Ragged Left

The newsletter for the Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

In this issue

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STC Board to Honor Bay Area with Important Visit

By Patrick Lufkin

As part of an exciting multi-day visit, August 16-19 at the Double Tree hotel at the Berkeley Marina, Bay Area STC members will get a chance to meet and celebrate with the members of the STC Board of Directors this month. Mark your calendars for **August 18**.

For those who aren't familiar with the Board, it is the body that provides the leadership needed to address both the internal and external issues facing the Society and the profession. Internally, the board makes financial and organizational decisions, determines the structure of the Society, sets fees and membership categories, charters new chapters and SIGs, picks the location for the annual conference, makes awards for service to the Society, and so on. Externally, the Board represents the Society and the profession to the world.

In recent years, the external aspects of the Board's role have very much moved to the fore. STC president, Paula Berger, recently wrote that the Board will soon be spending 70 to 80 percent of its time on external issues important to the membership, such matters as "managing and marketing perceptions of the technical communication profession, improving how technical communicators are valued and how their compensation is determined; and developing a body of knowledge for the profession."

The Board meets four times a year, once at the annual conference, and then in different cities where the STC has a strong presence. Because of the Society's huge geographic scope, meetings in any particular area are relatively rare events that those interested in Society governance or issues facing the profession will want to attend. The Board met in the Bay Area twice in the 1990s, once in San Francisco and once in San Jose.

Dinner Party!

It won't all be business though. The Saturday board meeting will be open to all, with the exception of a short period to discuss awards and such. You are encouraged to attend the meeting and the board presentation (5pm) and dinner (7pm) on Saturday evening. The Board hopes as many members as possible will take advantage of this chance to see the Board in action, and also to attend other events. For more information and to register online, see the website: http://www.stc-berkeley.org/MonthlyMeeting/2007AugustSTCBoardMeeting/August_18_2007_Event/calendar.shtml.

The hosting chapters (East Bay, Berkeley, Silicon Valley, and San Francisco) have organized a committee to work out the details under the leadership of Gwaltney Mountford, Society Associate Fellow, and past-president of the East Bay chapter. Other members of the committee include: Richard Mateosian (Berkeley), Helen Cheung (East Bay), Susan Becker (San Francisco), and D.J. Cline (Silicon Valley). Anyone wishing to help out in these activities should contact Gwaltney Mountford, mgm@mountfordgroup.com.

Patrick Lufkin is a longtime member of STC. He is currently Membership Manager of the Management SIG and Chair of the Kenneth M. Gordon Memorial Scholarship.

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TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (STC) has members worldwide. Its members include writers and editors, artists and illustrators, photographers and audiovisual specialists, managers and supervisors, educators and students, employees and consultants.

STC strives to:

- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication
- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members

MEMBERSHIP Membership is open to everyone. Classic membership is $145/year with an additional $15 enrollment fee. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email.

- Send email to membership@stc-berkeley.org
- Send mail to Berkeley STC, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007

INSURANCE Members of STC can apply for health, disability, and other insurance at STC group rates. For more information, contact STC office at stc@stc.org or (703) 522-4114.

WORLDWIDE ACTIVITIES STC's annual conference brings together more than 2,000 technical communicators from around the world for educational programs, seminars, and workshops conducted by experts in the field. Upcoming annual conference: Minneapolis, May 13-16, 2007. In addition the STC sponsors many regional conferences, which feature the same sorts of programs, seminars, and workshops on a more intimate scale. STC sponsors international and regional competitions in all aspects of technical communication. STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) bring together members with common experiences and interests to share their skills and knowledge. STC SIGs include:

- Academic
- AccessAbility
- Canadian Issues
- Consulting and Independent Contracting
- Emerging Technologies
- Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication
- Illustrators and Visual Designers
- Information Design and Architecture
- Instructional Design & Learning
- International Technical Communication
- Lone Writer
- Management
- Marketing Communication
- Online
- Policies and Procedures
- Quality and Process Improvement
- Scientific Communication
- Single Sourcing
- Technical Editing
- Usability & User Experience

STC sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the quarterly journal *Technical Communication*, the newsletter *Intercom*, and other periodicals, reference materials, manuals, anthologies, standards, and booklets.

Formed in 1953, STC has today become the largest professional society in the world dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of technical communication.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES The six northern California chapters of STC conduct a variety of individual and joint activities. See page 4 for contacts for these chapters. See page 16 for a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested.

SUBSCRIPTIONS This newsletter is free to members of the Berkeley chapter.

ADVERTISING RATES The *Ragged Left* is not accepting advertising at this time.

SUBMISSIONS *Ragged Left* publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please talk with the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

The deadline for unsolicited submissions is the last Friday of the odd months.

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Meeting Notes

Our Job is Not to Make Users Think

by Joe Devney

To begin her presentation, "Human Factors for Technical Communicators," at the June STC Berkeley meeting, Andrea Ames engaged her audience in an interactive exercise. She read a list of words, each with a hint (like "a type of fruit: banana") so we could remember the word later. Then she began the presentation proper, which included other interactive exercises.

Andrea is a Fellow and past president of STC, and a certificate coordinator and instructor for UC Santa Cruz Extension. Most relevant to the topic for the chapter meeting, though, is the fact that she is a Senior Technical Staff Member/Information Experience Strategist and Architect at IBM Corporation. She focuses on human factors in computer design.

"Human factors," she said, means designing for people. Such design takes into account how people think and how they learn, and the limitations of our memories. There is a body of research to back up the field, much of it coming from engineering—ergonomics in particular—and cognitive psychology. "You can get a degree in it," she says of the field.

What can human factors engineering teach technical communicators? One important lesson is that there are layers of meaning between the user and the content of the communication. Andrea identified four of them. From the "outside" into the content itself, they are:

1. The medium
2. Navigation
3. Presentation
4. Content.

We, technical communicators, write the content, but also create the other layers. It is in the best interest of our audience for us to understand these layers and how to make the best use of them. She pointed out that users don't enter our world; our products and information enter theirs.

One important concept that Andrea explained is that of "satisficing." For big decisions, she said, people go through a formal decision-making process, doing research and weighing options. But for most decisions, and some that need to be made quickly, they take the satisficing approach, using the first solution that seems reasonable.

As an example, she said that firefighters use instinct and experience to make decisions quickly. With fire raging, there is no time for a formal analysis. She referred to an interview with a firefighter, who said that when he decides how to approach a particular situation, he considers his alternatives by asking, "I'm going to do X. Will anybody die if I do that?" As soon as he hits upon an approach for which the answer is "No," he plunges ahead.

While the stakes for most users of technology are much lower, people use a similar satisficing strategy when faced with a new piece of hardware or software. They want to do their work quickly, and so take the first path-on a screen or in a manual that seems like it might lead to the right place. We need to keep this in mind when we organize information—and the layers of meaning mentioned above—in manuals, in online help, or in a software interface. "Don't lead users down the garden path," she cautioned.

To illustrate this concept, Andrea used another interactive exercise. She displayed some puzzles for the audience. The first was a series of numbers, and we had to determine the next one in the series. Then a second, similar puzzle. The third puzzle stumped most audience members for some time, though, because it followed an entirely different logic than the first two. Our satisficing approach didn't work because the context had been changed.

Remember to "place your product in the context of the larger business domain. What is the business goal?" Andrea advised. She said that "our job is not to make users think.

Continued on next page

The more cognitive burden we can remove from them, the better."

The presentation ended with some more interactive exercises. She read another list of 20 words. This time no hints, but the words obviously fell into a few categories, like men's names. The audience members did well when asked to write down as many words as they could remember when she finished reading the list. This exercise was to demonstrate that people remember things better when they can "chunk" the bits of information.

Finally, she returned to the original list from the beginning of the presentation. She read just the hints, and we were asked to write the word associated with each hint. Most people again did well, because they were able to connect the hint with the original word.

But one incident served to drive home Andrea's point about the technical communicator being responsible for getting the correct context. One audience member got only a couple of the words right. He hadn't connected the hints at the end of the presentation with the list of words an hour earlier. Andrea saw this as exactly the same problem that occurs when a technical communicator fails to put the information the user needs in the proper context. She had not made the context clear for everyone in her audience.

Other STC chapters in Northern California

East Bay: www.ebstc.org/

North Bay: www.stc-northbay.org/

Sacramento: www.stcsacramento.org/

San Francisco: www.stc-sf.org/

Silicon Valley: www.stc-siliconvalley.org/

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Resumes and Portfolios…

July 11, 2007 meeting notes
by Susan Jaeger

At the July membership meeting of the Berkeley STC, Andrew Davis, founder and President of Synergistech Communications, presented a highly informative talk entitled "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Resumes and Portfolios, But Were Afraid to Ask."

Davis is well-qualified to present this topic. As founder of Synergistech Communications, a recruitment firm that specializes in placing technical communicators, he has had a lot of contact with both hiring managers and job seekers. Prior to establishing Synergistech in 1995, Davis held positions in technical communications as a staff writer, contract writer, and manager at companies including Oracle, IBM, Informix, and Verity. His background has given him experience on both sides of the job-hunting fence. In his current role as a recruiter, Davis regards himself as a "matchmaker, advisor, and all-around champion" of technical writers.

Davis' talk, which focused on ways to create resumes, portfolios, and cover letters that work for you, provided advice that was both specific and candid.

Creating your resume

"What is the role of a resume?" he began by asking the group. The responses from the group weren't very different from his own: "The main function of a resume," Davis told us, "is to secure an interview with a busy person." When constructing your resume, you need to keep this busy person in mind; don't make him or her dig for the relevant details.

To create an effective resume, one that will get you an interview with a busy person,

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Davis discussed the things that work and do not work.

What works?

First, choose your resume format. In the functional vs. chronological resume debate, Davis comes down solidly on the side of chronological resumes. Why? Because when you use a functional resume, hiring managers assume that you are trying to hide something, such as a gap in your work history.

Next, include the following sections in your resume, in the order listed:

1. **At the top…**

   Provide the following information:
   - Your name
   - Home phone number (include your cell phone number if you are able to receive calls during the day)
   - email address (but not the one associated with your current employer)
   - URL to a Web site that contains your writing samples, if you have one

   You may be surprised to notice the absence of address information. Davis recommends skipping the inclusion of your address. In pre-Internet days, your home address was an important piece of information. With the widespread use of email, this is no longer so, and it may be judicious for you to protect your personal information as much as possible. When necessary, you can provide this information.

2. **Objective**

   The purpose of an objective is to let the recruiter or hiring manager know what job you are applying for. Consequently, it should be short (two lines) and narrowly focused.

3. **Summary**

   In this section, provide a summary of your job skills. *Include only those skills that are relevant to the job you want*. For example, Davis noted that if you have experience writing developer manuals, managing projects, and coordinating travel arrangements, don't include coordinating travel arrangements unless you are looking for a position that includes this responsibility.

4. **Technical Skills**

   A significant factor in hiring decisions is the applicant's technical knowledge. According to Davis, in today's job market, it doesn't work to present yourself as a generalist who is capable of learning new things; he noted that these are the positions that are being sent offshore.

   In the Technical Skills portion of your resume, Davis recommends including the following information in a table:
   - Operating systems
   - Authoring tools
   - Networking
   - Programming languages
   - Software applications
   - Databases
   - Hardware

5. **Professional Experience**

   In this section of your resume, provide a chronological list of the positions you have held, beginning with the most current position. For each position, provide a description of your accomplishments, along with metrics, if possible. Davis emphasized that your resume should include accomplishments, not simply a list of tasks and responsibilities. Additionally, it is best to focus on those accomplishments that are relevant to the position you are seeking.

   Provide the following information for each job that you have held for the past ten years:
   - Name of employer
   - Your title
   - Dates of employment

   When you provide dates, give both month and year. If you provide only years, the hiring manager may interpret the absence of months as an attempt to hide something. Note if you were a contract or staff writer at each of these

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positions.

6. **Education**

   Unless you are a new graduate or you have a computer science degree, put this section at the end of your resume. Include your degree, major, and the university you attended. Do not include the date that you graduated; it may be used to infer your age, and hiring managers are often wary of getting in trouble for discrimination.

   Be sure to include a list of additional coursework or continuing education, such as programming languages, XML, and technical publications management in this section.

7. **Affiliations (or Affiliations and Awards, if you have won any awards for your documentation)**

   List professional society memberships, awards, titles, and number of years of involvement. Your professional society affiliation demonstrates commitment to your field.

What doesn't work?

Davis noted that the following items could sabotage your chances for getting an interview:

- Unexplained gaps of 6 months or more. If you have been out of the workforce for more than six months, you need to provide an explanation in your resume.
- Information that reveals personal information about yourself, such as your age or your marital status. Some companies worry about being accused of discriminating against employees in certain categories. To avoid lawsuits, Davis noted that resumes that reveal personal details are sometimes thrown away.
- Vapid statements.

Make it look good!

For a technical writer, your resume is your first portfolio piece. Davis provided the following suggestion for making it look good:

- The type size should be at least 10-points
- The margins should be at least three-quarters of an inch wide
- Do not include pictures
- Do not use justified text (use left-aligned)

Davis provides many more recommendations for formatting your resume on his web site (URL provided at the end of this article).

How many pages?

Many people at the meeting had heard the adage that a resume should not exceed two pages. Some had heard that one page was the ideal length. In Davis's opinion, a resume should be as long as it needs to be. However, having said that, he went on to caution that your resume should include only relevant information for the position that you are applying for. Davis recommends “targeted” resumes. Keep in mind that the busy person you want to get an interview with is not likely to wade through pages of information to find the information that is relevant to the position. You need to highlight this information so it is easy for that person to locate.

What about references?

Do not list your references on your resume. You should provide references only after a mutual interest in the position has been established. You need to protect your references’ confidentiality, and you also want to shield them from receiving unnecessary calls. Davis also recommends not including the phrase: “References available on request” (or “References and writing samples available on request).” This information is obvious and does not need to be explicitly stated. However, good references are critical, and you should be prepared to supply them when you get further along in the hiring process.

Creating your portfolio

What should you include in your portfolio? According to Davis, your portfolio should contain examples that highlight your writing skills, your knowledge of audience needs, and your ability to use the required tools. Include only your best work for each audience type.

In the past, a person seeking a technical writing position got the chance to walk through his or her portfolio with interviewers. With the advent of Web- and CD-based portfolios, this is not always the case today. Therefore, Davis recommends you provide a paragraph or two with the following information for each of the writing samples that you submit:

- Who was the intended audience for the document?
- What was your role in creating the document? Were you the original author? If not, describe the amount of rewriting: was it a major rewrite, or was it a "patch-up" job?
- What were the circumstances of the document's creation: What were the timeframes like? Was the document edited? Was the product is a continual state of change as you documented it, or was it relatively stable?
- What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the document to be? If you could do this document again, what would you do differently?

This information helps the interviewer assess your writing samples, and it provides you with the opportunity to illustrate that you are able to work under less-than-ideal circumstances.

What doesn't work in portfolios?

- "Bringing the wheelbarrow." Select the most relevant writing samples for the position that you are applying for; don't provide everything you've ever written.
- Claiming full authorship when you were not the sole author. Davis noted that we are part of a small technical writing community, where misrepresentations of yourself are not likely to stand.
- Claiming that you do not have writing samples because all of your work is proprietary.

The last point led to a discussion about how to deal with proprietary work. Although many companies allow full public access to their documentation, some companies consider this information to be proprietary. Some meeting attendees said that they had signed non-disclosure agreements with employers, and they asked Davis for recommendations on providing writing samples under these circumstances. Davis suggested two approaches:

- Create your own writing samples. (For example, you can document a shareware program.)
- Change or blacken out the product and company names in your writing samples.

How should you present your portfolio?

Although you can submit writing samples by email or on a CD, Davis recommends making samples of your work available online. This method of delivery has many advantages. It provides the hiring manager with a quick and easy way to retrieve and review your writing samples. Additionally, it shows that you have experience with Web-based delivery of documentation. Davis also believes that a website with your writing samples has the potential to be the most professional method of displaying your portfolio.

Writing an effective cover letter

In your cover letter, you should address each job requirement with a description of your relevant experience. If you don't have directly related experience, you can provide a description of similar experience, or tell the hiring manager how you plan to get the required experience.

On the Synergistech Web site, Davis provides a sample cover letter (http://www.synergistech.com/images/CLTemplate.doc), which you can customize for your own use.

Parsing the job description

When applying for a position, Davis recommends that you "parse" the job description by identifying the following details:

- Audience for the documentation:
- Deliverables
- Subject matter
- Seniority

- Location
- Breadth
- Growth path

In addition to helping you determine if a position interests you, this information can also help you construct a targeted resume, portfolio, and cover letter.

At the interview

When you go to an interview, be prepared! Bring a hard copy of your resume with you, along with appropriate portfolio samples. A tip from Davis: leave a CD containing your writing samples with the hiring manager; he or she will be very impressed!

Provide relevant references, but be sure to notify and prepare your references in advance of the interview.

Last, if the position is interesting to you, don't hesitate to let the hiring manager know of your interest.

For more advice...

Visit the Synergistech Web site at http://www.synergistech.com/advice.shtml, where Davis provides an enormous amount of useful information for people seeking technical writing positions.

Web Usability: Consistency

by Eric Hughes, Managing Director Simplexity, LLC

In our previous columns, we discussed a process for, and the impact of, ensuring quality organization and navigation, and how to keep a web presence appropriately simple for your audiences. In this column, we'll discuss consistency on the web.

Bad experiences at restaurants are always communicated (Yelp, anyone?). But when you eat at a restaurant, you have physical criteria, so there isn't much open to interpretation later on. You also have someone real to complain to if the food is unacceptable.

Evaluation of experiences on the web are a lot harder to pin down, because when people have bad experiences, they rarely report them and sometimes can't explain them. (Even of they do report them, they rarely hear anything back from the email address or form they used to report the experience!) They just don't use that website again, and they are quite likely to share their bad experiences with whomever has their ear at the time.

One of the planning and implementation mistakes that web developers make is to underestimate how important consistency across a web presence can be. Perhaps consistency is driven too much by inflexibility in today's culture, because consistency requires that rules exist. But it can be quite confusing for a visitor to expect a certain result from an action and not get it, especially if they have seen the expected result elsewhere on the site.

Consistency is one of those criteria that is easier to define than it is to find on a website. Consistency is usually relative to something else, and so takes a bit of research and note-taking to discover. There is also some dissension about which consistency criteria are most important. Usability experts, it seems, tend to find more inconsistencies than users do. That is because users tend to have very specific items they are looking for, or tasks to accomplish, and if it is important to them, they will work around or ignore the problems.

It is also worth mentioning that the overuse of consistency can lead to the creation, on the visitor's part, of bad habits. If you expect something to happen, you might ignore the result and 'automate' your response to the consistent action. Jef Raskin's seminal work "The Humane Interface" (2000) has good discussions of this issue.

What are the areas of consistency that we need to be careful of? When we read about consistency, we tend to see sentences like: "And it is really important to be consistent with navigation, labelling, etc." Perhaps it is time we define "etc."

Consistency in form: Each page on a site should have the same logo. The logo should be linked to the home page (except for the logo on the home page). Some links should go on each page (contact us, help, privacy, terms & conditions, search) and be in the same place on each page. Use fonts consistently across similar types of content. Create HTML style sheets that can be used across multiple sites, if needed.

Consistency in language: Create a style guide for the way words and punctuation are used. There are quite a few on the web that can be used as starting points. "The Chicago Manual of Style" (2003) is currently in its 15th edition, and sits on most writers' and editors' desks. It is also available online.

Consistency in function: The behavior of the actions taken on a website should be consistent. Anything that looks the same across multiple pages or transactions should act the same and give the same results.

Consistency in coding: At some point in the life cycle of a website, new programmers will be needed, or the development and maintenance will be moved to new programmers. Their ability to quickly adapt is dependent upon how carefully the code is documented and standardized.

Consistency in results: Any call to action on a site should produce the same results. Labels used to cue those actions should be carefully chosen: submit, add, delete, send, cancel, next, previous should all produce consistent results. Get a copy of "A Style Guide For the Computer Industry" (2003) by Sun Technical Publications. It is a wonderful reference for these sorts of issues (albeit somewhat technical in focus).

Consistency in process: This is an area that impacts applications more than sites. On sites, if people are forced through a particular process to get them to do or see something, they will rebel. In an application (such as one that might produce a report on mutual fund performance over time), there are very specific steps that need to be followed. However, there can be different entrance points to these applications. Planning for consistent workflow and interaction design is difficult, but absolutely necessary, in those scenarios.

Consistency in labelling: Spend way more time discussing and evaluating labels than you think you need to. As sites grow, labels become less useful, and new labels are created with nuanced meanings. Don't thoroughly confuse visitors by using different labels for actions or content with the same meaning.

Consistency in infrastructure architecture: The software code that makes sites and applications work has to exist somewhere. That infrastructure needs to be planned and consistently used to meet high performance and low maintenance cost expectations.

Consistency in design: Arguably, the most important visual cue on the web is color. Use it carefully and consistently. Don't let designers try to convince you that having a different color on each section of your site is a good idea—it is not.

Consistency in error messaging: One might think that, considering the paucity of useful error messages on software applications, that consistency means providing the same error message for every possible error! Error messages should be useful, actionable, and distinct to the problems that created them.

Consistency in content: Content should be written with consistent tone, grammar, and punctuation across all pages of a site. If content is updated in one area and not the others, make certain that the changes made are not inconsistently applied in the areas that were not modified. Use titles and subtitles consistently, too.

Consistency in versioning: This applies when a new site is published. Consider what people will do who had bookmarked the previous site, they deserve consistent results. In many cases, it is a good idea to leave both the old and new versions of sites or sections of sites available for some period of time. Try to make certain that URLs are consistent and are related to the pages they display.

Consistency in the reason a piece of content exists: Back to the audience! If all of a sudden you decide there is a new audience that you want to provide content for, how does that impact your other audiences?

What visitors and users of applications want are quick and consistent results. All they have available to them is the user interface that allows them to do their work. If this user interface is all they have, it is critical that web developers pay it appropriate respect by planning consistency into interaction design.

Email eric@simplexity.net.

President's Notes

by Richard Mateosian

STC Board in Town

August is a busy time for the Berkeley Chapter. In addition to our regular meeting at the Highlands Country Club, we have a special event: The STC Board is meeting at the Doubletree Hotel at the Berkeley Marina. They are considering many actions and policies that may have a profound effect on our careers, and I hope you will follow the link from our website to find out about the events we have planned around that meeting. Sign up early for the lowest prices—or just attend the free part.

The STC Board was once focused mainly on internal STC matters, but recently STC has been looking outward too. One important STC initiative is with the Bureau of Labor Statistics to replace the outdated and limited technical writer category with a technical communicator category that encompasses many more of the tasks and skills that characterize our jobs today—and implies a better pay grade to go with it. If our profession interests you, then come see what our representatives are doing—and give them your input.

Technical Communication Competition

September brings our technical communication competition. For reasons too silly to explain, we are not calling it Touchstone, but in effect, that's what it is. The five Bay Area chapters are sponsoring it. The Sacramento Chapter, which is going through a bad time right now, could not participate.

Volunteer to be a judge, or submit your best work. You can do both, but you don't get to judge your own entry.

The STC Kenneth Gordon Scholarship Committee, the main beneficiary of the competition, is managing it. We don't have an official website yet, but if you want to participate, please let me know at xrm@pacbell.net. You can also join our Yahoo group, STC_Comp by sending email to STC_Comp-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or visiting the Yahoo Groups website and signing up online.

Getting Yourself Hired

Lesson 5: Ten Killer Mistakes You Should Avoid Making During Your Interview - *Part One*

by Dalton Hooper, STC Member
Orlando & Suncoast chapters

Although there are countless reasons for your elimination from consideration during a job interview, there are certain actions and behaviors on your part that will almost guarantee you ***don't*** *get the job. For lesson 5, I am covering mistakes 1 - 5. In lesson 6, I will finish the list and talk about mistakes 6 - 10.*

If you want to ensure you don't get a job offer, be sure you do at least one of the following during your interview:

Mistake #1: Arrive late.

There is virtually no excuse for this happening. You should allow plenty of time for your travel so that you get there well before the appointed time. Unless it is a location with which you are very familiar, you should make a trial run to the address prior to the appointed day. If possible, you should make the trial run during a day of the week and a time of day similar to your appointment time. This will allow you to observe the traffic flows and how much time you should build into your schedule for travel. Remember, it is far better to arrive an hour early and sit in your car in the parking lot for 45 minutes than to arrive five minutes late! The interviewer has every right to consider this as an indicator of a chronic punctuality problem. If you are late for an appointment as critical as a job interview, how diligent can he or she expect you to be for less critical appointments if you got the job?

If you find that you are going to be unavoidably late, call the interviewer's office as soon as you know you will not be on time. If your reasons are unexpected enough and your notification early enough, it is possible you may be able to redeem yourself and get your interview rescheduled.

Mistake #2: Dress inappropriately.

My personal opinion as someone who has interviewed hundreds of job applicants is that, aside from wearing a tuxedo, it is nearly impossible to overdress for a job interview. By far, the greater hazard is to dress too casually. You would not wear a swimsuit to church nor would you wear a business suit to the beach, although there is nothing wrong with either in the appropriate setting. However, if you had to be in one of these two scenarios, which would you choose? The business suit at the beach, of course. It is always better to err on the side of being overdressed.

Many job applicants make the mistake of trying to dress for the "job" rather than dress for the interview. The clothes you choose to wear to the interview should be selected to convey your respect for the interviewer—not your "best guess" as to what you would wear every day if you got the job.

Mistake #3: Talk too little/ too much.

Remember that a job interview is, at its most basic, is an exchange of information between you and the interviewer(s). The interviewer is seeking certain information to determine if they want to offer you the position and you are seeking certain information in order to make a decision as to whether you would want to accept a job offer from this company.

If your answers are very short ("yes", "no", "I don't know"), the interviewer is not able to collect the information they require to make a positive determination about you. A lack of information will disqualify you from further consideration as quickly as negative information.

On the other hand, if your answers are unnecessarily long and meandering, you are probably running the interview past its allotted time and causing the interviewer to skip other questions (i.e., information exchanges) that he or she had prepared. Also, taking too long to answer the questions may give the interviewer the impression that you would also waste valuable time on the job by unnecessarily talking instead of working—and thus, keeping two employees (you and the person to whom you are talking) from being productive.

Mistake #4: Do not ask questions.

I spoke at some length about this in an earlier article. At some point during the interview—usually near the end—the interviewer will ask if you have any questions. Never say no. Always take this opportunity to ask relevant questions that demonstrate your interest in the position and the value you could bring to it. As an interviewer, whenever I encountered an applicant who didn't ask questions, I assumed the applicant was just looking for a job and a paycheck, with no real regard as to what the job entailed. That would likely not be a motivated employee or one who would stay around very long.

Mistake #5: Demonstrate that you are only interested in what the job can do for you.

As I have said in previous articles, companies are not in business to provide jobs. Companies are in business to make a profit for their owners. Jobs are just a fortuitous by-product. Consequently, the interviewer is most likely not interested in how placing you in the job would benefit you, but how it would benefit the company. In everything you do or say, whether on your resume or during the interview, it should reflect how hiring you would benefit the employer.

There are many "games" that the interviewer/interviewee play during the hiring process and this is one of the most obvious. Both you and the interviewer know that, in reality, you are seeking employment to enhance yourself rather than them. You must however, demonstrate that you can be counted on to conduct yourself in a manner that represents the employer's best interests. That is, after all, the role of an employee.

Dalton Hooper works for Walt Disney Parks and Resorts Information Technology as a Project Technical Specialist. Dalton was the documentation project manager for over five years, directing a team of technical writers responsible for providing all relevant technical documentation during the development and support of internal business systems for Disney parks and resorts worldwide. Dalton also retired from AT&T in 1998 after 32 years in various leadership positions. Dalton is available to speak to your group on various topics. For more details, visit his website at www.wordsandwit.com.

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month. See *Meeting/Dinner Prices* on page 13 and *Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions* on page 14.

Increasing Visibility and Value: Reframing the Work We Do

by Linda Urban and Joan Lasselle

Wednesday, August 8, 2007, 6-9:30pm
Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

It's time to reframe technical documentation from what we do to how we add value.

To do so, it's important to consider questions like these:

- Do you know the major business objectives for your company, for this year? What are three critical goals or initiatives? How does the work you do help or hinder those objectives?
  If you don't know your company's key objectives, how can you find out?
- How are documentation and training perceived by upper management at your company?
  Is your work a checkbox on the requirements list, or is it a critical success factor?
- Does the work you do help to solve customer problems?
  Are you focused on documenting features, or on making sure your customers have information that can help them solve problems?
  Do you have the support you need to develop the latter? Do stakeholders within your company realize the value you can bring?
- Is the glass half empty, or half full?
  When you propose changes, do they come across as complaints, or as innovations that will significantly add to your organizations' competitive advantage?

We know we need to think about these kinds of issues, but it's hard to do so when our day-to-day work is focused around meeting tight schedules and getting deliverables out the door.

Bring your experiences, ideas, and questions to this interactive session for an opportunity to stop and think about your role in the organization, and identify what you can do to increase your visibility and focus on your value.

Speakers

Linda Urban is an independent consultant with over 20 years experience in technical communication. She works on product usability, help systems, software and hardware documentation, and training. Linda focuses on developing solutions that meet user needs and company goals, and her work has received local and international STC awards. She also teaches in the technical communication programs at UC Berkeley Extension and UC Santa Cruz Extension. Her company is Linda Urban Communications, LLC.

Joan Lasselle is founder and President of Lasselle-Ramsay, Inc., a professional services company that develops business information and learning solutions that drive superior user experience, productivity, and change. Lasselle-Ramsay focuses on four practice areas: content management, technical documentation, training development, and on-the-job information tools. Since 1982, Lasselle-Ramsay has worked with major high-tech manufacturers to develop technical documentation solutions for commercial products.

Upcoming Meetings

Writing for a Developer Audience: User Assistance for an Integrated Development Environment
by Kathryn Munn, Principal Technical Writer at Oracle

Wednesday, September 12, 2007, 6-9:30pm
Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Lessons Learned from Web Applications and User Centered Design
by Sarah B. Nelson and David Verba of Adaptive Path

Wednesday, October 10, 2007, 6-9:30pm
Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Meeting/Dinner Prices

STC Members Meeting and Dinner
$21.00 per person at door
$18.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Students Meeting and Dinner
$18.00 per person at door
$15.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Non-STC Member Meeting and Dinner
$24.00 per person at door
$21.00 if reserved on our Chapter's Website by the day before the meeting

Meeting-only prices (reserved and at door are the same):
STC Member $12.00
Student $10.00
Non-STC Member $15.00

Special cost notes:

- All members of the San Francisco Chapter of the IABC are welcome to register for Berkeley STC General Meetings at the member price ($18 dinner/$12 without dinner) by midnight on the day before the meeting.
- Nonmembers are always welcome to STC meetings at the non-member rates.

Meeting Agenda

6:00 Check-in, networking, and conversation.
6:30 Dinner.
7:15 Chapter business and announcements. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.*
7:30 Formal program. Usually we have a speaker or panel of speakers on a topic related to the business or technology of technical communication.
8:30 Conversation, offline questions for the speaker, follow-up on job announcements
9:00 Clear the room. Move conversations to the sidewalk.

* **Attendees**, please announce open positions, and bring job listings for distribution.

Recruiters are welcome to attend meetings, place literature on a designated table, and talk with attendees one-on-one during the informal parts of the meeting. We ask them not to announce specific jobs during the formal announcement period, but they are free to stand up and identify themselves.

Similarly, we ask anyone else with commercial announcements to confine themselves to calling attention to the availability of literature on the designated table.

Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions

Highlands Country Club

110 Hiller Drive

Oakland, California

Information at http://www.stc-berkeley.org/MonthlyMeeting/june2007_meeting/calendar.shtml#loc

By Car

From San Francisco

Cross the Bay Bridge to I-580 Eastbound. Remain in the right lane, until Highway 24 Eastbound (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Continue eastbound until the Tunnel Road off-ramp. Exit will loop around to the west, crossing back over Highway 24. Turn left at the stop sign. Follow Tunnel Road/Caldecott Lane to traffic signal. Veer to the right, and follow Hiller Drive halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From Walnut Creek

Take Highway 24 Westbound through the Caldecott Tunnel. Stay in the right-hand lane, taking the first exit after the tunnel ends, the Tunnel Road exit, going towards Berkeley. Follow Tunnel Road to the complex intersection and stop light, at Tunnel Drive, Hiller Drive, and Highway 13. Veer to the right, and continue halfway up the hill on Hiller Drive. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From I-80 and Berkeley

Take Ashby Avenue to the Highway 13 exit. Ashby becomes Tunnel Road at the Claremont Hotel. Continue on Tunnel Road (through the split-level section) to the stoplight just before the Highway 24 overcrossing. Remain in the left lane and make a sharp left U-turn around the Firestorm Memorial Garden, on to Hiller Drive. Continue halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From Hayward

Take I-580 Westbound to Highway 13 north. Continue on Highway 13 past the overcrossing of Highway 24. At the stoplight, turn right, then left, onto Hiller Drive. Continue halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

Parking

Please park on the street. The club's parking lot is for members only.

STC News

Chapter News

Leadership Positions Available

We are looking to fill several leadership positions! Contact Richard Mateosian if you are interested.

Membership Update

by Jim Dexter:

Total STC Membership as of June 30, 2007	14,139
Total Chapter Membership	144

Welcome Bonnie Leib, Gopi Shubhakar, and Susan E. Jaeger to our chapter!

Networking Opportunities

Volunteers needed for the 2007 Bay Area Networking Guide (BANG)

What

The Bay Area Networking Guide (BANG) is a directory of local companies that need the services of technical communicators. Several previous editions of this guide were published by the San Francisco chapter of STC, but the last one appeared in 1994. At a minimum, the next edition should contain the following information:

a. the company's name, physical address, switchboard telephone and main fax numbers, main and employment-related URLs, and a brief description of its products and/or services
b. whether there's a formal in-house technical publications, training, or marketing communications service (and if not, is there a need for a contract solution)
c. the titles, contact information, and key responsibilities of any technical communications department managers
d. which tools are in use in technical communications department(s)
e. whether the company creates content for a global audience
f. the credentials the company typically seeks in its candidates

Why

Now that the tech economy is back on track and many of our former employers have disappeared or moved their technical communications activities offshore, a new BANG will let us find out who's still hiring in the Bay Area, which skills they need, and where we fit.

In short, San Francisco Bay Area technical communicators need another edition of the Networking Guide to help them focus their quest for meaningful work. Just as significantly, STC headquarters has dramatically reduced its funding for individual chapters' operations, so those chapters must augment their revenue. Networking Guide sales could substantially benefit their budgets.

Finally, such a project requires a talented, committed project manager and dedicated researchers.

How

The BANG Coordinator's primary role is to marshall and train researchers, then help them be productive as they fact-check and augment data.

Essentially, the BANG is the ultimate team effort. Many hundreds of phone calls and emails, followed by plenty of data entry, coalesce into a document that lists invaluable details about Bay Area employers of technical communicators. The BANG:

- Lets employers educate would-be employees and contractors about their needs, corporate infrastructure, and marketplace
- Helps job seekers focus their search and avoid the HR black hole, and
- Generates revenue for STC through sales of the completed document.

Specifically, to make another BANG come together, the following tasks need to be accomplished:

1. Gather the data. As indicated below, Synergistech will provide as much raw data as is needed.
2. Recruit volunteers through STC chapter meetings and newsletters. With 20-30 volunteers each contributing five (5) hours/week, the project should come together quickly.
3. Train volunteers on a phone script and role-playing scenarios. Synergistech will supply the MySQL database for data entry.
4. Supervise volunteers, answering their questions as they gather the information listed under 'What' (above).
5. Publish.

Synergistech's role and incentive (truth in advertising)

Synergistech needs help validating and fleshing out a huge amount of data we've gathered recently about local technology industry employers. We would supply all the raw material for volunteer researchers, including:

- company name
- physical address
- main phone and fax
- main URL
- employment URL (if one exists), and
- (usually) a description of what the company does

Synergistech's legal relationship with the BANG 2007 project is to a) supply the raw data, b) pay for the design and hosting of the target database, and c) underwrite an initial print run should STC decide to distribute in this way. In return, Synergistech will own the resulting data and lease it to STC for free for one 'edition' as well as making it available for further research (on the same terms) at STC's option.

Everyone else's incentive

Volunteers participating in this project get first access to fresh data. As such, the project is attractive to students and those who are out of work, and less appealing to those who work full-time or are unavailable during working hours. At STC's option, volunteers who complete a given number of records might be able to acquire a free or discounted copy of the completed publication.

The Coordinator gets to orchestrate something truly worthwhile and relevant, as well as of substantial economic value to STC.

Employers get free publicity with a motivated workforce as well as the chance to specify the kinds of talent they seek.

And local STC chapters benefit by publicizing their own existence and generating revenue to continue funding valuable chapter operations.

What now?

If you are interested in the role of BANG Project Coordinator, or just want to help with the research effort, please get in touch with Andrew Davis at Synergistech by email <andrew@synergistech.com> with the Subject *Interested in participating in the 2007 Bay Area Networking Guide project*.

Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. www.amwancal.org

American Society for Training and Development, Mount Diablo Chapter. Meets monthly in Danville. http://mtdiabloastd.org/.

American Society of Indexers, Golden Gate Chapter. www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter — www.awc-sf.org/

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. A network of professionals committed to improving the effectiveness of organizations through strategic interactive and integrated business communication management — http://sf.iabc.com/

National Writers Union (UAW). A labor union for freelance writers of all genres. — www.nwu.org

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings & other events. www.ncswa.org