BLUE PENCIL

PITTSBURGH CHAPTER, STC HTTP://WWW.STCPGH.ORG VOL. 42, NO. 3 - OCTOBER 2005

Pick of the Issue

Quite accidentally, this issue of the Blue Pencil seems to have taken on a "touchy-feely" theme. It covers some topics that perhaps are not mainstream technical writing - keeping a diary (p. 1), body language (p. 6), and visual communication (p. 8) - but can help us be better technical writers nonetheless. Come enjoy - and learn from - the side trip.

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The Diary as a Professional Development Tool

by Ray Janicko

"Withdrawal is a preparation for emergence." — *Nor Hall*

There are many elaborate programs designed to help you set goals, develop action plans, manage time, and celebrate achievement. An activity that is central to many if not all of these programs is the keeping of a diary or journal, at least in an abbreviated form, to record your thoughts and to assess your progress.

Although many people associate diaries with the "Dear Diary" of adolescence, others have discovered in the diary an opportunity to grow and develop both personally and professionally. They approach the diary as a serious tool for professional development—"a place for you to clarify goals, visualize the future, and focus your energies; a means of freeing your intuition and imagination; a workbook for exploring your dreams, your past, and your present life." [1]

Why should I keep a diary?

A well-kept diary becomes a database of information that you can refer to when you are solving problems, setting goals, making decisions, or looking for creative ideas. Small observations, recorded faithfully, may open streams of new ideas and insights that otherwise might have been lost. Being able to recall in detail how you solved one problem may help you to see the solution to another.

In addition to recording information, a diary can help you to improve your language skills. Writing every day exercises your mind, promotes thinking, and forces you to express yourself clearly [2]. A diary can also help you to appreciate the skills and abilities you already have. When you face difficulties at work, it helps to have reminders of your achievements and plans to pull you through [3].

Should I keep it confidential?

How you choose to answer the question "Who reads the diary?" affects the contents and therefore the usefulness of your diary. If you decide to share your diary or portions of it with a mentor or confidant for feedback, you may find yourself trading off a certain degree of candor or spontaneity in your writing. The same internal censor that keeps you from "telling it like it is" in front of your supervisor or peers goes to work as you write. As a result, you lose the value of the diary as an accurate mirror of your thoughts.

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STC SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

President's Column

by Nicky Bleiel

Today I attended a session on networking. This session was with students at a local university, and I found it interesting that they had to be sold on the reasons why you should network before the speakers could move on and discuss *how* to network. Specifically, they had to be sold on the concept that networking is a marathon, not a sprint. They had already observed that walking up to people at meetings and saying "Hi my name is X and I'm looking for a job," did not instantly help them get a job or even an internship. In fact, it was a conversational hot potato.

But networking can help you land a job, internship, or other prospects. As many of you have experienced, it can take a year – maybe even four or five or ten – for just the right opportunity to present itself.

In reality, I think many of us avoid networking not because it is ineffective, but because it is hard. We can learn where to meet the right people, how to prepare, how to dress, what to say, what *not* to say … but in reality, it is very difficult for most of us to walk into a roomful of strangers and start a conversation.

But it is an important thing to do.

You can start talking about the weather, or the buffet — but when attending local meetings (such as STC monthly meetings), a great conversation starter is to ask a member or one of the leaders what the organization does and how you can volunteer to help — and follow up. Every organization needs help at some level and becoming a volunteer is not only an easy way to meet a lot of dedicated, involved, knowledgeable people, but also to learn more about your field and your local community. The opportunity to write articles, design websites, recruit members, and be a leader is right there in front of you. Those are probably skills you might not have a chance to hone otherwise.

And at the next monthly meeting, you won't be walking into a roomful of strangers. Plus you'll have much more interesting things to talk about than the stuffed mushrooms.

Not to mention the fact that once you've made connections at one meeting, you'll see many of those people at other events.

STC Pittsburgh has a number of great opportunities available for jobs big and small. You can choose to spend two hours a month or twenty, but the impact is the same. You'll be networking, learning, and seizing an opportunity.

When you attend the next meeting, look for chapter officers and Board members; our positions are on our name tags. And you'll know just what to say – if we don't start the conversation first.

STC

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication.

Four awards of $1,500 each will be granted for academic year 2006-2007.

Application deadline is February 15, 2006.

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office:
901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
(703) 522-4114
www.stc.org

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter

P.O. Box 133
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National Office

901 North Stuart Street
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Phone: 703-522-4114
Fax: 703-522-2075

Membership at a Glance

(as of October 3, 2005)

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Total chapters: 140

Pittsburgh

Total members: 135

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Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Telephone/Web Seminars

Cost: $99 (STC Members), $149 (non-members). See stc.webex.com for more information and to register.

November 9, 2005

FlashHelp, WebHelp, Web Help… Help!

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Instructor: Neil Perlin

Confused about the differences between sound-alike technologies like WebHelp and Web Help or HTML Help and HTML help? Not sure what newer technologies like XHTML and SVG are, and how they may affect your authoring tool selection and development? These uncertainties can make it difficult to select technologies and tools for creating online help or documentation and increase the risk of misunderstandings. This seminar demystifies these options and others to help you select the most appropriate formats and tools and be aware of the technical and business aspects of new technologies.

December 7, 2005

Mastering Metadata: Making the Most of Your Content Management System

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Instructor: Jack Danaher

For many organizations, moving into a content management environment can be a step into the Great Unknown. Whether you call it content management, single-sourcing, structured knowledge, or structured information, deciding on the tools, styles, and document structure is the easy part. Now, you've got to figure out how to put it all together to work most efficiently and cost-effectively. Knowing how to develop and use a robust metadata model can help. Metadata, or "hidden" data about content, helps an organization manage its knowledge efficiently by classifying and organizing data, facilitating the reuse of content in multiple outputs, and enabling dynamic content delivery.

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STC Offering 2006 Scholarships

The STC is offering scholarships for full-time, post-secondary students who are studying for a degree in the area of technical writing, editing, graphical design, interface design, or web design. Four awards of $1,500 each will be granted toward school tuition and expenses. Two awards are granted to graduate students, and two to undergraduates. Applications must be received by February 15, 2006.

To obtain application forms and additional information, contact:

Society for Technical Communication

Attn: Scholarships

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904

Arlington, VA 22203-1822

(703) 522-4114

www.stc.org

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National Notes, cont. on page 4

National Notes, cont. from page 3

STC Salary Survey Available

STC's *2005 Salary Survey* has been posted on the STC Web site (www.stc.org/salarySurvey.asp). The annual salary survey provides technical communicators with valuable information about compensation in Canada and the United States. The information is broken down by levels of experience, levels of education, gender, and ZIP code/postal code.

Pittsburgh Points

Pittsburgh Points contains news about Pittsburgh chapter members and local items of interest. If you have an item for Pittsburgh Points, please email it to Meg at meg@alumni.cmu.edu.

Pittsburgh chapter members featured in *Tieline*:

The Pittsburgh chapter is nicely represented on page one of the October issue of *Tieline* with an article titled "Planning and Executing a Successful Regional Conference" by our own Nicky Bleiel and Barb Stanton. You can download the issue at http://www.stc.org/Tieline/issues/2005_10.pdf.

News on Local Technology Events

Pittsburgh Business Calendar: http://www.businesscalendar.org/

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Diaries, cont. from page 1

Diarists over the centuries have developed clever ruses for disguising their work. Some wrote in foreign languages; others wrote in shorthand, or in code. You might find it useful to assign innocuous pseudonyms or nicknames to people who would recognize themselves in your diary. Perhaps the best advice is to write and store your diary away from the place where its discovery might be incriminating.

What should I write?

> "The diary-keeper is an interventionist, the transmuter [sic] of what would be normally perishable into what must last. Without a diary, almost everything we do or say or think or feel slips very quickly into oblivion." — *Ronald Blythe*

At first, you might be tempted to write long passages describing the weather, your surroundings, or memories. A professional diary, however, should focus on the people, situations and interactions that have the most immediate influence on your career. Some people make quick notes during the day to record dates, names, and one- or two-sentence descriptions of events; later, they take the time to reflect on their thoughts, feelings and decisions, using the facts as reminders [4]. Over time, you learn which information you need and which information can safely slip very quickly into oblivion.

"Although many people associate diaries with the "Dear Diary" of adolescence, others have discovered in the diary an opportunity to grow and develop both personally and professionally."

Concentrate on conversations. Blythe writes: ". . . one of the first things the diarist knows he must get right is talk. The discipline of memorizing conversation and putting it down on the page hours later can help the diarist in other ways." [5] In addition to developing your listening skills, your diary can help you recall specifics of conversations that might otherwise be forgotten.

Make detailed lists. A list is "a summary of what you need, want, or have, or see at a particular moment in time. It's a survey, an overview, a summary of the crucial facts of the state of one aspect of your life. It's a kind of blueprint that can be a guide to the future." [6]

Above all, be diligent. "Educators and mental health experts agree that to be truly effective, the diary must become a daily. . . habit. Ten minutes of writing per day may be enough. The repetition helps promote the discipline of daily entries." [7]

References

(1) Rainer, Tristine. *The New Diary*. Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1978

(2, 3) Casewit, Curtis W. *The Diary: A Complete Guide to Journal Writing*. Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1982. p. 131-132.

(4) Lloyd, Roseann and Richard Solly. *Journey Notes: Writing for Recovery and Spiritual Growth*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989. p. 6.

(5) Blythe, Ronald, ed. *The Pleasures of Diaries: Four Centuries of Private Writing*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1989. p. 4.

(6) Lloyd and Solly, p. 64.

(7) Casewit, p. 133.

Raymond P. Janicko has presented several conference papers and progressions on topics ranging from GUI design to reengineering to time management for the technical communicator. He is a writer/editor for the Pennsylvania Association of Notaries and holds an M.F.A. in nonfiction writing from the University of Pittsburgh. This article was adapted from a progression Ray presented at the STC Annual Conference in 1995.

Body Language and Mirroring, pt. 1 - *by Laurel Patterson*

This is part one of a two-part article. This part will examine body language, and part two will examine mirroring in the November issue.

Studies show that 93 percent of communication is non-verbal. Only seven percent is the result of words. Learning and practicing the skills related to non-verbal communication—body language and mirroring—results in improved interviews, meetings, and consultations.

Be aware of your body language

Body language, according to the dictionary, is "the process of communicating through conscious or unconscious gestures and poses." It includes, often just on the subconscious level, the eyes, facial expressions, positions and movements of the torso and limbs, and the voice.

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR	INTERPRETATION
Brisk, erect walk	Confidence
Standing with hands on hips	Readiness, aggression
Sitting with legs crossed, foot kicking slightly	Boredom
Sitting, legs apart	Open, relaxed
Arms crossed on chest	Defensiveness
Walking with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched	Dejection
Hand to cheek	Evaluation, thinking
Touching, slightly rubbing nose	Rejection, doubt, lying
Rubbing the eye	Doubt, disbelief
Hands clasped behind back	Anger, frustration, apprehension
Locked ankles	Apprehension
Head resting in hand, eyes downcast	Boredom
Rubbing hands	Anticipation
Sitting with hands clasped behind head, legs crossed	Confidence, superiority
Open palm	Sincerity, openness, innocence
Pinching bridge of nose, eyes closed	Negative evaluation
Tapping or drumming fingers	Impatience
Steepling fingers	Authoritative
Patting/fondling hair	Lack of self-confidence; insecurity
Tilted head	Interest
Stroking chin	Trying to make a decision
Looking down, face turned away	Disbelief
Biting nails	Insecurity, nervousness
Pulling or tugging at ear	Indecision

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Becoming familiar with body language and incorporating it in our communication really does work. Some people perceive the meanings in body language naturally. They have an instinct, a feel for it, and may not even realize they're using or discerning body language. Others need to consciously work on it. They may not read people well and have trouble communicating. Using body language and mirroring for these folks may seem awkward at first, but with study and practice, results in better rapport. See the sidebar for examples of body language and their interpretation.

Body language is there; it's not a bunch of hooey. It is happening all around us, every day, all the time. People react to our body language

Body Language, cont. on page 7

Body Language, cont. from page 6

whether we or they are conscious of it. For example, have you consciously watched someone's pupils when you first met, to see if they became larger? Probably not, but studies have shown that when "someone likes what they see, their pupil size increases and so does their blink rate." People note this on a subconscious level and react accordingly.

Another tiny bit of body language is "the eyebrow flash. When we first see someone we're attracted to, our eyebrows rise and fall. If they are equally attracted to us, they raise their eyebrows in return." It only lasts about a fifth of a second. "Some experts claim it's the most instantly recognized non-verbal sign of friendly greeting in the world."

Check yourself and your habits

Do you allow your eyes to shift about, instead of looking at the speaker? Are your eyes focused too intently on the person speaking, causing uneasiness? Are you smiling or frowning? Is your handshake firm? Do you extend your hand palm up? Are you slouched or standing erect? Are you crossing your arms over your chest? Are your torso and limbs pointing toward the person you are listening to? Are you standing too close, invading someone's personal space?

Are your gestures communicating positive messages? Do you have mannerisms that you need to discontinue? Are you furrowing your eyebrows? Rubbing your nose? Steepling your fingers? Are you fidgeting? Now is the time to recognize and avoid any negatives. Your body language should portray who you are and who you are working to become.

Keep in mind that while people are noting your body language, you may also read theirs. Note the negative and positive points of their body language. Apply the rule of four, which is: Identify four signals with the same message before believing it. Don't jump to conclusions, watch for a pattern of body language. Also, note whether the body language matches the verbal message.

If someone reacts to you with negative body language (which is at first on their subconscious level), see if you can back up or clarify your position (before it transfers to their consciousness).

Next month, mirroring.

Laurel Patterson, an active WorkQuester, is a consultant specializing in writing and speaking on human relations, diversity, customer servicee, and environmental issues.

At the September chapter meeting, current and past presidents Nicky Bleiel and Barb Stanton show off the "Chapter of Distinction" plaque from the STC National office.

Making Messages Visible - by Nancy Carpenter

At the September chapter meeting, Don Moyer of Agnew Moyer Smith (AMS) shared his insights into "foglifting," that is, how to clarify a message using visual explanation. Communication consists of a message, a channel and an audience. First, consider what you want the audience to know and what are the physical constraints, such as time and money. Outline the message. Sketch the parts and their relationships. Distill the process to its essence and sketch a blueprint. Refine the drawings and provide fine detail. Add some "magic vision" – special effects to open up detail. Remember that the scale does not matter. If a computer is vital, it can be larger than a truck. Evaluate the results through user testing.

Pick the channel that is most effective and don't use all channels for all audiences. Certain messages with certain audiences succeed better with a picture, such as topographic maps, bar charts, process diagrams, structural diagrams, storyboards, 3D sketches.

Don showed examples that crystallized enormous quantities of data. For instance, AMS drew a 3D representation of the population distribution in the United States. The hills and peaks on the map represented the size of the population.

To begin "foglifting" try these steps.

- Get a model audience to do user testing. We won't be able to borrow Don's brother (his test audience), but we might find someone who is typical of our own users.
- Show the physical image and don't elaborate too much. In other words, keep the graphic simple.

Foglifting, cont. on page 9

Quick Tip...Using an FTP Server Directly from MS Office Applications - *by Robert Mohr*

You do not need a dedicated ftp tool to upload/download files to/from an ftp server when using Microsoft Office applications. All of the Office applications enable you to interact with an ftp server, and all of them work the same way. The following procedure uses Microsoft Word to illustrate how to save a new document to an ftp server. You must have the URL of the ftp server, a login name, and a password in order to complete the following procedure.

Create an ftp site reference within Word:

1. Open any document in Word.
2. Select **File > Save as**. The *Save As* window is displayed.
3. Click the down-arrow on the **Save in** drop-down list and select **Add/Modify FTP Locations**.

The Add/Modify FTP Locations window is displayed.

4. Enter the **Name of the FTP site**.
5. Select the **User** radio button and enter your login/user name.
6. Enter a **Password**.
7. Click **Add** and click **OK**. The new ftp site is added to the list of FTP sites and the window closes.

Once the ftp site reference has been created, you can save/open files to/from the ftp site without having to manually log in—Word will log in for you when you select the ftp site from the list.

To save a file:

1. Select **File > Save as**. The *Save As* window is displayed.
2. Click the down-arrow on the **Save in** drop-down list. The ftp site reference created above is displayed in the list of available locations.
3. Select the ftp site and click **Save**.

To open a file:

1. Select **File > Open**. The *Open* window is displayed.
2. Click the down-arrow on the **Look in** drop-down list. The ftp site reference created above is displayed in the list of available locations.
3. Select the ftp site and the file, and click **Open**.

November Meeting: Essential Consulting Skills for Career Success

Speaker: Lori Klepfer

Date: Monday, November 14, 2005

Time: 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

With the ever-changing field of technical communication, the days of quietly cranking out procedures are slowly ending, but more opportunities are present for practitioners to expand their scope and focus. To be able to fill these opportunities, technical communicators must expand their skills and expertise. We can look to the field of consulting to help us prepare to meet the new challenges ahead of us. This session explores essential consulting skills that any communicator, whether working internally as a solo practitioner or as part of a team, or externally as a consultant, should cultivate for career success.

Lori Klepfer is the founder and Principal of LJK consulting, a training, e-learning, and technical communication consulting firm she founded in 2001.

Place: Pittsburgh Technology Council - for directions, see www.pghtech.org/aboutus/directions.asp

Cost: $12.00 members/$15.00 non-members/$10.00 students/unemployed (dinner/beverage included)

RSVP: by Nov. 9 to Beverly Spagnolo at 412-766-7200 or bspagnolo@klauscherarchitects.com.

Foglifting, cont. from page 8

- To help simplify, use a black box or cloud to represent unnecessary detail or intuitive activity.
- Sometimes, simplicity is not your goal. It might be sufficient to put events into logical order and leave some complexity.
- Look for the loop, the path from beginning to end.
- Look for places where people interact with the process.
- Include some "wow," something attractive, bright, fun, to give more life to your images.
- Take time off from the project. Try to find some activity that is related. For instance, technical writers could try poetry.

2005-2006			
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