

BLUE PENCIL

PITTSBURGH CHAPTER, STC

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Coping with a Co-Dependent Workplace: How to Maintain Your Sanity When All Those Around You Seem to Have Lost Theirs - by Chuck Lanigan, MA

We all want to work at jobs and in organizations that run well and where our efforts seem appreciated and worthwhile. Even in tough economic times, many of us still want to feel our effort and talent contribute to a larger purpose beyond just making a buck.

But what happens when your efforts each day seem to go into a big black hole; where the more you and your colleagues try to do things right, the more things seem to go wrong? What do you do when you feel more exhaustion than a sense of accomplishment at the end of each working day?

You may need to look at improving the degree and kind of effort you're expending. You may just be going

through a momentarily frustrating phase in your career. It may be the job is not (or is no longer) a good fit. But it may also be the work environment itself is dysfunctional.

Workplaces operate like families. They contain a variety of interpersonal and group dynamics and

It would be refreshing if all work environments worked smoothly, efficiently and rationally; and planting a radish yielded a radish in our work effort.

relationships. Not all of these are healthy or efficient. Patterns of behavior and ways of thinking (or lack of thinking) develop in some organizations that are downright unhealthy and counterproductive. Some of these are hidden. Some are obvious, though no one talks about them. Lessons from family counseling and therapy may help you to understand if this is occurring and suggest strategies for coping.

One notion that family and addiction therapy offers is the idea of *co-dependency*. Co-dependent relationships are based on the mutual need to perpetuate (or enable) unhealthy or self-destructive behavior. Co-dependent relationships revolve around addiction or other dysfunctional behavior. Both parties (or multiple members, in a family) invest enormous time, effort, and emotional energy toward maintaining the status quo – however painful or destructive – rather than fixing real problems and achieving success and growth. Co-dependent relationships are often characterized by:

- Lack of meaningful communication
- Hidden agendas
- Resistance to healthy change
- Ignoring the obvious (a.k.a. the elephant in the room)

Organizations or individual departments can exhibit elements of co-dependency and dysfunction. Organizations that run well are usually able to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. Personnel identify problems,

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President's Column - by Bryce Walat

I'm sure that at some point in your career, you've run into a sports metaphor. Sports metaphors are used by managers, consultants, training and development experts, and others in the professional world. While these sports metaphors are often uplifting and inspiring, they also have the potential to inspire lots of yawns and sighs.

I personally don't use a lot of sports metaphors in my professional capacity, partly because I'm anything but athletic, and partly because they may not go over well with fellow non-athletic folks. But I thought that this one was just too good to pass up.

Even though I am no expert at the game of football, and don't pay much attention to the intricacies of the game, I still consider myself to be a part of the Steeler Nation, and make time to squeeze in a game or three. Like countless others in the Steeler Nation, I was watching the AFC Championship game against the Baltimore Ravens a few weeks ago, in which the Steelers took the championship and earned the AFC spot in the Super Bowl.

At the end of the first half of the game, Limas Sweed, a rookie receiver, was standing in the end zone, ready to make a touchdown. Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger threw Sweed a perfect pass – then Sweed fumbled and fell down, much to the dismay of Steelers fans everywhere.

Sweed's teammates and coach realized that he made a mistake, but didn't let it slide – or take Sweed out of the game. Instead, they told him that he would be filling in for Hines Ward, who was sidelined with a minor injury.

In the second half of the game, Roethlisberger threw a pass to Heath Miller. Sweed blocked an opponent from tackling Miller before he could complete the pass. Sweed then went on to break up a third down pass which was almost intercepted by the Ravens, thus letting the Steelers get within field goal range. To top it off, Roethlisberger threw another pass to Sweed, which gave the Steelers a critical first down to pull well ahead of the Ravens and win the game.

I then read about Sweed's comeback performance in the Tribune-Review the next day. The sports column featured this quote from Ben Roethlisberger to Limas Sweed in the locker room at halftime:

"You get to learn how to be a professional, and you get to display how to be a professional to the world — by bouncing back. Other guys, we make mistakes. We bounce back. That's what professionals do."

This quote from "Big Ben" summed up in a few sentences one of the pillars of professionalism – learning from mistakes and bouncing back after a setback. Whether you're a veteran or a rookie, you'll make



mistakes – everyone does. What separates professionals from the rest of the pack is learning from mistakes and bouncing back. Limas Sweed, along with his coaches and teammates, could have dwelled on his fumble. Instead, that fumble became a springboard for success.

With that having been said, although the 2008-2009 STC Pittsburgh event year is past "halftime," there's still a lot of "playing time" left. We're hosting a meeting on nonverbal communication and our annual Stress Reduction Seminar, both of which feature guest speakers who are known locally as experts in these areas.

On behalf of the STC Pittsburgh board, I'd like to wish you a great 2009, and encourage you to see within each fumble and incomplete pass the chance for field goals and touchdowns. And, sometimes, championships.

Society for Technical Communication

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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.

STC's Mission Statement

The STC's mission is "creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication."

Keep Your Information Current

Receive your STC emails and publications on time! Update your STC contact information at www.stc.org. STC Members, Member Directory, Address/Restriction Change Form link: (<http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/formAddressChange01.asp>).

STC National and Regional Notes

Web Seminar

- **Date:** Wednesday, Feb. 18
- **Time:** 1:30 - 3:00 p.m. ET
- **Cost:** \$79 for Members

Technical Communication As a Management Function (Joel Kline)

Demonstrating the value of your technical communication skills becomes more challenging in difficult economic times. This presentation will discuss how technical communicators can position themselves as managers. It will illustrate how practitioners can leverage their knowledge, skills, and abilities to support the business management function. The presenter will show how management of information, projects, and collaboration is vital to an organization during an economic downturn. From this information technical communicators can position themselves as managers and improve the future prospects for the field and their careers.

STC Election Information

The STC election opens March 10 and closes April 14, 2009. This closing date allows winning candidates more time to plan for the conference and to prepare for their first board meeting.

Only members who have paid their dues by February 28 will be eligible to vote. All eligible members will receive voting instructions in March.

STC Annual Conference: Early Bird Rates Expire February 18

Register by February 18, 2009 to receive the early bird rates for the 2009

Technical Communication Summit, to be held May 3-6, 2009, in Atlanta, Georgia. Registration is available online at the STC website, as well as by fax and mail. With everyone facing difficult economic times these days, early bird rates offer significant savings, especially for STC members. As a dues-paying member, the early bird rate is \$795—a savings of \$300 off the onsite rate. Students pay \$175 for early bird rates—a savings of \$75 off the onsite rate.

The nonmember early bird rate is \$1,095—a savings of \$200 off the onsite rate, while the student nonmember and retired member early bird rate is \$325—a savings of \$30 off the onsite rate.

More information about conference hotel amenities is available at <http://conference.stc.org/>. The official conference hotel is the Hyatt Regency Atlanta, where all sessions will also take place.

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Janis Ramey Achieves Rank of STC Fellow - *by Robin Fowler*

Another of our members has climbed to the top!

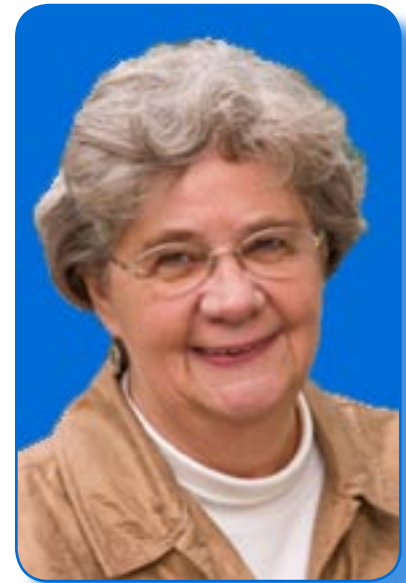
The Pittsburgh chapter of the STC is honored to announce that a second member of our chapter has climbed to the top. Janis Ramey, member of the Pittsburgh chapter and distinguished leader of STC WorkQuest, has been honored with the rank of Fellow in the Society for Technical Communication.

Janis has been an active member of STC since she was a student at Carnegie Mellon University. Incidentally, she was in the first class of undergraduate technical writing majors in the US and won the first scholarship offered by the society.

Times have changed since Janis first joined the ranks of technical writer, when she needed nothing more than

a pad and pencil while someone else did the typing, typesetting, graphics, printing, distribution, etc. Now an independent writer, she manages an office full of powerful equipment and applications and is responsible for it all. (And she still has to put words together.) Her knack for putting words together, her ability to conquer a variety of technologies, and her mastery of a surprising variety of tools has given her a broad client base in a variety of industries.

Her most satisfying accomplishment is starting and continuing to run STC WorkQuest™ (www.STCWorkQuest.org), a support group that has touched and helped about 300 people during their job searches. Janis spends her time with WorkQuest™ dispensing her wit and wisdom at various Panera Bread



locations around Pittsburgh as well as serving as the head of the group's e-mail list.

For more of Janis' wit and wisdom, or to retain her services, you may contact her through her website at www.technical-writing.net.

March Chapter Meeting: Stress Reduction

- **Date:** Tuesday, March 10
- **Time:** 6:30 p.m.
- **Speaker:** Various
- **Place:** Panera Bread, Penn Center in Wilkins Township, 400 Penn Center Blvd, Pgh, 15235
- **Cost:** no cover cost, food purchase optional
- **RSVP:** by Friday, March 6, to Kathee Kuvinka at katkuvinka@hotmail.com or 412.365.1063. Include your name, phone number, and e-mail address. RSVPs are required.

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Co-Dependence, cont. from page 1

communicate about them, and resolve them. Whatever day-to-day frustrations and obstacles employees encounter, their efforts and talent go toward achieving the overall goals of the organization. They are recognized, supported and rewarded accordingly.

Like it our not, people bring their baggage from their personal lives into the workplace. This includes dysfunction and any tendencies toward co-dependence. The workplace is a microcosm of relationships similar to a family or a tribe. Employees from the CEO on down to managers, executives, and staff, whatever their professional demeanor, also interact according the patterns of their family upbringing and experience. The larger society and business culture exert influence (good, bad or indifferent) as well.

Although no DSM IV (the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) exists for assessing the mental health of an organization, the following list may identify any dysfunction that may be occurring in your workplace:

- Your organization says it wants to engage its employees, but doesn't listen to what they have to say
- People are pigeonholed into static roles and meet with resistance when they try to work innovatively or creatively to meet goals
- Expectations, rules, and processes are hidden, unclear, or conflicting
- People are recognized more for spouting rhetoric than for telling the truth and doing their job competently
- A large proportion of employees' time and energy and competence go into maintaining broken systems and processes (including technology) rather than making improvements and fixing problems at their source
- The everyday mood at work vacillates between drudgery and panic. 'Fun' and 'worthwhile' seem to have left the building
- 'Dilbert' seems more like biography than a comic strip

If this describes your workplace, employment networking groups like STC WorkQuest can provide a helpful perspective, as well as advice in helping to avoid such a situation in the first place. Specific solutions are beyond the scope of this article, but the following

suggestions provide a start in identifying and surviving in such an environment and making changes for the better:

- Maintain your perspective and sense of humor
- Pay attention to your instincts (If it looks, acts, and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck)
- Find internal and external allies
- Stay focused on the job at hand and performing achievable tasks; maintain a distance from surrounding dysfunction
- Pursue activities that are personally meaningful within and outside of the workplace
- Know when it's time to leave and take action accordingly, and avoid rationalizing

It would be refreshing if all work environments worked smoothly, efficiently and rationally, and planting a radish yielded a radish in our work effort. But when this doesn't occur, being forewarned means being forearmed. And at least you'll know it's not all in your head.


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Some of Word's Lesser-Known Features - *by Robert P. Mohr*

Did you know Word can generate anywhere from a few paragraphs to dozens of pages of text from fewer than 10 typed characters? Did you know Word has a built-in calculator that's accessible at any time? You have probably highlighted horizontal blocks of text hundreds of times, but did you know you can also highlight vertical blocks of text? Read on to learn more about these and other lesser-known Word features.

PDF Maker

The first feature mentioned in this article isn't so much of a feature as it is an add-in utility. Microsoft offers a free download that, when installed, allows Word and most of the other Office programs to save files in PDF format as well as to send them as e-mail attachments in PDF format. Once installed, the option to save as PDF appears in the Save As list. Clicking the Options button

displays several useful options, such as the ability to create PDF bookmarks from the document's headings or internal bookmarks.

The free download can be obtained here from Microsoft: <http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=f1fc413c-6d89-4f15-991b-63b07ba5f2e5&DisplayLang=en>

Text Generator

A very handy feature is the =rand() function. Microsoft's developers and testers use this function to quickly generate large amounts of text in a document. To use this function, place the insertion point at the beginning of a new line anywhere in a Word document and type =rand() and press Enter. By default, 3 paragraphs of 3 sentences each are displayed. You can change the number of paragraphs and sentences per paragraph by adding numbers in the parenthesis

separated by a comma. For example, =rand(10,20). Here, the number 10 represents paragraphs and the number 20 represents sentences in each paragraph.

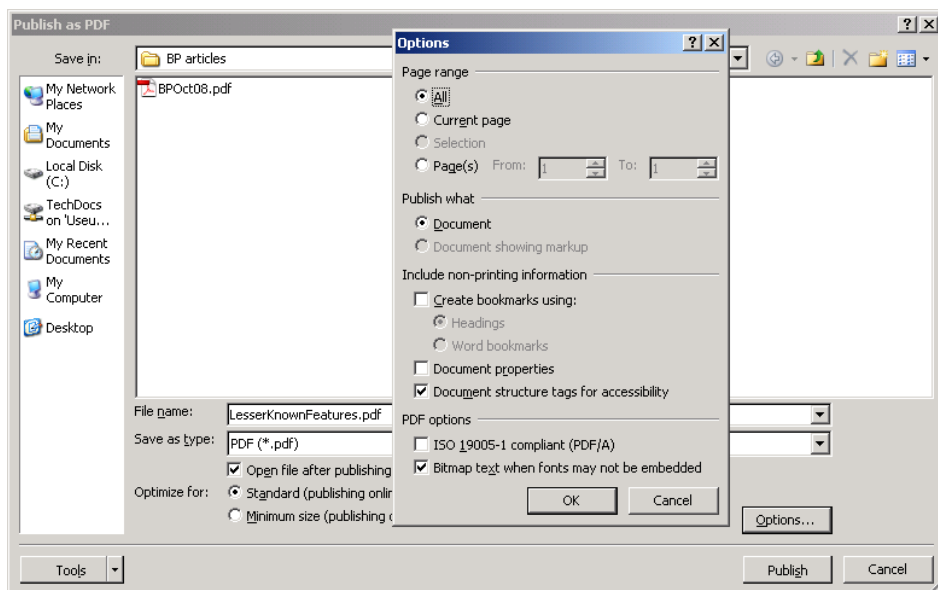
Copy-and-Apply Formats

Another feature is a keyboard shortcut for copying and applying format attributes to text. It works much like the Format Painter but on any number of words and paragraphs. For example, highlight some formatted text, such as bold red. Press SHIFT+CTRL+C. Next, highlight other non-formatted text and press SHIFT+CTRL+V. The text just highlighted is now bold red.

Calculator

Ever find yourself in the middle of a document and find that you need a calculator? No problem. Word has a built-in calculator and the icon for it can be added to the Quick Access Toolbar for fast access. To add the icon to the toolbar:

1. Click the down-arrow on the Quick Access Toolbar and choose More Commands.
2. Select Commands Not In The Ribbon from the Choose Commands From drop-down list.
3. Scroll through the list and select the Calculate command.
4. Click the Add>> button to add it to the Quick Access Toolbar list of icons.
5. Click OK to close the window and return to the document.



Some of the options in the PDF Maker utility

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To use the calculator:

1. Type an equation, such as $125+654/18.35$.
2. Highlight the equation and click the Calculate icon on the Quick Access Toolbar.
3. The answer is displayed in the Status bar at the bottom of the document window. In this example, the answer is 160.64.

Vertical Selections

The ability to select vertical blocks of text is invaluable when working with tabular information. For example, imagine you have 9 columns of information, each separated by 1 or more tabs. And further imagine that you want to delete the middle three columns and keep the 3 left-most and right-most columns on either side. How would you do it? The solution is to use Word's Extend a Selection feature.

Using the example above, place the cursor at the beginning of the first of the 3 middle columns, then press SHIFT+CTRL+F8. This turns on the selection. Next, press the down and right arrow keys to extend the selection vertically and horizontally. When all 3 columns have been selected, press Delete. To cancel the selection, press Escape.

Macros

The ability for you to create and store macros in Word 2007 is not a new feature. However, the ways macros are accessed in Word 2007 are unlike its predecessors. You can no longer create custom toolbars and assign your macros to them, but you can assign your macros to the Quick Access Toolbar. You can also place the Quick Access Toolbar below the Ribbon instead of above it.

To assign a macro to the Quick Access Toolbar:

1. Create a macro using the macro recorder or the VBA editor.
2. Click the down-arrow on the Quick Access Toolbar and choose More Commands.
3. Select Macros from the Choose Commands From drop-down list.
4. Scroll through the list and select the macro created in step 1.
5. Click the Add>> button to add it to the Quick Access Toolbar list of icons.
6. Click OK to close the window and return to the document.

RD Field Code

The Reference Document field code has been part of Word since 1995. Yet, many Word users attempting to create books with Word either struggle with the Master/Sub Document feature or give up and turn to other software such as FrameMaker, PageMaker, InDesign, etc. What those users don't seem to realize is that the RD field code allows them to create books in much the same way as does FrameMaker, PageMaker, and InDesign by referencing the individual chapter files that comprise the book. The RD field code makes it is easily to generate a table of contents and an index for books of any length. (Refer to http://www.writemohr.com/downloads/200504_09-13.pdf for complete instructions on building books using the RD field code.)

Robert Mohr is a senior member of STC and can be reached at rpmohr@writemohr.com.

New Option for Members Attending Upcoming Technical Communication Summit *reprinted from STC News and Notes, February 2009*

Being in two places at one time may not be a problem much longer, thanks to an innovative program beginning during the Technical Communication Summit, May 3-6, in Atlanta, GA.

For years, attendees have struggled with choosing which of the concurrent sessions presented in the Final Program to attend. With six or more sessions offered at one time, choosing the most relevant one to attend has been a perennial problem. Conference evaluation forms have documented the frustration of members who wished they could benefit from all the sessions. Printed proceedings offer some value, but they do not capture the energy or dynamic interaction of the presentations or the important questions and answers that follow.

STC's solution is to capture the content (audio and visuals) of almost every session and make it available to attendees at no additional cost. The massive file of content, to be named Summit-at-a-Click (SUMMIT@aClick), will be stored online. With the addition of SUMMIT@aClick, attendees who normally would be able to physically attend only eight to ten sessions during the conference will now be able to reap the benefit of more than 100 sessions at their convenience. STC's Summit is the only meeting in the technical communication

field that offers this added bonus. A few sessions, such as roundtables or progressions, will not be recorded due to the level of quality necessary. After the conference, STC will sync the audio with the presentations and make them available (by passcode) for attendees on the STC website.

"I am delighted that STC is able to do this," explained STC President Mark Clifford. "I can now 'attend' all those sessions I missed. SUMMIT@aClick also allows me to revisit the ones that I did attend and to refresh my memory of the fine points made by the speakers. It enormously increases the member's experience, and it adds real value to the conference package."



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