

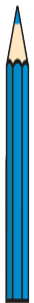
BLUE PENCIL

PITTSBURGH CHAPTER, STC

[HTTP://WWW.STCPGH.ORG](http://www.stcpgh.org)

VOL. 43, No. 1 - AUG 2006

Pick of the Issue



It's a new year! Right? If you don't think so, read your new president's column on page 2. We have new programming coming to you (cover story), new ways you can give your input and help to the chapter (page 6), and some advice when you're looking for a new job (page 4). Who needs to wait for January 1st to do something new?

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Welcome Back!

With fall comes the beginning of many things, not the least of which is a new year of networking and learning with the STC! Our chapter programming kicks off on September 18 with a familiar face. STC senior member Mike Bates of Intuit Real Estate Solutions, Cleveland, Ohio presents a usability case study and discusses how wikis are changing the way we think about user assistance and self-service support.

Bates and the “lean” team at Intuit published a 5,000 article wiki for large commercial and residential real estate clients who use the company’s enterprise software to manage their real estate and assets. Bates discusses how the team accomplished this, how clients reacted, and the discoveries that could change the approach to user assistance in the future.

The details of where/when/how much are on the back page of this newsletter.

While you have your calendar out, go ahead and pencil in the rest of the year's programming.

- October 9 – *Topic-oriented Writing with XML and DITA* (Alan Houser)
- November 13 – *Adopting Adobe Captivate* (Nicky Bleiel)
- December 18 – *The Fun Factor: Make E-learning Interesting with Good Writing Techniques* (Sheldon Murphy)
- January 8 – *Annual Career Roundtable*
- February 12 – *Managing Translations 101* (Charlene Nagy)
- March 12 – *Rules of Myths: The Changing English Language* (Theo Teich & Karen O’Keefe)
- April 9 – *Documentation Planning and Estimating* (John Hedtkke)
- May – *Annual Banquet* (date TBD)

We will also offer two Software Saturdays this year on *Structured Authoring/ DITA* and *MadCap Flare*.

So, join us this year, and get involved in your Pittsburgh chapter STC.



President's Column - *by Beverley Spagnolo*

Resolution time?

I know, I know, it's August, and the time for resolutions isn't until way off in January. But for the STC Pittsburgh Chapter, this is the start of our new year, and time for some resolutions.

As the incoming chapter president, I have spent hours—no, make that days—trying to figure out what sorts of profound things I should say to start this new year. And I'm still trying to figure it out, but Meg wants my column so I'm hitting against a deadline, and doesn't that sound familiar? We're all in the midst of constant deadlines; sometimes showing up for a meeting is the best we can do, sometimes we don't even make the RSVP deadline. "If only I had more time to get to a meeting..." or "If only I had time to volunteer to do something for the chapter; it's a good thing somebody else is doing it..." But you know what? Since STC is an all-volunteer organization, we—you and me—are the ones who are doing it.

One of my major resolutions for STC's new year is to try to get as many of you as possible more involved with the Pittsburgh chapter. That means asking you to spend some extra time—even if it's only a couple hours a month—doing things to improve and build our chapter. This past year we won the STC Chapter of Excellence award, and last year we won Chapter of Distinction. You don't get those by just showing up. We've had excellent meetings, provided good means of communications, helped people with employment issues, hosted a regional meeting...and that's just what I can think of off the top of my head! But no one person did that alone. We did that with the officers, Board members, committee members—and each one of you who took the time to write an article for the Blue Pencil, attend a meeting, or proffer information on the listserv or discussion board.

Now, to get you to volunteer, we have to give you a good reason to do so. But it becomes one of those no-beginning-no-ending loops: "you" are the "we" so it's up to all of "us" to make the chapter worthwhile. If you have a great idea for a future program, let's hear it. If you have some great ideas to increase membership, let's hear them. If you only have time to do the name badges for meetings, that's good, too. If you'd like to work on the web site, we've got lots of room for you.

I've discovered that if you volunteer to do something, it makes whatever you've committed to that much more fun and rewarding (STC, a project at work, your kids' little league). Last week before our first Board meeting, I sat with Nancy Carpenter and extolled on how wonderful it would be for her to take on the role of vice president (and I sure do want to thank Nancy for taking the position!). Then when the Board members showed up, it was really fun to see how everybody got excited about the new year, and what we wanted to accomplish. It raised the level of enthusiasm several notches, and I thought, "wouldn't it be great to have this same enthusiasm for the whole chapter?"



I know there are a lot of members who belong to STC only because it looks good on their résumé. You know what? I think it looks good on mine, too. But once I started getting involved, it started to feel good, too, that I was an active part of an organization that could help me. Corny? Yes, but true. I heard a speaker at a meeting a few weeks ago while I was going on a tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater (talk about a weekend getaway!), and the main thread of her talk was "Be the change that you want to see in the world". I like STC on my résumé; I especially like it because it's one of the best organizations of its kind, and in my own small way, I'm helping it to be so.

And for all of you who volunteer right now, I want to thank you from the bottom of my toes. The current Board and officers do a terrific job, and the new Board members are a wonderful addition, including:

- Marty Houser—publicity
- Mary Ann Pike—employment liaison (former chapter president)
- Nancy Carpenter—moving from secretary to vice president
- Bryce Walat—taking Nancy's spot as secretary

Column, cont. on page 3

Society for Technical Communication

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Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Telephone/Web Seminars

Cost: \$99 (STC Members),
\$149 (non-members)

Time: 1:00-2:30 PM ET

See stc.webex.com for more
information and to register.

September 13, 2006

Visible: The New Visible

Instructors: Austin Skaggs and
Christine Granger

Documentation departments have value; however, because of the disconnection from the rest of the company, that value rarely gets accurately communicated. This presentation describes how one technical writing department overcame negative perceptions by making itself visible.

September 27, 2006

Creating Interactive CBTs with
Captivate-in Half the Time

Instructor: Kevin Siegel

Macromedia/Adobe Captivate is a
powerful tool for creating software

simulations, also known as Computer Based Training (CBTs). While recording Captivate movies, your options include Demonstration, Assessment Simulation, and Training Simulation. During this seminar, you will explore the inherent strengths and weaknesses of each mode and learn how to maximize the potential of each, including how to create "hybrid" CBTs that will cut your development time by 50 percent.

Upcoming STC Events**October 13-14, 2006**

STC's Region 2 Conference, **Making Cents of Making Sense: The Business of Technical Writing**, will be held in London. The audience for the conference includes anyone involved in the business or production of technical documentation, including writers, editors, documentation managers, translators, technical illustrators, and publishers. For more information, please visit www.stcuk.org/R2conf.

Column, cont. from page 2

I also have to thank Nicky Bleiel, who has taken on the task of programming this year—from president to programming, there's never a dull moment in your life! And to Marlene Miller, who is an absolute rock in this chapter; whenever I needed some information, or feedback, or just a laugh, she always gave the right response. She's actually even agreed with me a couple times!

I recently ran across this wonderful quote by Robert Frost: "The world is full of willing people; some willing to

work, the others willing to let them." I want to thank everybody in advance who's willing to work this year, and continue making this chapter better every year.

Next month, in efforts to get more people involved, I'd like to talk about what we can do to increase membership in the chapter. If you have ideas, send them to me. Now, do I have a clue about what to write in the October newsletter? Not a one, right now. But with your help, I will.

Before, During, and After Layoffs - By Bryce Walat

No matter what the economy is doing, an unpleasant fact of working life is that no position is truly "permanent" today. As someone who has had firsthand experience with this fact, I have a few words of advice to share about what to do before, during, and after a layoff or reorganization.

Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign

While layoffs can happen to anyone at anytime, the truth is that there are several signs that can clue you in on the need to dust off your résumé. While individual signs are by themselves not a clear sign of impending trouble, if you see quite a few of these, it's a good idea to get your job search in gear.

I personally saw some of these signs and had a gut feeling that something was happening, so I went to all the big-name job sites and WorkQuest meetings before the ax fell. That was a key factor in getting multiple offers within a few months of beginning my search.

Even if things are otherwise going well for you and you enjoy your job, here are some signs to look out for:

- You've received a negative review or formal warning.
- Your workload has been getting inexplicably lighter or heavier.
- Your boss is watching you more closely than before.
- Morale has taken a nosedive.
- Your organization has announced hiring and/or salary freezes.

Layoffs, cont. on page 5

STC 2006/2007 Technical Publications Competition

STC Pittsburgh is holding the following competitions in October 2006:

- Online Communications Competition
- Technical Art Competition
- Technical Publications Competition

The entry submission deadline is Saturday, Oct. 21, 2006. Entry fees are \$80 for STC members, \$95 for non-members, and \$60 for students.

Entries that receive a Distinguished award at the chapter level are automatically submitted to the International competition. More information and entry forms will be available shortly at STC Pittsburgh's website, www.stcpgh.org/compete/index.htm. Contact Heather Lum at hlum@pobox.com with any questions.

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Layoffs, cont. from page 4

- Your organization is cutting travel and training sessions.
- The work you're doing is no longer treated as importantly as it used to be.
- The rumor mill is going in overdrive.
- You're being left out of the loop.
- Your organization has hired a lot of management consultants.
- Management is making your days at work a living nightmare.

If you see these signs, they may just be from a bad week or month, or they may point to something worse. Better to be prepared and have nothing happen than to be unprepared when trouble is indeed headed your way.

Hit the Road, Jack

Now it's official. You've gotten the pink slip and the exit interview. For me, I was actually relieved that I was laid off. Although this situation was due to a lack of work that resulted from shifting corporate priorities, in retrospect, my unhappiness was showing, and that unhappiness probably was a factor.

You can still take constructive action to make a bad situation better, or at least keep it from getting worse:

- Negotiate your severance. Although many companies have official severance policy, you can still negotiate a better deal, because chances are the layoff is more painful for the company than it is for you. It's also good idea to have a lawyer review your severance agreement to make sure you and the company aren't waiving any rights or responsibilities to each other.
- Severance includes not just cash, but other items such as continuation of benefits. Even if you can't renegotiate your cash payout, you often can negotiate non-cash items, which can be worth their weight in gold.
- Don't forget about references, either. Even though most organizations give only title and dates of employment when asked for a reference, make sure you line up some personal references, including your peers, and get their permission to use them in your job search.
- Try to aim for a better job than the one you lost. It's likely that you would have stayed in the same ill-fitting job for years out of inertia.
- Think positive. Negativity breeds more negativity, and no one likes negativity.
- Get your finances in order. You can eliminate a lot of work-related expenses right off the bat, such as commuting, regular dry cleaning, and lunches. But don't skimp on the essentials, either.
- Don't be embarrassed. Layoffs can happen to even the best employees.
- Even if you contributed to the situation, you can always put a positive spin on it. Be honest, however, about the reason and if you did contribute to the problem, own up to it.
- You'll feel shock, anger, guilt, depression, or all of these. It's OK to feel bad.
- Most importantly, you now have something that you may not have a lot of before: time. After your health, your most valuable asset is time, because you can't earn back lost time. Use this new-found time wisely: to upgrade your skill sets, network, and practice your interviewing skills.

Get on the Good Foot

So, you found that dream job, or something close to it, or even a "stepping stone" to the next big thing. Good for you! But wait a minute... you're not done by any means. Make sure to start your new job on the right foot. You're now armed with knowledge with how to make yourself more fire-resistant, so it's time to put it to work. Although there's no guarantee you'll never be laid off again, there are things you can do to reduce the chances of it happening again:

- Make sure you and your boss-to-be work together on your job description to accentuate your strengths and negate your weaknesses.
- Be as kind, helpful, and agreeable as possible. More employees are let go for being unpleasant or annoying than for incompetence.
- Get feedback the same way you would vote in Chicago, early and often. Don't let your first performance review be a complete surprise.
- Show your company spirit. Work hard and smart.
- Understand your boss's and your organization's priorities.
- Don't get complacent; keep your job search skills sharp.

Bryce Walat is one of the STC Pittsburgh Chapter's newest members. He hails from the Central Pennsylvania chapter, where he served as Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer. He works as a contract technical writer for UPMC, a position he accepted after being laid off from Concurrent Technologies Corporation.

STC Wants You! - by *Beverly Spagnolo*

Many of you have been members of STC for more years than you can count, and have held several positions in the organization. If you're new to STC, or haven't played a volunteering role, now's a good time to get involved. It not only helps the chapter, it also provides opportunities for you to network and learn new skills.

Here are the positions that have been filled:

- Officers—president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary
- Budget committee
- Publicity coordinator
- Employment liaison
- Program planner
- Newsletter editor
- Student liaison/student scholarship committee
- Special projects coordinator
- Historian
- WorkQuest liaison



Here are the positions we're looking to fill. Notice that some of them are looking for a team; in these cases, one or several people can coordinate efforts to be sure that everything necessary for that specific area is completed on a timely basis.

- **Membership Coordinator**—keep track of new members in the chapter. Send welcoming letter to new members, and develop membership growth campaigns. Provide information about new and senior members to Blue Pencil and website.
- **Hospitality Team**—work with program team to coordinate chapter meetings. Take reservations for upcoming meetings, ensure venue is reserved. Provide caterer with counts of meeting attendees. Make name badges for meeting attendees. Make any needed signs for meetings. Register attendees and take or confirm payments. Distribute door prize tickets.

- **Publications Competition Coordinator**—coordinate and organize annual publications competitions. Find judges, establish and monitor schedule and judging, prepare reports. Time-intensive in October, November and December.
- **Webmaster Team**—ensure that all information on the website is current and up-to-date, including upcoming events, job opportunities, current and archived newsletters, annual competition, etc. Maintain chapter forum.
- **Newsletter Contributor**—contribute articles for the Blue Pencil. You can write one article, a series, or many individual articles—we're always looking for contributions!
- **Brochure Designer**—design an STC Pittsburgh chapter brochure available to potential new members, at meetings, and for companies interested in learning more about STC Pittsburgh.

Some chapters also have committees for nominating upcoming officers, nominating Associate Fellows, coordinating volunteers, performing strategic planning, plus any number of other positions. If you would be interested in any of these, let us know.

Please contact any one of the officers by email, phone or when you see us at a meeting, if you would like to get more involved with STC. It's good for everybody!

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Bill Sabin Brings Wisdom and Humor to the Annual Spring Banquet

by Meg Papa

I don't get that excited at the prospect of meeting "famous people." Actors, entertainers, politicians don't do much for me. I never stand in line for autographs. (I did meet a former astronaut, and that was pretty cool!) So imagine my surprise when I started acting positively giddy at the prospect of meeting Bill Sabin, grammar guru extraordinaire and author of *The Gregg Reference Manual*, at the Annual Banquet this past May. (Some of the other Board members can attest!) I am happy to say my expectations were exceeded. He was one of the funniest, most down-to-earth speakers I have ever heard; beyond that, he gave us plenty of good grammar and style tips in a talk that was half presentation, half lively audience discussion.

He described his job as a "struggle with the agonies of trying to wrestle the English language into shape." A struggle we can sometimes lose. Or run away from, as the case may be. Some of Bill Sabin's more memorable rules of thumb include:

"Sabin's Law of Professional Cowardice"

If you are trying to use a form of a word and you can't find it in literature, try every conceivable possibility – write them down and say them. If you don't like any of them, then walk away. The example he discussed was the effort he put forth with a student to find the plural of *Ms*. They tried *Mss*, *Mses*, *Ms's*, but none of these worked. They finally decided that the plural of *Ms* is...*Ms*.

"Context Trumps Everything Else"

The rules are flexible instruments. Also, there are some words where no "correct" form has been universally accepted. The most obvious examples are the spelling of *email*...or *e-mail*, and *Web site*... or *website*. In cases like these, you should do whatever the standard is for your industry or audience. And then, be consistent!



Guest speaker and grammar guru Bill Sabin was willing talk about ANYTHING - except the hyphenation of compound modifiers!



Nancy Carpenter receives her Distinguished Chapter Service Award

"It's Correct, but It Ain't Right"

If a phrase or a sentence is grammatically correct, but still sounds awkward or strange, don't use it. Rephrase it so it is both correct and harmonious.

Some other examples of running away from the struggle include:

- Avoid phrasing a sentence in a way that needs gender specific pronouns, because him/her, etc. is awkward. Rephrase it so you can use gender neutral words without it being artificial.
- The website e-Bay's name is trademarked with the lower-case e, so do you capitalize it or not at the beginning of a sentence? The answer: avoid starting a sentence with *e-Bay*.

It was a truly memorable evening. I even got my copy of *Gregg* signed. And I didn't even have to wait in line.



Barb Stanton and new Associate Fellow Alan Houser

Notice to Blue Pencil Advertisers by Meg Papa, BP Managing Editor

August marks the beginning of the STC year, and that seems like a good time to do some organizational housekeeping. **If you have been running a free ad in the Blue Pencil the past year, and wish to continue to do so, I need to hear from you by September 8.** If I do not hear from you, your ad will be pulled from the BP starting with the September issue. Chapter members are allowed to advertise for free in the Blue Pencil. Currently, our advertisers are:

- Bright Path Solutions
- Carnegie Mellon MAPW Program
- Group Wellesley
- One Planet
- Ramey Technical Writing
- TechComm Technical Writing

Please send me an email (newsletter@stcpgh.org) to confirm that you are still a member of the chapter and you want to continue running your ad. It's that simple!

If you are not currently an advertiser but would like to be, here are the specs.

- You must be a chapter member to run a free ad
- Ad will run for a full STC year
- Ad should be roughly the size of a business card (3.5" x 2")
- Ad orientation can be horizontal or vertical
- Ad can be color or b&w
- Ad format should be pdf or JPEG (medium to high resolution)

September Chapter Meeting: Usability Strategy Today and in the Future

Speaker: Mike Bates

Date: Monday, September 18, 2006

Time: 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Cost: \$12 STC members; \$15 non-members; \$10 students and unemployed - a 'box lunch' dinner will be served

RSVP: by Sept. 13th to Nancy Carpenter - vicepresident@stcpgh.org

Location: Pittsburgh Technology Council Building (see <http://www.pghtech.org/aboutus/directions.asp> for directions)

2006-2007

STC Pittsburgh Officers

President	Beverly Spagnolo	412-766-7200 (W)
Vice President	Nancy Carpenter	412-820-2221 (W)
Secretary	Bryce Walat	412-779-1795
Treasurer/Historian	Marlene Miller	412-281-0678 x130 (W)
Immediate Past President	Nicky Bleiel	412-223-1026 (W)
Region 4 Director	Bob Dianetti	

Committees

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Web Site Coordinator	Phillip Miller	724-744-3687 (H)	webmaster@stcpgh.org
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