- ◆ Compatible with all Microsoft products and other Adobe products
- ◆ FrameMaker 7.1 includes SGML and XML in combination

We were also privileged to be the first STC group to experience Macromedia's Web satellite demonstrations through Voice-over IP (VOIP) in a large setting. Most of their Web demos are completed through individual computer terminals in company offices; while we were able to conduct a 2 ½ hour session with them in California!

Mike Hamilton and RJ Jacquez instructed us on the use of RoboHelp X5 and RoboHelp for FrameMaker. Both presentations opened the door to a question and answer period of great "how do I use this at my job" questions. All of us benefited from the insight into these three great products.

NEO STC also announced the winners of the international STC meeting registration. Congratulations to Brian Baddour and Robert Radcliffe! Have a wonderful learning experience!

April

This was a terrific evening for networking. With ample time to ask questions and seek advice from the eight employment tables, attendees were able to learn more

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about how to better search for a job or improve their career marketability. We had about twenty employers representatives from the Northeast Ohio area at the meeting who presented company brochures, gave out business cards, and got to know STC members.

We were privileged to have students from Case, Cleveland State, and Youngstown State come and learn more about the chapter and the potential job opportunities in our area.

The technical communication panel topics brought out a lot of great discussion.

- ◆ Jay Gordon, 2nd year professor in the PWE program, discussed what fields he anticipates moving into for the students, and what areas of technical products would be beneficial for the students. He was very interested in hearing with others who are working in the field are doing so he can accurately teach the students and prepare them to graduate.
- ◆ Gigi Kolt, from Rockwell Automation, discussed her role as an online help author. She delved into insight on what the critical differences between online and paper documentation are, and how you can prepare to make the change.
- ◆ Elizabeth Simeral, from New Concepts Consulting, discussed how important it is to have the “why” and “how” behind what you are writing – she is a trainer and it’s essential to know why you are writing material and what audience you are writing for.
- ◆ Theresa Wilkinson did a great job speaking about her involvement with Web design. She talked about how it is critical to find the key pieces of information for your audience to bring them onto a site – and then have them trust you enough to sell them something. This reflects on documentation as well – the customers trust us enough that if they are going to use that documentation, they better be able to find what they are looking for – and quickly!
- ◆ Barb Philbrick spoke about what key skills she has implemented in consulting from her previous experiences as a full-time technical communicator. She emphasized how important it is to always be willing to pick up anything. Even if a task doesn’t seem “fun” at the time, the job may lead to a learning a critical skill that you will need later in your career.
- ◆ Karla Caldwell, from Parker Hannifin, spoke about what skills she uses day to day to work with different SME’s. She has had a range of

documentation outputs including online help, paper documentation, and web design. All of these applications involve getting the correct information from different audiences which in turn requires unique applied business skills.

With the success of this meeting – our largest turnout in a long time! – we’re potentially looking at this as a possible annual meeting. Please let the Programs committee if you would be interested in attending another meeting like this by sending an e-mail to programs@neostc.org. All meeting ideas are greatly appreciated!

May Meeting Preview

By: Stephanie Webster and Dannette Thompson

- ◆ When: May 21, 2004
- ◆ What: Join the Northeast Ohio chapter in celebrating the 50th anniversary of STC!
- ◆ Where: Holiday Inn, Independence

We will reminisce with veteran and novice members of their chapter experiences.

Mike Bates, our current Region 4 Director-Sponsor, will talk to us about the Transformation committee activities. Not sure what this is? Come find out what’s going on at the International level for the future of STC.

Applaud with the rest of the members for our many Distinguished honor achievements and the following Competition winners - Chris Griffith and Wendy Majikas, Jennifer Bauernfeind, Anne Brookhouser, Kathy Croft, and Bob Schwarz, Mike Vinson, Richard Gurin, and Glenn Goldney and Jennifer Jones.

We look forward to having another large turnout to celebrate our chapter! It’s been a great year.

June Meeting Preview

By: Stephanie Webster and Dannette Thompson

Spring Family Picnic

- ◆ When: June 19, 2004
- ◆ Where: Brecksville Metropark
- ◆ What: We all meet once a month either at the monthly meetings or a networking luncheon. But, do you know who supports the other members of the chapter the other 353 days of the year? Come meet the families and friends of our own “family”!

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On June 19 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. we'll have a NEOSTC family picnic. Join a day of fun through lunch, games, and chatting with other members' families. NEO STC will provide the meat and beverages for the picnic. Please bring one side dish per family.

We'll also be recognizing the 2003-2004 NEOSTC board and committees, and introducing the 2004-2005 positions.

Membership Announcements

Welcome New Members!

- ◆ Janet Belding
- ◆ Helen R. Wisgerhof
- ◆ Kari A. Howell
- ◆ Theresa L. Sites

Welcome Reinstated Members!

- ◆ Bob E. Clark
- ◆ Denise M. Kadilak
- ◆ Lori A. Moreland
- ◆ Curtis C. Stokes

Welcome Members transferred from another chapter!

- ◆ Carol L. Nelson-Burns from Southeastern Michigan

Chapter Membership Counts:

- ◆ Associate Fellow: 1
- ◆ Senior Members: 79
- ◆ Members: 65
- ◆ Student Members: 3
- ◆ Retired Members: 1
- ◆ ACS: 3
- ◆ Total Chapter Membership: 148

If you know of any new members or anyone who has become a senior chapter member, please let Lines & Letters know. Contact the editor at newsletter@neostc.org

Chapter Elections

The executive positions (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Immediate Past President) are all uncontested, so no ballot is being sent. Instead, as directed by our bylaws, the candidates are being

announced in this edition of Lines & Letters, the chapter newsletter.

Any opposition to these candidates must be recorded within 21 days from the publication of this newsletter.

Nominations for 2004-2005 Board and Committee Positions

By: Beth Williams

It is time to announce a new slate of candidates for the Chapter's board for the upcoming year, which runs from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005.

The executive positions (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Immediate Past President) are all uncontested, so no ballot is being sent. Instead, as directed by our bylaws, the candidates will be announced in the upcoming chapter newsletter [*ed. This is the newsletter*]. Any opposition to these candidates must be recorded within 21 days from the publication of the newsletter.

President: Kim Lindsey served as chapter vice president for a year, chapter secretary for two years, and has been a member of STC since 1999. Kim is currently a technical writer at Parker Hannifin, and has also worked at Intuit and RADCom.

Vice President: Bob Young is Senior Documentation Specialist for MAXIMUS, Inc. in North Canton, and has been a member of STC since 2000. Under the chapter bylaws, Bob automatically becomes the chapter's president in July 2005.

Secretary: Tricia Spayer served as secretary for the 2003-04 year, was on the membership committee from 2001-03, and has been a member of STC since 2000. She is currently a technical writer/illustrator for Pressco Technology Inc., where she's been since 1996.

Treasurer: Ken Rogers served as treasurer for the 2003-04 year, was on the chapter Web Site committee in 2002-03, and has been a member of STC since 2001. He is a software and information technology documentation specialist, and is currently working for TMW Systems in Beachwood.

These candidates will serve on the executive board with Lori Klepfer, who becomes Immediate Past President and will head the nominating committee next year.

Thanks to the following people who have agreed to work on our committees:

- ◆ Membership: Candace Wintering and Beverly Peterson

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- ◆ Public Relations: Jessica Hendricks
- ◆ Web Site: Brian Baddour and Bob Clark
- ◆ Newsletter: Nora Ebie and Carol Zollinger
- ◆ Programs: Carrie Begeot and Rick Elliott
- ◆ Employment: Sarah Burke and Namrata Malik
- ◆ Academic Relations: Jeanette Evans
- ◆ College Competitions: Jeanette Evans
- ◆ Professional Competitions: Beth Williams
- ◆ Networking Lunches: Angie Dianetti
- ◆ CIC SIG: Barb Philbrick
- ◆ Strategic Planning: Lori Klepfer, Kim Lindsey, Beth Williams, Angie Dianetti, and Kris Henige

We are always looking for more volunteers to help out on the committees.

If you would like to volunteer, regardless of how much time you can commit to, please contact any of the board members or the committee members directly. If you have time to help, we'll find a spot for you!

April Leadership Tips Message: Delegating

By Brenda Huettner, Associate Fellow, Southern Arizona Chapter

No man is an island; it takes a village; two heads are better than one. These sayings--and many others--emphasize the importance of sharing the workload on any project. As a Society leader, you don't have to do everything yourself. In fact, the more you can delegate your authority to other members, the more your chapter will grow and mature. By delegating, you'll be able to accomplish more, reduce your workload, and train new leaders for the upcoming years.

STC Resources

We've added a new article to our Leadership Archive: "Delegating for Results" by Suzanna Laurent

Readers are encouraged to explore the growing archive of Leadership Tips articles at <http://www.stc.org/leadershipTips.asp>.

As always, there is a wealth of information available in Tieline, the publication for Society leaders. If you do not receive Tieline, you can view all past issues from 1996 to the present online at <http://www.stc.org/tieline.asp>. And

don't forget the Chapter Handbook at http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/Ad-49-02.pdf.

Non-STC Resources

Compiled by Garret Romaine, Senior Member, Willamette Valley Chapter

Delegating responsibility is one of the hardest and yet most necessary skills for a manager to master. The success you have in coordinating your direct reports will depend not on how hard you work, but on how well you get others to work hard. Here are some resources from the Internet collected from various nonprofit groups, educational institutions, and others.

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/0,4621,288573,00.html>

This is a good article from an excellent management resource. Here's a snip from their Q&A article on delegating:

"You asked about trusting your employees to perform new duties. First, they must trust you, too. They must trust that, in their new positions, you will give them not only new responsibilities to perform, but also the authority and the tools. And they must trust that you'll allow them to fail. In the Marine Corps, there's a term, 'lifeboat leadership,' that applies here. Your employees must have the confidence that you trust their skills and judgment, but everyone must also have confidence that the leader will throw them a rope when they get in over their heads. If they can trust you, you'll be able to trust them--after all, you already do."

<http://www.csuchico.edu/sac/leaders/delegate.html>

Even student organizations such as Cal-State Chico know that to grow you have to let go. A good comprehensive set of bullet points regarding how, when, and why to delegate. The site also lists ways that leaders benefit from delegating, including "not being spread too thin," "less likely to burn out," "gaining satisfaction seeing members grow and develop," and "acquiring more experience in executive and administrative functions."

<http://www.tke.org/resources/leadership/delegating.htm>

Tau Kappa Epsilon has a good set of bullet points about delegating, and offers advice about when delegating might not be appropriate. These conditions include "low member morale," "unstable organization," "high conflict among members," and "no resources to carry out projects."

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<http://www.see.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/MENG/ME96/Documents/Aspects/delegate.html>

This site, maintained by the University of Edinburgh School of Engineering and Electronics, lists several topics. One reminder:

"Even though you have delegated a task to someone else, you are still responsible for making sure the task is done on time and correctly. If the task fails, you cannot point the finger. You delegated. It is your fault. You may have picked the wrong person for the job."

<http://www.teal.org.uk/et/page7.htm>

Christian Leadership World has developed a set of checklists for effective leadership. Some of it is a little off track for our use, but there is a helpful checklist of things to consider for delegation, including "things you are good at," "things you are bad at," "work which will provide experience," and "routine decisions."

<http://studorg.nwu.edu/leadership/delegate.html>

Northwestern University lists some good advice, including the following:

"Acknowledge achievement and give recognition. Almost nothing is worse than pouring oneself into a task, having it turn out perfectly, and then being ignored by the person who delegated it. Give recognition and praise for the work members have done. By giving recognition and letting them know you appreciate them, they will feel a further sense of pride in their work and may be more willing to help in the future."

<http://www.mapnp.org/library/guiding/delegate/basics.htm>

There is a wealth of information here, used by The Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits:

"Assign the task, not the method to accomplish it. Let the subordinate complete the task in the manner they choose, as long as the results are what the supervisor specifies. Let the employee have strong input as to the completion date of the project. Note that you may not even know how to complete the task yourself--this is often the case with higher levels of management."

<http://www.cecunc.org/business/personnel/delegating-work.html>

This site has posted an article from YoungEntrepreneur.com that offers the following advice:

" 'Let others take care of the details.' That, in a few words, is the meaning of delegating work and responsibility. In theory, the same principles for getting work done through other people apply whether you have 25 employees and one top assistant or 150 to 200 employees and several managers."

"I not only use all the brains I have, but all I can borrow."

--Woodrow Wilson, as quoted on the University of Edinburgh, School of Engineering and Electronics site (above)

TECHNICAL STANDARDS NAMES WORST MANUAL

*By: Michelle Wier, Technical Standards (760) 233-7570
michelle@tecstandards.com*

Escondido – Technical Standards, Southern California's source for specialized documentation staffing and technical writing, today announced the winning entry in its fourth annual Worst Manual Contest. This year's \$100.00 prize went to Rhonda Bracey of Western Australia for her submission of a two-page Safety Section from her friend's air-conditioning unit.

"The frustration that's caused by a poorly written manual is almost a universal experience. Poor documentation can cause more confusion than comprehension and could lead to liability issues and hidden costs for companies," said Michelle Wier of Technical Standards. "On the other hand, good product documentation results in satisfied repeat customers, reduced costs, and limited liability exposure for companies."

With entries solicited from the 25,000+ membership of the Society for Technical Communication, Technical Standards' Worst Manual Contest is designed to underscore the importance of clear technical writing for everything from consumer products, computer hardware and software, to employee handbooks.

This Year's Winner: The Safety Section of a commercial air-conditioner User's Guide

This year's worst manual, submitted by Rhonda Bracey of South Perth, Western Australia, is a section of a User's Guide for a commercial product marketed to the general public. Rhonda's entry only consisted of the two-page Safety Section, but that was enough! As Rhonda Bracey puts it, "translator beware!" If the phrase, "...to

have the observance without fail to prevent the damage to harm and the property beforehand to the person who use this product and other persons" doesn't scare you, then some of the other text will!

The symbol key alone provided much material for the staff at Technical Standards to question. For example, the symbol key contained a symbol (twice) that wasn't referenced in the text, but didn't contain a symbol that was referenced. In another instance, the same symbol was used for both Warning and Caution, but each represented very different consequences. The difference between possible death compared to minor injury or material damage seems worth having its own distinction. There were also some amusing symbol descriptions such as, "Attention rousing," "Prohibition" and "Compulsion."

A few excerpts:

"Please do not put the one embarrassed because it gets wet under the air conditioner."

"To apply the cold wind to the body for a longtime and so as to not exist about cooling too much"

"Do not blow the wind to animals and plants directly. It occasionally causes a bad influence for animals and platns to be exerted."

Often, poorly written manuals for consumer products can be attributed to translation problems. Clear, accurate translations are extremely important when communicating health and safety warnings associated with operating or assembling a product.

"For many end users, bad documentation amounts to nothing more than an inconvenience and possibly a poor impression of the company," said Wier. "But for companies, the results can affect the bottom line in terms of overloaded help lines, reduced revenues from dissatisfied customers who won't come back, and increased liability."

To view the top entries and more information about Technical Standards' fourth annual Worst Manual Contest, go to their Web site at www.tecstandards.com.

About Technical Standards

Technical Standards provides documentation writing and staffing services to Southern California companies in a wide range of industries. Carefully assessing the specific needs of its clients, Technical Standards provides a customized fit for each job by handpicking candidates from its pool of writers. When handling outsourced projects, Technical Standards produces clear, accurate,

and understandable documentation to help ensure end-user satisfaction and reduced liability.

Editor's Exigency

by: Nora E. Ebie, Editor

I would like to give a very special THANK YOU to the following for contributing to the March/April 2004 issue of Lines & Letters:

- ◆ Beth Williams
- ◆ Stephanie Webster

Lines & Letters needs your help!

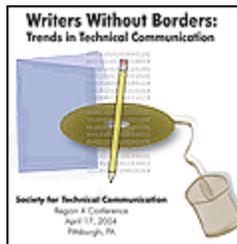
Summer 2004 Edition: I will be publishing the next issue of Lines & Letters during June. I will be looking for (AND EXPECTING) many articles on the conference. I'm hoping that all of you who will be attending the conference to write reviews of what you did, what you saw, what you heard, and what you learned. I am extending the deadline for content submission to June 1.

All Issues: Looking for reporters for Lines & Letters. Attend meetings and write summary reviews about them. Attend and report on other various seminars, workshops and conferences. Research other STC Web sites for current, topical information/articles related to each issue. E-mail the editor at newsletter@neostc.org

Got something to say about what's happening in our Chapter, the District or National? Send a LETTER TO THE EDITOR and tell us what you think.

Regional Opportunities

STC Region 4 Conference: Writers Without Borders: Trends in Technical Communication



What:
STC Region 4 Conference

Where:
Holiday Inn Select -
University Center
Pittsburgh, PA

When:
Saturday April 17, 2004
8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Cost
\$99 (before March 15)
\$119 (after March 15)

Registration fee includes:

- Admission to the keynote session
- Choice of several presentations exploring the role of technical communicators
- Continental breakfast
- Buffet lunch with a vendor demo
- Conference t-shirt

Technical communicators today do the traditional—write books, online help, white papers and requirements and specifications documents—as well as the untraditional—serve as usability experts, user interface designers, marketing support and internal consultants. They also explore, embrace and implement new technologies to improve their product deliverables as well as their efficiency. This one-day conference explores some "out of the box" roles that technical communicators perform today, looks at the latest technology trends, and examines aspects of technical communication you may want to consider in the future.

STC Educational Opportunities

More New Phone Seminars from STC

STC has greatly expanded its program of telephone seminars--#### will be offered from April 2004 to June 2004! Some of these will include a Web component--participants will not only hear the presenter via conference call, they will also follow along online via a series of Web pages.

Information for all upcoming Phone/Web seminars can be found at www.stc.org/seminars.asp. Additional information on sponsor, location and price can be found on the NEOSTC Calendar

STC's telephone seminars have been a great success so far--please help us keep the momentum going!

Society Information

TRANSFORMATION TEAM

[This article contained several links to the Society website; the URLs are no longer valid]

Blog Update!!!

As many of you know, the Transformation Team has been maintaining a blog at <http://trans4mation.typepad.com/>. The same articles that have been posted on the STC Web site have also appeared on the blog. The blog has given us the ability to receive and post comments to each article.

However, we will soon begin using a new communication tool for our transformation efforts: a series of telephone broadcasts on transformation-related subjects. The STC Web site will offer opportunities to submit comments on these broadcasts, as well as small surveys to help us better focus our messages.

Because of this new tool, and also due to declining interest in the blog, the Transformation Team will discontinue updating the blog.

Letter to STC Members

From: Thea Teich, President; Andrea Ames, First Vice President and Suzanna Laurent, Second Vice President

Dear friends,

As you know, work is underway to determine what STC must do to attract, serve, and retain members as the needs of employers and the economy evolve. Many of the growth areas for technical communicators require new skills. STC can be an important part of this learning

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process; however, to serve members better as they face these changes and challenges, STC must transform itself.

A Transformation Team has been appointed, and now we need your help. As part of the communication plan developed to keep the membership updated on this important effort, the Transformation Team has posted an article on the Transformation page of the STC Web site at www.stc.org/transformation.asp. We feel strongly that the members must be kept apprised of the transformation effort (by reading the Web site) and encouraged to give us their feedback on the Transformation Team BLOG at trans4mation.typepad.com. This will best enable the team to meet member needs.

The plan is to post a series of articles to both the Transformation page of the STC Web site and the Transformation Team Blog. The first two articles in this series are posted.

If you have any questions about the transformation effort, please contact one of the team members listed on the Transformation Team Web site.

Thank you for your assistance and continued dedication to STC. As STC leaders, we know the time and effort you dedicate to STC, and we appreciate your investment.

Sincerely,

Thea Teich, President

Andrea Ames, First Vice President

Suzanna Laurent, Second Vice President

Transformation: Whys and Wherefores

Technical communication is often defined as any effort that makes it possible for people to get the most from the technology in their lives. Under that broad umbrella come all the activities technical communicators have found themselves in: instructional design, information architecture, marketing communications, documentation development, usability, management, training, writing and editing--whatever is necessary to make our companies' and clients' products and services acceptable, understandable, and accessible to customers and users.

As technical communicators, we are all aware that change is a basic parameter of our profession. By definition, we try to make technical information understandable and accessible to audiences who are not

knowledgeable about the related field. Therefore, because technical information is ever changing, we accept the fact that our work will be continually various, constantly in flux. It's just the nature of the beast.

So, it really should come as no surprise that as time goes on, different requirements are demanded of us. It seems that just as soon as we feel comfortable with a particular work flow, software package, or job description, it is "folded, spindled, and mutilated, i.e., transformed into something new that we must adapt to, learn, and use.

If we agree that change is a guaranteed, albeit sometimes unwelcome, component of our profession, then it follows that the associations, organizations, activities, and avocations that we turn to for support, assistance, relationships, and education--among other things--must also change so they can continue to meet our needs and the needs of the technical communicators who are currently in training.

This is the essence of the purpose of the STC transformation initiative: basically, it's to keep up with you. So with that in mind, the overall goals of the Transformation effort have been defined as follows:

- ◆ Increase the breadth, relevance and value of services delivered to members.
- ◆ Create a long term platform for financial stability
- ◆ Promote membership growth
- ◆ Enable STC to be a leader and advocate for the Technical Communication professions and their practitioners.

In defining the goals for transformation, it is equally important to be clear about what this transformation effort is NOT trying to do.

- ◆ It is not focused on solving our short term financial pain. (though that certainly is being addressed separately). It is about evolving to a more stable business model for the future.
- ◆ It is not about dismantling, strangling or in other ways undermining the Chapters.
- ◆ It is not a secret agenda to eliminate the publications

Obviously, this transformation effort is not something we have just suddenly undertaken. The board's work on governance in 2000-2001 first identified the need for the Society to change how it operated in order to assure its future. One major change that resulted from that

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governance work was an increased reliance on the professional staff in the STC office for our burgeoning operations, with the board moving toward a policy-setting orientation--although we're not completely there yet, we know this is the correct and inevitable path for an organization of our size and aspirations.

This transformation effort will not be completed by June of 2004; indeed, no recommendations have yet been made to the board. And while we anticipate quick adoption of some recommendations, implementation of some of the programs or operation changes may be several years away.

Transformation is a process and while change is rarely any fun, the STC as we currently know it, must change--because our membership is changing. So please remember that all this focus and effort is directed at one thing only... to make things better for you, the STC's members.

In the next communication, we will share with you the participants in the extended Transformation team, their roles and the thinking behind them. Following that, we will share the Transformation principles and methodology that we have adopted to guide the effort. And finally, with those foundations laid, we will share the results of the key milestones as they are reached. We are making great progress already, and are looking forward to sharing the results.

Transformation: The Team

Leadership can be quite a challenge. One reason is that in STC our leaders are all volunteers who must also earn a living—even those members you elect to the board of directors. In addition, STC leaders are dedicated to making a difference in this diverse group of professions that we call technical communication. With that commitment in mind, the board of directors continues to implement the various phases of the STC transformation that actually began with the branding initiative. We realize that transformation is not really "new" to our profession, because we've been evolving for the last 50 years, but everyone knows that for our profession to survive and for STC to provide the best value as a professional organization, we must constantly strive to improve.

The board of directors realized that it would take a specialized team to lead this effort, so at the May 2003 board meeting, a "core" Transformation Team was appointed. That team developed a vision, goals, and principles to guide them. The people involved represent many of the communities of practice within STC. Two

past Society presidents, the current president, and the two current vice presidents (who will be STC presidents over the next two years) are all working closely together so any recommended programs and improvements can be implemented consistently in the future.

The board also felt it was necessary to provide the membership with a means of responding to and submitting ideas related to the transformation. The team created a blog (this web log is at <http://trans4mation.typepad.com>) so members can present and discuss their ideas, concerns, and issues.

The Transformation Team then added representatives who could provide the chapter, SIG, international, marketing, management, financial, business owner, and historical perspectives to their committee. They called this "extended group" the Stakeholders. Let me introduce each of our 20 Transformation Team members and share the perspective they each bring to the team.

| Team Component | Individual (alphabetical by last name) | Society Position | Perspective Brought to the Team |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Core, Steering | Andrea Ames | First vice president, President 2004-2005 | Corporate management, education, large chapter |
| Core | Rahel Baille | Director-Sponsor Region 7 | Canadian, business owner, medium chapter |
| Core | Jon Baker | Director-Sponsor Region 1 | Regional, financial, large chapter |
| Stakeholder | Mike Bates | Director-Sponsor Region 4 | Proposal writer, corporate management, medium chapter |
| Stakeholder | Judy Glick-Smith | President 2001-2002, Member of SAC | Management, business owner, Senior Advisory Council (SAC), large chapter. Judy started the Leadership Initiative. |
| Core | Bonni Graham | Director-Sponsor Region 8 | Regional, business owner, metrics, medium chapter |
| Stakeholder | Sandra Harner | Assistant to the President for Academic and Research Programs | Educator, faculty advisor to a student chapter |
| Stakeholder, Steering | Peter Herbst | Executive Director | Historical, office 20 years, management |
| Stakeholder | Vici Koster-Lenhardt | Director-Sponsor Region 2 | Regional, international (European), corporate management, small chapter |
| Core, Steering | Suzanna Laurent | Second vice president, President 2005-2006 | Management, business owner, small chapter |
| Stakeholder | Taryn Light | Boston chapter past president | Large chapter, former president |
| Stakeholder | Whitney Quisenberry | Usability SIG and helped establish UPA (Usability Professionals Association) | SIG, large chapter |
| Stakeholder | Ginny Redish | Founder and former president of the Usability SIG | Former board member, SIG, added value, large chapter |
| Core | Jim Romano | Assistant to the President for Membership Development | International, business owner, metrics, large chapter |
| Stakeholder | Fred Sampson | Silicon Valley chapter president | Large chapter, current president, offshoring |
| Core, Steering | Ed See | Immediate Past President, President 2002-2003, SAC | Corporate management, marketing executive, large chapter |
| Core, Steering | Mary Jo Stark | Transformation Team Manager, Board Treasurer | Financial, subject-matter expert, education, large chapter |
| Stakeholder | Bill Stolgitis | Former Executive Director | Legal, historical, management, office |
| Stakeholder, Steering | Thea Teich | President 2003-2004 | Management, marketing, business owner, finance, medium chapter |
| Stakeholder | Debbie Wiles | Lone Star chapter president | Large chapter, current president |

As the team grew, we realized that a Steering committee was needed to facilitate and approve the critical activities of the Transformation Team, including John Nardone's work. Members of the Steering committee are Mary Jo Stark, Peter Herbst, Thea Teich, Ed See, Andrea Ames, and Suzanna Laurent.

The board of directors has engaged John Nardone, a strategy and marketing consultant, to give us professional assistance in our transformation process. In addition to being a "friend of the Society," John brings us a wealth of experience. That experience will help us ensure the transformation is successful. He has developed a structure for the entire process, is

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facilitating the process, and is providing unbiased experience and perspective. You can read about his credentials at <http://trans4mation.typepad.com> under "The transformation process."

In the next communication, we will share the Transformation principles and explain the transformation process.

Lines & Letters Editor

- ◆ Nora Ebie (nora.ebie@tri-c.edu)