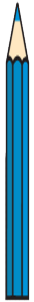


BLUE PENCIL

Pick of the Issue



Although the STC is a professional organization, the personal bonds we can form with each other is part of the appeal of being a member. And sometimes personal issues can trump professional ones in importance. Please take a moment to read Beverly's column on page 2 as she shares a personal challenge in her life with her chapter.

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Does Anybody Know What Time It Is?

It's RENEW Time!

Okay, that may not be the most elegant reference ever made to a classic T.V. show, but I'm hoping it got your attention. It is once again time to renew your STC membership, so here is a guide to the whys and hows.

Why Renew?

The STC is one of the most respected and well-known organizations for technical communicators, and your membership in it means something to potential employers. More than a line on a résumé, STC membership indicates that you are connected to the state of the industry.

Your membership includes access to the magazine Intercom and the journal Technical Communication, two publications that keep you up-to-date on the trends, tools, and opportunities in the industry. These publications are also opportunities for you to have your own work published.

If you choose a chapter membership (and we hope you choose Pittsburgh), you have access to monthly meetings that explain and review the latest technology, discuss survival strategies for the workplace, and provide contact with other technical communicators.

A chapter membership also provides many opportunities for networking, both social and professional. Our chapter not only presents monthly meetings, but also holds a yearly Employment Roundtable (in January) and participates in several socials throughout the year with other professional organizations in the region.

How to Renew?

Renewals are due January 1, 2007 for next year. This date is earlier than in the past, so please take note of it. A quick review of the different levels of membership:

Classic: \$150/year, includes national membership; membership in 1 chapter and 1 SIG, 2 chapters, or 2 SIGs; and printed copies of Intercom and Technical Communication.

Electronic: \$140/year, includes national membership; membership in 1 chapter and 1 SIG, 2 chapters, or 2 SIGs; and access to online versions of Intercom and Technical Communication.

Renewal, cont. on page 6

President's Column - by Beverly Spagnolo

(This president's column is different than most, in that I'm not really addressing any issues about technical writing or the profession. It's personal, and longer than most columns, but I hope you will bear with me.)

"It's b-a-a-a-ck". This certainly is not one of the things you want to hear from your oncologist when you're in your third year of surviving breast cancer. But those nasty old cells figured out a way to grow back, in spite of all the right things done to prevent it from happening. And right while I was getting in the swing of things as chapter president.

So now I'm faced with a whole new treatment. I've already had the CT scan, the bone scan, the blood tests, a lump removed, and the port inserted. And my doctors assured me that I'm not going to die (this time), that my sarcasm will remain intact, and I'll be around for awhile to keep my husband in line.

All of those are good things. And since I've been through it before, even though the treatment will be different, I still expect that I will feel lousy and tired, especially since I have to go through chemo again.

I'm not sure what my treatment will be exactly, but I'll find out tomorrow. Though the doctor is putting me in a clinical trial, and I'll be getting the best care, nothing yet is etched in stone. I'm not scared, but there is a certain degree of anxiety. When people ask how this could happen to me, my response is, "Why not me?" I'm not special from anybody else; why shouldn't it be me instead of you getting cancer." I always think of the "expendable crew member" in TV shows and movies who has to die to save the hero; what makes the hero special? Oh, yeah, she's famous and much better-looking.

But then, look at the rich and famous and good-looking people who get cancer, too. The thing about rich and famous people getting cancer is that everybody knows about it, and they issue press releases or somebody starts a fund in their honor. Well, I guess this is my press release. Everybody goes on and on about how strong and brave the publicized stars with cancer are—well,

what about the hundreds of thousands of other strong and brave women who fought as hard and managed to survive? Or did not survive? These famous women, or relatives of famous people, while they are strong and courageous, are not any more strong and courageous than we insignificant women who just struggle to get to the other side of survival. While in no way am I minimizing what they are suffering, a lot of other people are out there as well, just trying to make it through their next chemo, or preventing an infection that will land them in the hospital, or drinking enough fluids so they won't feel so lousy.

The only recognition we get is from friends and family, and oftentimes they're not quite sure what to do when you're sick.

So I came up with some guidelines for friends and family members who don't know what to do when you're ill. In a recent issue of Parade magazine, there was an article about what to do if you're a co-survivor. (Odd word don't you think? I guess it's kind of like talking about a couple being pregnant.) The article said you should acknowledge your losses, stay informed and don't become an emotional martyr. Martyrs aren't pretty sights, no matter what the situation—more on them later.

Here are my guidelines or tips:

1. Ask if you can help, but don't be overly intrusive. Don't tell me you'll move into my house to take care of me unless I ask you.
2. Don't ask me when I got it, and don't look at me like I'm an idiot because I didn't rush to the doctor the second I



Column, cont. on page 5

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter

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STC Pittsburgh's Mission Statement

STC Pittsburgh's mission is to provide professional support for technical communicators in the region. The chapter strives to:

- * Provide opportunities for professional enrichment
- * Help members achieve their career goals
- * Support the local business community
- * Promote technical communication as a career.

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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 p.m. ET
 See stc.webex.com for more information and to register.

November 22, 2006

Selling Technical Communication Services-Both Inside and Outside Your Organization

Instructor: Robert Dianetti

Technical communication is often an afterthought or done at the last minute within most companies. Marketing, training, and customer service departments don't often see the value or understand the effort it takes to analyze technical communication needs and develop effective materials.

Whether you manage technical communication for your company or consult with many clients, you need to know how to help others identify needs at an early stage so you can offer effective and timely solutions. This early buy-in will help you create more business, better manage the project, and give you building blocks to grow your career. Plus, the end-user gets what they really need.

In this presentation you will discover several time-tested strategies to help you sell your services and solutions.

December 6, 2006

Creating Training that Sticks

Instructor: Maggie Haenel

You want to create great training, but many factors impact your ability to deliver a superior learning experience

for participants. Time constraints, availability of resources, lack of information (or too much information), an undisciplined environment, delayed decisions... Most often, these factors are outside of your control.

Having a solid understanding of how adults learn, what makes them remember and how to enable transfer learning to other situations gives you an advantage as a training developer regardless of the factors you cannot control.

This fun and interactive session will grab you from the beginning and hold you 'til the end as you learn to create effective and engaging training. You will acquire the knowledge you need to begin building superior training immediately and experience the results of using such knowledge in your development process.

STC Creates Director of Education Position

To help STC provide enhanced educational programming and a new level of service, the Board of Directors has approved the creation of a totally new position, Director of Education. This role will help position STC as a leader in providing the most advanced, dynamic, and future-oriented training and education in the field of technical communication. The first person to fill this new position is Lloyd Tucker, who joined the STC staff on November 1st. Lloyd has been the Director of Education and Membership at the Document Management Industries

National Notes, cont. on page 4

STC Supports World Usability Day

STC announced its support for World Usability Day (www.worldusabilityday.org), Tuesday, November 14, 2006. Primarily sponsored by the Usability Professionals' Association, World Usability Day is a series of events that promote the values and benefits of usability engineering and user-centered design. The events will take place over a 36-hour period in more than 30 countries around the globe.

“STC’s involvement in World Usability Day is a logical extension of technical communication,” says Paula Berger, president of STC. “Everything that technical communicators do is about usability, whether making instructions more usable through better writing, interfaces more usable because of better labeling and navigation, or products more usable because of user testing. It’s all part of the same continuum.”

As part of World Usability Day, STC and CM Pros, an organization of content management professionals, are organizing a global online card-sort exercise. The exercise is made possible by the donation of WebSort software (www.websort.net) from Parallax, LLC.

Card sorting is a quick, inexpensive, and reliable technique for determining how people categorize information. This knowledge helps information architects and usability professionals create structures for print and online information that make products and technologies more usable.

STC's card-sort exercise will be carried out by participants on five continents. The exercise will provide insights about regional variations in the ways people organize information.

Congratulations!

Leslie MacKay won a free meeting at the October meeting's raffle. We hope to see you at many more meetings, Leslie!

National Notes, cont. from page 3

Association (DMIA) for the past ten years. He was the architect and project leader for an award-winning and profitable association e-learning system, developed and managed the education program for the annual conference, and worked with regional and local leaders in planning community events.

Before DMIA, Lloyd was in the Air Force for twenty-five years, culminating his career as a Lieutenant Colonel. He supervised military intelligence training, served as a spokesperson for Defense Intelligence in international forums, and developed a \$26 million worldwide intelligence communications program. He was described as “a technical communicator with great creativity, skill and grace under fire--literally--as well as a fine educator and leader.”

Having a director-level position focused on education will enable STC to offer programs valuable to the experienced technical communicator as well as the neophyte. Lloyd’s experience with all forms of delivery mechanisms, from conference programming to small training sessions and e-learning, will benefit the entire membership.

Please welcome Lloyd and send him your suggestions for quality educational programming for STC at his e-mail address: lloyd@stc.org.

Simon Singh Named Honorary Fellow for 2007

STC is pleased to announce that Simon Singh, author, journalist, and television producer, is the Society’s honorary fellow for 2007. Singh will accept his award and address attendees at STC’s 54th Annual Conference, May 13–16, 2007, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

STC Dues Are Deductible

If you pay taxes in the United States, keep in mind that STC dues are tax deductible. Please note, however, that dues must be deducted from the tax return filed for the year in which they were paid. In other words, dues paid in 2006 may be deducted only from 2006 tax returns. More information can be found in the November issue of Tieline ([www.stc.org/stcmembers/ tielineArchive01.asp](http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/tielineArchive01.asp)).

Column, cont. from page 2

felt a lump. Obviously, I had cancer a lot longer than I knew since symptoms usually take a long time to show up.

3. Since I haven't started treatments yet, don't expect me to tell you that I feel terrible now. It's not the initial stages of cancer that make you feel so rotten, it's the cure that gets you. Right now I feel fine, but once I start the chemo I won't feel fine as much.
4. Don't tell me I look bad/tired/exhausted; ask me how I feel and listen to the answer. This may be a good day, and you just wiped out all those good feelings I was having about myself by saying I looked bad.
5. Don't instill doubt in my method of treatment. If my doctor makes some suggestions that are still open for decision, don't tell me that you read that such and such is better or you have a friend who did ABC and that's what I should do. If you have an MD behind your name, I'll listen, but if you don't, please don't feel bad if I don't follow your advice.
6. Don't tell me that the reason I'm sick is because of all the stress in my life/ because I smoke (or used to)/because I'm fat/because I never had children/because I didn't eat enough blueberries or whatever else you may think is why I got cancer. I got cancer because I got cancer. I got cancer and it came back because the cancer cells grew and couldn't be stopped by the Femara or the Tamoxifen I was taking. I don't blame myself, my doctor, my husband or my God for getting cancer. Please don't you do it either.
7. Now about that martyr thing. When I had cancer the first time, I had an employee who would wince every time I mentioned the cancer or treatment or losing my hair. She wanted me to know that she "shared my pain". Well, all she did was drive me crazy because it was so, well, phony. Then there's the elephant in the room. A close relative, after my having shared my employee story, totally ignored any mention of my cancer because he thought it might make me feel uncomfortable, and besides that, he "never knew anybody before who had cancer", and didn't know how he should act (what a bunch of hogwash). Don't worry, cancer's not contagious. If you feel really bad that I have cancer, and you want to share it, that's good to get it out and tell me

"And my doctors assured me that my sarcasm will remain intact, and I'll be around for awhile..."

how you feel. But having cancer and being treated for it is a science, and it can be dealt with very pragmatically. So there comes a point that you just talk about the practicalities of it, not the drama of it. Get the drama out of your system, because though I appreciate that you feel bad that I'm going through this, I don't need melodrama, I need friendship and support. If anyone gets to be a martyr here, it's me. And guess what, I don't do the martyr thing well at all.

8. Please call and check up on me, just to let me know you're thinking about me. Sometimes it's hard to think when I'm going through chemo, so if my conversations are short, it's only because I'm very tired or I can't concentrate.
9. Offer to come for a visit, maybe just to sit and watch TV with me. If you're not offended that I might get tired and doze off, the company would be nice. If I'm feeling up to it, going out to dinner or a movie is fun, too. Knowing that you're a friend goes a long way to getting better and feeling better.
10. Consider that my husband is one of the strongest men in the world. When I burst into tears for no reason, he'd hold me and let me cry—and realized that he hadn't done anything wrong but I just wanted to cry. When I was too tired to walk up the steps, he'd support me to make sure I didn't fall. Considering the very real danger of infections that I could contract, he scrubbed the whole kitchen and all the utensils with bleach. He cooked and wasn't offended when I wasn't hungry, he stood beside the bed and forced me to drink water so I'd stay hydrated, and he didn't hesitate to take calls for me when I was too tired to talk to anyone. He knew when I needed a pep talk, and when it was best just to keep quiet. And he never complained about what a pain in the neck I was.

Since this is my president's column, I want to take a moment and thank everybody on the Pittsburgh Chapter Board for their encouragement and support. And of course for all the other volunteers in the chapter—and for anyone who would like to pitch in and offer some help! Remember, volunteering makes you feel good—remember, the doctors said I wouldn't lose my sarcasm!

Do You Know the ABCs of Career Change? -by Deborah Walker

Making a career change is one of the toughest job-search challenges. For clarification, “career change” means much more than “job change.” A career change means choosing a completely new profession or industry. A “job change” is simply changing employers within the same industry and profession.

Why do people change careers? The two main reasons are:

- * The industry or occupation becomes obsolete (or is outsourced overseas)
- * Job dissatisfaction (If you dread going to work on Monday morning, you’re probably in this category.)

What makes a career change so difficult? After all, most job seekers attempting a career change know exactly why they would do well in a new profession or industry. The problem comes down to communication. Most job seekers have difficulty communicating in their résumé their ability to excel in a new career. Résumés, by definition, focus on career experience (history), but career changers need employers to see their expertise (current skills) in order to be viewed as a viable candidate.

If you are attempting a career change, it becomes easier when you understand the ABC’s of career change:

- A: Assess
- B: Bridge
- C: Communicate

Assess what you want changed

Before you can make a successful change, you must decide what needs changing. Is it the duties you perform? Your overbearing boss? Your current geographic location? The industry you work in? The size of company you work for? The level of responsibility you hold? Once you pinpoint your exact source of unhappiness, you’re on your way to making the correct choice for change.

Bridge the gap between what you’ve done and what you want to do

The key to selling yourself based on your expertise rather than your experience is transferable skills. Transferable skills work like bridges to help you cross over from one industry to another or one occupation to another. Transferable skills are those skills you now possess that qualify you as a viable candidate for your new career.

Communicate your ability to excel in your new profession or industry

Your résumé is your front-line communication tool to prospective employers. No matter how well you interview, if your résumé doesn’t sell you, there won’t be an opportunity to convince them in person. Use your accomplishments to prove the strength of your transferable skills, and you’ll get interviews faster and with more enthusiasm.

An experienced career coach can help you apply these ABCs to your current résumé and your interview skills. Once you practice the ABCs of career change you’ll be on your way to changing your career and changing your life—for the better!

*Deborah Walker, CCMC
Career Coach - Résumé Writer
Find more job-search tips and résumé samples at: www.AlphaAdvantage.com
Email: Deb@AlphaAdvantage.com*

Renewal, cont. from page 1

Limited: \$130/year, includes national membership and printed copies of Intercom and Technical Communication; no chapter or SIG memberships.

There are also Student and Retired memberships. For more information on any of the levels, please see <http://www.stc.org/membership/join01.asp>.

We strongly encourage you to renew at the Classic or Electronic level and choose the Pittsburgh chapter as your chapter. Online renewal is available at <https://www.stc.org/duesrenewal/stcLogin.aspx>.

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October Meeting Introduced Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA)

by Bryce A. Walat

Alan Houser, STC Pittsburgh chapter member and past president, STC Associate Fellow, and president of Group Wellesley, graced us with his presence at STC Pittsburgh's Tuesday, October 9, 2006 meeting at the Pittsburgh Technology Council.

Alan Houser is the president of Group Wellesley, a local firm specializing in XML-based solutions. Alan's presentation, entitled, "Topic-Oriented Writing with XML and DITA" introduced the group to the Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA), IBM's successor to its "book-centric" IBMIDoc information architecture. DITA is an XML-based information architecture that supports authoring, managing, and publishing topic-oriented content.

DITA meets the challenges inherent in single-sourcing information, reusing content for multiple audiences, and organizing information to give users just what they need to know when they need it.

DITA was developed by IBM in February 2005 and approved by the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS) in June 2005 as Version 1.0. Version 1.1 is currently under development. IBM donated DITA to the public domain for free use.

Alan gave attendees a brief overview of how DITA came to be, how it works, and how to plan for migrating your content into DITA.

Alan demonstrated several DITA applications, such as IBM Task Modeler and the DITA service packs in FrameMaker. Alan discussed the lessons learned in DITA development, as well as considerations and reasons to use and not to use DITA.

Bryce Walat is a technical writer/editor who can be reached at 412-779-1795 or walat_bryce@msn.com.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Joint Happy Hour/Mixer

Participants include Pittsburgh Regional Knowledge Management Consortium; Pittsburgh Chapter, Special Librarians Association; Ohio Valley Chapter, American Medical Writers Association; and Pittsburgh eLearning Society.

Date: **Tuesday, January 16, 2007**. Location to be announced.

Software Saturday #2: Introduction to MadCap Flare

A detailed description will appear in the December issue of the Blue Pencil.

Date: **Saturday, April 28, 2007**.

Chapter Awards Banquet

Date: **Monday, May 21, 2007**.



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December Chapter Meeting: The Fun Factor: Make E-Learning Interesting with Good Writing Techniques

Speaker: Sheldon Murphy

Date: Monday, December 18, 2006

Time: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

The October 16, 2006 cover story of U.S. News® entitled “E-Learning Explodes” shows the fast growth of e-learning, especially in higher education. Content is king in e-learning, just as it rules most of the media in our Information Age. In this December session, we will learn about a critical element to high performance e-learning courses, and share some examples and writing tips and techniques to make them fun and engaging.

Cost: (includes dinner and beverages)
 \$12 STC members;
 \$15 non-members;
 \$10 students and unemployed

RSVP: by Dec. 13th to Nancy Carpenter - 412-820-2111 (w) or vicepresident@stcpgh.org

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

Sheldon Murphy is an e-learning consultant and founder of Solid State Learning, a full-service e-learning firm based in the Pittsburgh area.

After working and consulting in web and enterprise systems, he found a ground floor opportunity to help build and support a corporate e-learning program for a Fortune 500 client. This led to a real-world understanding of what it takes to create engaging and effective e-learning, and the technical and political challenges that organizations face.

For many years now, Sheldon has leveraged his technical knowledge and real world

experience to successfully deliver e-learning solutions for some of the best known organizations in the Pittsburgh region and beyond. E-learning has been both a passionate pursuit and a creative outlet.



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2006-2007

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