Technicalities

Instructional Design and Technical Writing
Do you know where your skill sets are today?

by S. Redmond Naus

Today's technical writer is a hybrid: part engineer, part information developer, part communications specialist. Technical writers who remain competitive in the field have developed highly technical skills, and become masters at finessing tools, perfecting techniques, creating workarounds, and working independently and with teams to meet aggressive deadlines. We technical writers are wizards of the highest order. We coax numbered lists from a certain popular-yet-balky software tool, manipulate multiple online help files from a single source, laugh in the face of changes due a week ago (but of which we may not have been informed until today), and — oh, yes — translate highly technical design documents into readable form for the less-than-technical audience. I'm sure I've missed a lot here, but you can fill in the blanks. Still, this is not enough.

In a marketplace that demands much and guarantees little, technical writers must evolve further still. Future trends forecast a need for technical writers to assimilate additional, cross-functional skills that will add value to organizations

> *Now that we've mastered the tools and content, how can we remain on the leading edge of the IT marketplace?*

hoping to compete in our information-based economy. Now that we've mastered the tools and content, how can we remain on the leading edge of the IT marketplace? Got Instructional Design and Development?

Instructional Design (ID), also known as Instructional Technology (an aside: purists in the field of Instructional Technology are now loudly groaning) is the foundation of training development. In the ID field, the term "training development" is often used synonymously with instruction or instructional development. So what exactly is Instructional Design and Development and how does it help you as a technical writer?

Generally speaking, Instructional Design and Development evolved from work done by behavioral and educational psychologists during the 1950s and 60s. Key to Instructional Design and Development are learning outcomes: they define what a learner should be able to do following training. To facilitate the desired learning outcomes, the instructional designer analyzes and identifies objectives, and establishes criterion-referenced measurements. These measurements assess the learner's behaviors as they relate to the objectives of instruction. Measurement is the second key component required to solve instructional problems. Today, because of

Also In This Issue

STC
SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

From the Editor

For the Love of Money

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

According to the Bible, "…the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." (*1 Timothy 6:10*). True as this may be, sometimes it is the love of money that keeps us going in our careers when other incentives fail to light the fires of desire and motivation.

Like it or not, money does make the world go round. Without money we would not be able to afford all of those neat toys we have grown so fond of in our acquisitive lives. Sometimes, however, we need money to pursue other goals besides getting and spending. To that end, the STC provides a number of grants and loans to further the field of technical communication. Some of these may be available to you — read on:

Are you a high school teacher who wishes that more of your students could communicate their practical knowledge and ideas in ways that would help them in jobs, college, and life in general? STC's Practical Communication Committee is continuing its summer teacher training project with the 21st annual Institute in Technical Communication (ITC) at Horry-Georgetown Technical College in Myrtle Beach, SC. ITC grants will be awarded to ten high school teachers to fund their tuition and accommodation while attending the institute's summer program to learn hands-on how to improve their teaching of technical communication to their students.

Do you have an idea that might help bridge the gap between those who create ideas and those who put them into practice? If so, then an STC research grant might be for you. The STC awards research grants to individuals like you, and is interested in funding practical basic and applied research on topics of concern and interest to the Society's mainstream membership. To date, the STC has awarded nearly $300,000 in grants for these research programs.

When we attend college or return after a few years to further our professional development, our monetary resources may be unable to keep pace with the cost of our education. To help bridge this gap, the STC offers scholarships to deserving students enrolled in technical communication programs at universities, colleges, junior colleges, and technical schools. Since starting the program the STC has awarded almost $360,000 to students to help them further develop a career in technical communication.

Finally, several years ago I dreamt of developing a comprehensive, nation-wide, university-level microbiological sterilization education program for microbiology majors. My program would have been the first of its kind in the nation. Unfortunately, other concerns stole my attention and I never pursued funding for my research project. Do you, as a technical communicator, have an idea or concept that could develop and communicate new information about the art and science of technical communication? The STC encourages you to submit proposals for educational projects such as pilot programs, new high school and college curricula, and innovative teaching methods through the Society's Special Opportunities Grant program.

While an obsession with money can be unhealthy, the money we earn may not be enough to fund our special needs relating to technical communication. In such instances, we STC members can go to our Society with requests for grants and scholarships to support our research and education goals. After all, "…ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (*John 16:24*)!

For more information about STC grant and scholarship programs, visit the STC Web site at www.stc.org/grants_loans.html. **RMC**

President's Corner
The Value of Finding Fault
by David C. Garrett

This column is a result of the following factors:

> *Suppose we had a place to post ratings and reviews of employees and clients.*

‣ Elsewhere in this issue, you will find another article by me discussing ways of ensuring that you get paid by your clients. (See page 9.)
‣ In my previous column, I suggested ways that the STC could improve its service to its membership and, in the process, provide greater value to its senior members.
‣ Recently, in my role as Employment Manager, I sent out an ad for a contract job. Someone responded to that ad with a cautionary note about the client being notoriously slow to pay.
‣ I've just finished making lodging arrangements for an upcoming trip to Mexico on *Travelocity*.

From these influences I have arrived at what I think is an interesting idea. Suppose we were to rate and review clients and employers?

When you book lodging on *Travelocity*, you can see a rating for a hotel using the classic 5-star system. The rating is based on feedback by guests who have stayed at the hotel: real people giving real opinions. In many cases, you can read actual reviews of the hotel by previous guests. It gives one a tremendous feeling of comfort to read what others have experienced at the hotel before booking.

The hotels that receive bad ratings deserve what they get, don't you think? After all, it's their job to make your stay pleasant, and you are paying them, so the negativity is a good thing because, maybe, they'll improve their service, get more business, and be more profitable. In this sense, negative reviews can actually be helpful to the long-term survival of the hotel.

Now suppose we had a place to post ratings and reviews of employers and clients. We could post their want ads with a link to a ratings and review area. Potential employees and contractors could follow the link and see what others had to say about that company.

What sort of things could we include? For employers, we could rate them on the following:

‣ Quality and interest of the work
‣ Pay and benefits
‣ Political climate
‣ Opportunity for advancement
‣ Financial soundness
‣ Honesty of upper management

For clients, we could rate them on:

‣ Tendency to cut corners
‣ Interest in quality
‣ Accessibility of subject matter experts
‣ Ability to do meaningful and timely reviews
‣ Timeliness of payment
‣ Reasonableness

Now, to be fair, the rating system has to work both ways. Employers and clients need a venue in which to rate their employees and contractors. After all, even though we are, without doubt, the best at our profession, potential employers and clients have no way of knowing that. And maybe we'd like those of us who are substandard professionally to be identified as such.

The ratings would have to be different for employees and contractors, because the expectations are quite different. For employees, employers would want to rate employees on their:

‣ Emotional stability
‣ Flexibility
‣ Maturity
‣ Technical competence
‣ Ability to work well with others
‣ Ability to understand the difference between stated organizational objectives and reality

Clients could rate their contractors on:

‣ Understanding the difference between quality and reality
‣ Ability to expand or contract services as needed
‣ Price-to-value ratio
‣ Technical competence
‣ Focus on meeting requirements and deadlines
‣ Ability to work with subject matter experts

We could liven up the dialogue a bit by giving employers, employees, clients, and contractors a place to phrase a rebuttal, like, "It's not true! We ALWAYS pay within 30 days. It's the post office's fault!" or "Sure I leave everyday at 4PM, and skip a lot of Fridays, but I'm always THINKING about work." or "No! No! NO! I delivered the document on time. After all, the day ends at midnight, doesn't it?" or "Just because we pay a few bucks less than the average salary and politely ask everyone to work 70 hours a week we get downgraded?! You must be kidding!!! Isn't that what Steve Jobs does????"

Now THAT'S a membership service worth paying for.

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Human Factors for Technical Communicators

by Mike Livsey

Join us on June 20th at the Tivoli Center as STC RMC closes out its 2001-2002 meetings with a discussion on human factors for technical communicators. The Online/Multimedia SIG will also hold a meeting prior to the main program. After the summer break, STC RMC meetings will resume in September.

STC RMC Calendar

See the RMC Web site for more information about any of these activities.

June 2002

Thursday, 6/6 —
STC RMC Council meeting

Thursday, 6/20 —
Chapter meeting: Human Factors; Online SIG

July - August 2002

Summer Break —
Enjoy your summer!

September 2002

Thursday, 9/5 —
STC RMC Council meeting

Thursday, 9/19 —
Chapter meeting

Editorial Corrections

Our apologies for the following errors in the April/May 2002 issue of *Technicalities*:

▸ The article "Getting Published" erroneously referred to Dr. Don Zimmerman as the head of the Department of Journalism and Technical Communication at CSU. Dr. Garrett O'Keefe is the head of the Department of Journalism and Technical Communication at CSU.

▸ The author of the article "Now is the Time to Volunteer" was erroneously given as Linda Gallagher. Helen Tuttle was the author of this article. ℞𝐦𝐜

June

Thursday, June 20
Human Factors for Technical Communicators
At our June meeting, Andrea L. Ames will discuss human factors from a technical communicator's perspective. She'll provide an overview of human factors and demonstrate their impact on several aspects of information design.

What are "human factors," you may ask? Human factors are those characteristics of our users that influence or affect their experience while using our products — including the way users think, solve problems, and learn, as well as their background, past experiences, and attitudes. Information is, after all, part of the product that technical communicators deliver, and staying in touch with users is important. Technical communicators who develop online information, like Help and Web sites are, strictly speaking, designing interactive interfaces. And many communicators are moving away from developing only traditional documentation deliverables and designing product user interfaces — clearly an area that calls for a solid understanding of human factors!

If this sounds like you, join Andrea Ames for this entertaining and informative session. For details, check the chapter Web site at www.stcrmc.org/news_events/june2002.htm. ℞𝐦𝐜

50th Anniversary Committee Seeks Your Memories

by Elizabeth Babcock

When STC members from across the world gather, a favorite activity is sharing stories about the memorable times we've had — the great session at the Annual Conference that changed our lives, perhaps a mentor in the Society who helped with our careers, or the technical communication "firsts" and transitions we shared.

During such a story fest, we also laugh about the fun times and the difficult times that turned out to be fun — the Publications Competition conducted during a hurricane in Tampa, for example.

In preparation for our May 2003 celebration of STC's 50th Anniversary, the 50th Anniversary Committee wants such stories from you. We need humorous and inspirational anecdotes that we can collect in an STC archive, and we want to publish some of your most sparkling or inspirational stories in a brochure to be distributed to all members.

Whether you're a Society leader or a chapter member, a member of many years' duration or one who recently joined, a technical communication specialist or a novice, a U.S. member or one located in another country, we hope you will participate.

Instructional Design and Technical Writing

the work of experts in the field of Instructional Design and Development, there are a number of models available as tools to assist in the Instructional Design and Development effort. Dick and Cary's development of a model for the systematic design of instruction (the ADDIE model) provides one of the simplest ID tools.

As a technical writer, you probably will have the opportunity to develop training at some point in your career. Training development is, in fact, "becoming an expected skill set for technical writers" (Hassell-Corbiell, 2001, p. 16). Learning about Instructional Design and Development can only put technical writers ahead of the curve. Consider the need for cost-effective just-in-time training, on-the-job training, distance learning, and these additional facts distilled from surveys done by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) and presented by Hassell-Corbiell (2001) in Developing Training Courses:

- ‣ Technology training is the fastest-growing segment of training budgets
- ‣ CD-ROM or corporate intranet now delivers fifty percent of training interventions
- ‣ Over 90% of training professionals are being required to justify the cost, benefits, and bottom-line impact of their training projects.

If you have no previous experience in the Instructional Design and Development field, your technical writing skill and experience will serve as a good foundation. However, note the differences and work to develop those skills that will enhance your expertise in ID. First, realize that ID is focused on learning outcomes, that is, a change in behavior based upon instruction. Technical documentation does not aim to change behavior; rather, its goal is to inform. It is generally designed for usability, regardless of the delivery method. Second, ID is always concerned with measuring the learning outcomes to determine the instruction's effectiveness. These measurements often consist of classroom tests or self-assessments, or they may take other forms. But measurement is critical to the ID process. Finally, ID takes documentation one step further and enhances the information by providing learning activities and strategies that will engage the learner and motivate him or her to further develop knowledge and skills.

Historically, technical writers became recognized for their ability to add value beyond formatting (although some outside the field still believe this is their true role!), and to assimilate, structure, and organize information rather than just cutting and pasting. It is time for technical writers to further define their expertise, and to be valued for their contributions in the Instructional Design and Development arena.

Got Instructional Design and Development?

References

Hassell-Corbiell, R. (2001). *Developing Training Courses: A Technical Writer's Guide to Instructional Design and Development.* Tacoma, Washington: Learning Edge Publishing. **RMC**

Book Review — Content Management for Dynamic Web Delivery

by David C. Garrett

Content Management for Dynamic Web Delivery
JoAnn T. Hackos
John Wiley & Sons: New York, NY. 2002.
Paperback; list price: $39.99

We technical communicators typically rear back in horror when we see the awful interfaces that programmers "design." Much of our work attempts to compensate for the poor usability of software and other technical outputs.

The reason for poor usability, of course, is that developers and their employers don't want to invest in good development practices, although they more than pay for them in lost sales and technical support. Even we lowly technical writers know that spending time on analysis and design will save headaches later on.

Or do we? Though we rant and rave, how rare indeed is even the most cursory user or task analysis. Like a callow twenty-something Java developer, off we go a-thumping on our word processors, with nary a sidelong glance at audience or long-term maintenance issues. We sing the praises of planning, but we don't actually do it.

The current shift toward single sourcing, content management, and information design will change that. Technical communicators with an affinity for logical design will simultaneously provide great value to their employers and transform themselves from toolsmiths into professional information designers.

To begin this transformation, read *Content Management for Dynamic Web Delivery* by JoAnn Hackos. In her first book, *Managing Your Documentation Projects*, Hackos attempted to model a lifecycle process for documentation after that of

Ode to the Printed Page

by Jolie A. Gallagher

I have a confession. Even though I agree that online help, electronic documents, distance learning, and other progressive methods for delivering information can benefit both authors and readers, I must admit that I haven't warmed up to the cold fluorescence of online publishing. I'm a hopeless, old-fashioned fuddy-duddy. I want a book.

Ah, the book. I can feel its weight in my hands, feel its importance, its familiarity. When I need information, I can rapidly flip through its crisp pages, skim down its paragraphs, slam it shut, and shelve it with satisfaction. I may not often grab that hardbound manual sitting on my shelf, but its simple existence makes me feel secure. I know it's there.

For me, an electronic document has no permanence. The characters flickering on the screen feel tenuous, as if only in draft stages. But once printed, the information seems less suspect. Maybe I just trust book publishers more than online publishers. I'm confident that book publishers are a respected group of professional writers, editors, and designers who adhere to strict and established standards. But online publishers, particularly for the Internet, could be anyone wanting to fling words on a Web site.

Maybe I'm not alone in my yearning for the nostalgic book...

As for online help, I trust that professional technical communicators develop its content, but I still dislike it. When poorly produced, online help makes me feel lost and anxious. Like the little boy in *The Shining* who's running through a maze of hedges on a cold, dark night, I'm frantic when I can't find the path I need.

Despite my lament, I've pushed myself into the 21st century. After years of delivering hard-copy manuals (I work at a hardware company, after all), my department now provides manuals in PDF format on CD. I've finally conceded that the benefits of providing electronic documents outweigh the benefits of printed books. Not only do electronic books save printing costs, but CD production is often quicker.

As for our customers, PDF files provide added benefits, such as convenient hyperlinks in the bookmarks, cross-references, and index entries. One click, and the link drives them to their desired information at warp speed. And if they feel that reading online is annoying, they can always print the PDF file, which has pages formatted like a familiar print document.

So, I've come to accept, albeit grudgingly, the prevalence of electronic documents. And although I wouldn't return to the days without the Internet or e-mail (and actually have to talk to people?) or return to composing documents on a typewriter (yeah, you Gen-Xers, I'm that old), I still feel cheated when I don't receive a hardbound manual with a software purchase. Please don't roll your eyes at how out-dated I am. When Microsoft abandoned hard-copy manuals years ago, a whole new demand spawned for independently written books. Yes, hardbound, printed books.

So maybe I'm not alone in my yearning for the nostalgic book. I see something poetic and beautiful and truthful in the printed page. I hope Keats would forgive me, but he might agree: Beauty is print — print, beauty; that is all I know on Earth and all I need to know. **RMC**

50th Anniversary Committee Seeks Your Memories

Those stories will be most useful to us if they are succinct (250 words or less on any given topic) and entertaining. We would love to receive several stories from you, with each story to the point and on a single topic.

Here are some questions we hope will inspire you:

▸ What amusing or inspirational story can you tell us about how you joined the profession? How did you overcome obstacles that our members will find educational or amusing?

▸ What career and/or Society highlight can you share with us? (We will construct a technical communication time-line, so your stories in this area will be helpful.)

▸ What's your favorite STC memory?

▸ What mentor or role model inspired you in your career or in the Society? What makes that person memorable? What did he/she do to help you?

▸ What experiences, humorous or inspiring, have you had with our changing technology — typewriters to computers, red pencils to redlining?

▸ What can you tell us about a chapter or regional event or accomplishment that changed you, your chapter, or the Society?

This list of questions is intended to rekindle your memories, not to restrict your flow of ideas.

Please communicate with Liz Babcock, 401 N. Warner, Ridgecrest, CA 93555 or lizbab@iwvisp.com, or with other members of the committee, as follows: Georgina Cantoni, committee chair, gcantoni@techcomm-solutions.com; Ken Cook, kenc@kencook.com; Marguerite Krupp, mkrupp@cisco.com; Bill Leavitt, skibilll@aol.com; Ernie Mazzatenta, Jande@a-o.com; and Bill Stolgitis, bill@stc.org. We look forward to your messages!

STC 50th Anniversary Committee **RMC**

Tools, Technology, & Technique
Ethics as a Marketing Tool
by Dana Cline

I wouldn't ordinarily bring up an ethics question except that this one can have a profound effect on our profession. It started innocently enough: eHelp, makers of the RoboHelp tool, sent a marketing e-mail to professional programmers essentially stating that developers didn't need tech writers, because eHelp's product could produce professional Help without any work.

One of the recipients of this e-mail was David Liske, a Microsoft MVP who is both a programmer and a tech writer. David took eHelp to task for their statement. eHelp issued an apology on the HATT mailing list, but that apology didn't sound very sincere, and eHelp didn't admit that they had misstated the capabilities of their product.

This incident, as well as several others in years past, forced tech writers to think about business ethics. Since the demise of ForeHelp, RoboHelp has the lion's share of the help authoring market (of course, it probably did before, but we'll never know). Many authors use it without liking it, and now they have even more reason to not like it.

Whether this feeling translates into a loss of sales will never be known as eHelp is a private company and doesn't publish financial figures.

RoboHelp's market penetration is based in part on a decade of advertising in programmers' magazines. The programmers may not know a thing about it, but they remember the ad when their manager asks for authoring tool suggestions. Now, those same programmers may believe that the tool will truly allow them to create help without the writing and organization (and, incidentally, the tech writer) that goes into a good help system.

So the question for discussion is: Should you use software product XYZ even if their producer, Company ABC, has questionable ethics? In this case, it's eHelp, but it could be any company and any tool. In the HATT list, the opinion seems divided. Some feel that the usefulness of the tool overrules all, while others feel that they couldn't possibly use or recommend a tool from any company with a history of ethical problems. Where would you stand? RMC

Book Review

the software development lifecycle. The problem then is the problem now: technical communicators avoid systematic development of information, and so do the software developers we emulate. No one wants to pay for it because the return on investment is difficult to calculate.

Recently, several technical streams have converged to make that return value more obvious. First, Web sites became unmanageable — so tools for managing Web content were developed, and companies began promoting the idea of content as a quantifiable corporate asset. Second, XML became popular, as did associated ideas of structured information and metadata. Third, "usability" became a buzzword and, along with it, the concept of intelligently designed information. Analyzing these disparate influences, *Content Management for Dynamic Web Delivery* presents a coherent framework for understanding and designing content management projects.

I liked this book for the following reasons:

‣ *It is well written* — Hackos presents difficult topics in a straightforward manner, and uses examples that are meaningful to technical communicators.

‣ *The book provides an extremely valuable outline for structuring content management projects* — Particularly relevant chapters include Chapter 4, "Creating an Information Model," Chapter 5, "Developing Information Types and Content Units,"

and Chapter 7, "Developing Content Plans for Static Web Sites."

In addition, Hackos addresses other important issues for content management, including legacy content, defining workflow, translation, authoring for reuse, and making the business case for content management.

‣ *Hackos includes an appendix that lists content management tool vendors* — Because there are so many players in this loosely defined field, I much appreciate her references.

My only nitpick is the title's ostensible emphasis on Web sites. Hackos mostly discusses broad content management plans in which Web delivery is only one type of output. Since the treatment of dynamic Web sites is rather cursory, I found the title misleading. If I were the author or her editor, I would have preferred *Content Management for Technical Communicators* or just plain old *Introduction to Content Management*.

Despite the title, *Content Management for Dynamic Web Delivery* is a solid introduction to content management concepts, and compares well with the excellent book by Bob Boiko, the *Content Management Bible*. Either work is a great starting point for anyone interested in what will certainly become a central part of our profession. RMC

Is the Colorado Tech Industry Bouncing Back?

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

A recent article in the *Denver Post* cited a survey of hiring managers in the tech industry conducted by the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA) that reported an anticipated surge in the need for technology workers in the next 12 months. Managers feared that many open positions would remain unfilled due to a lack of qualified workers. But local technology executives were quick to dismiss the report as overly optimistic. According to the article, these executives generally believe that the economic recovery predicted in the ITAA report will take longer in Colorado.

Local technology executives generally believe that economic recovery will take longer in Colorado

While the ITAA report indicates that the demand for workers is up 27 percent over last year nationwide, the demand for workers in the Western region, which includes Colorado and 12 other states, is still down 71 percent between 2000 and 2002. To local technology company executives, these numbers indicate that the downward spiral in the technology industry may have just leveled off, rather than reversed itself into a full-blown recovery. To further support this view, some suggest that companies don't immediately hire when things begin to pick up. Instead, they just work the people they have harder until they're convinced that the upturn is not just a short-term fling.

So what does this mean for technical communicators caught in Colorado's current non-job market? Unfortunately, it means that jobs are still scarce. Numbers presented in the ITAA report further support this grim assessment. Of the 1.1 million jobs the report expects to be in demand nationwide in coming years, only six percent, about 68,000, will be for technical communicators. Slim pickings — and searches on the most popular job Web sites seem to support the view that recovery of the technology industry in Colorado may be painfully slow.

In the meantime, if you are a victim of the employee hemorrhaging endemic to technology companies in Colorado, don't give up hope — keep looking for a job here, if your diminishing resources allow you to do so. The search may be long and hard, but eventually the technology industry in Colorado will blossom again, providing ample opportunities for both experienced and new technical communicators who are looking not just for a job, but for a real career. **RMC**

Technicalities *Does It Again*

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

P op the corks off the champagne bottles and let the bubbly flow! *Technicalities*, your award-winning newsletter for the Rocky Mountain chapter, has come away with yet another award for Excellence in the 2001-2002 STC Newsletter Competition, continuing our growing tradition for creating and delivering quality and pertinent information about technical communication in general and the Rocky Mountain Chapter in particular. Woo Hoo! **RMC**

Professional Development
On Getting Paid
by David C. Garrett

I've just come from my lawyer's office. In my hand is my standard consulting agreement. It has red ink all over it. During the last eighteen months, many of my clients have become my enemies. Blame it on the economy, blame it on global warming, blame it on Osama. My clients have become deadbeats.

I find collections demoralizing and depressing. I get angry, resentful, and sometimes just plain crazy waiting for the promised check. If starting a new project is like getting a playful new puppy, then collecting overdue payments is like putting an old dog to sleep. It's a dismal task.

Many people in large organizations don't understand the consequences of late payment. Middle managers and project directors have no clue that cash flow makes or breaks an independent consultant. They protect their own interests in their Byzantine political worlds — so it is reasonable that you and I protect our own interests as well.

Here is some advice about getting paid if you are an independent contractor or run a small business. I'm not a lawyer and I offer no contract boilerplate. Discuss your contracts with a competent lawyer, preferably one who, like mine, specializes in collections.

Idea 1: Get paid in advance

This is the simplest solution. It's good for your workflow and eases the client's administrative burden. If you're billing by the hour, create an estimate and ask for a retainer for the full amount of the estimate. At the end of the project, bill the client for the difference or refund some of their money. I sometimes offer discounts for payment in advance. The more money you can get up front, the easier life will be downstream.

Idea 2: Ask for a credit card

If the project isn't a large one, charge the full amount to a credit card. This may sound a little wacky, but you'll get paid. Many corporate cards have spending limits, so this may not always be an option, but at least retain the card information and, if necessary, charge the remainder to the card. If the only card available is someone's personal credit card, my bet is that you will be paid.

Idea 3: Specify short payment terms

I have usually billed in two-week increments and given my clients 30 days to pay. This is like extending a loan to someone for 45 days. Now imagine (or remember) the last time your client took 60 days to pay. Or 90 days. I have one client (a major computer manufacturer with a thing for cows) who has outstanding invoices from July 2001! Get tough on terms. Fifteen days is plenty of time for a company to cut a check.

Idea 4: Charge interest

Specify that payments will be subject to a late fee. Specify a minimum charge of 1.5% and apply the penalty for every 30 days that the amount remains unpaid, adding in any unpaid penalties. If I had applied this approach to the cow fetishists mentioned above, they would owe me over $3,000 in penalties, which would go a long way toward easing my aggravation.

Idea 5: Have them fill out a credit application

If a company can't or won't pay you in advance, they're asking you for credit. So make them fill out a credit application. This act alone may shake some prepayment dollars loose; more importantly, if you do need to pursue collections or sue, you will have the necessary information. The application should request the legal name of the company, the state of incorporation, the date of incorporation, the Federal Identification Number, and the names and addresses of all company officers, including the Chief Financial Officer and a contact in Accounts Payable. If you are dealing with a partnership, get the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all the partners. Each of them is liable if you aren't paid.

Idea 6: Make sure they pay your lawyer's fees

In your contract or in the credit application, make sure they agree to pay costs of collecting unpaid monies and, importantly, specify that they will pay your lawyer's fees. Not all lawyers work on contingency. You may have to pay your lawyer up front and you definitely want your deadbeat client to be liable for those fees once they lose the lawsuit.

Idea 7: Stop work if you don't get paid on time

Specify in your contract that you reserve the right to stop work until past due amounts are paid. If the work involves a critical deadline, this may help your client focus on timely reimbursement. You can specify the interval before a past due bill will result in work stoppage; 10 to 15 days seems adequate. Don't let unpaid invoices linger for weeks or months. Squeak early and often.

Idea 8: Retain ownership of your work until you receive full payment

Reserve the right to withhold delivery of the final work pending payment. If that's not possible, reserve ownership of

On Getting Paid

the work until you are paid. This way, if they don't pay you and they use the work you produced, you have a copyright claim against them. I favor just holding on to the finished files until you get the check. It's funny how everyone loses interest in paying you once they have the product.

Idea 9: Keep photocopies of the checks you do receive

Checks are good sources of banking information in case you have to attach a lien or use another legal tactic to collect.

Idea 10: Make sure the person signing your contract has the authority to do so

Under the signature line put language that says the signee has the right to legally bind his/her company. If in doubt, ask the person's boss to sign the agreement as well. Ideally, the company's lawyer should sign.

Maybe it is just an economic blip and, soon, professionals will begin to act like grownups again. Meanwhile, apply some of your writing skill to the clauses in your legal agreements that protect you from deadbeat clients. **RMC**

Volunteer Spotlight

Our Honor Roll of Volunteers

by Helen Tuttle

Special thanks to those of you who volunteered your hands, your minds, and your special skills to the STC RMC during the 2001–2002 season. You have given us another successful year!

Officers
President — David Garrett
Vice-president — Martha Sippel
Secretary — Molly Malsam
Treasurer — Hugh Gallagher
Past president — Linda Gallagher
Nominating Committee — Joel Meier; Suzanne Schneider

Competition
Overall Manager — Marella Colyvas
Online Communication Managers — Marella Colyvas; Kathy Ramsey
Publications Competition Managers — Michele O'Dell; Ken Bingenheimer
Art Competition Managers — Deb Braun; Steve Kavalec; Steven Chalmers; Kim Adams
Online Judges — Ron Arner; Laurie Lamar; Jan Rahm; Mary Lou Simanovich; Dana Cline; Laurence Hoess; Al Kemp; Marc Lee; Leslie Priest; Jim Ramsay; Phil Tobias; Dan Winkler; Jo Davies; Robin Welsh; Don Stoehr; Don Zimmerman; Mary Headley; Denise Burrows; Beth Myntti; Dawn Stevens
Online Speakers/Helpers — Donna Tellam; Mary Jo Stark; Kim Weathersby
Awards Reception Manager — Kim Weathersby
Publications Judges — Joy Yunker; Leslie Priest; Karen Rabin; Jo Davies; Hugh Templeton; Carol Claton; Marella Colyvas; Jolie Gallagher; Ed Hanson; Jennifer Kimberly; Amy Metzger; Kathy O'Donnell; Sarah Peasley; Diane Plampin

Database
Karen Kraft-Miller

Education/Scholarship
Manager — Donald Zimmerman
Co-manager — Joy Yunker

Employment/Job Line
David Garrett

Membership
Manager — Jacque Fryday
Member — Carol Claton

Mentoring
Manager — Jim West

Publicity
Manager — Jacque Fryday

Newsletter
Editor — Steve Wertzbaugher
Staff — Bridget Julian; Stacy Leeds; Jay Mead; Dana Cline; Jolie Gallagher
Contributors — Mike Livsey; Kelly Robbins; Ted Penberthy; Helen Tuttle; David Garrett

Programs
Co-managers — Micheal Livsey; Jeanie Fogwell
Storage Tek on-site meetings — Diane Ohrt
JD Edwards on-site meetings — Frank Tagader
Sign-in desk — Steve Wertzbaugher
Meeting helpers — Joel Meier; Anne Halsey; Linda Gallagher; Sally Thee

Guest speakers — Maureen Hogg; Michael Livsey; David Garrett; Ben Weisner; Suzanna Laurent; John Daigle; Marc Lee; Andrea Ames

Salary Survey
Molly Malsam; Jennifer Schnegg; Carol Nicholas

Volunteer Coordinator
Helen Tuttle

Web site
Manager — Anne Halsey
List Server — Alana Cote
Professional Resources — Marta DeGraw
Peer Historian — Joel Meier
Code for Comm. STC members — Phil VonHake
History pages and archives — Jan Bakken
Meetings pages, CIC SIG pages — Gail Bernstein
CIC SIG database — Karen Bowen
Scholarships & Internships page — Cliff Emerson
Site Map, Publications — Marsha Lofthouse
STC Knowledge Base — Ted Penberthy
Degree & Certificate, Books, etc. — Suzanne Schneider
Member Web sites — Mary Lou Simanovich
Freelance FAQ, Newsletter page — Mike Spalding
ProWeb — Ellen Tieberg
Calendar — Katy Wegner; Molly Malsam; Lolita Mannik; Mark Werner

Workshops/Seminars
Co-managers — John Daigle; Angela Estes-Rank; Julie Welander

FrameMaker SIG
Manager — Larry Prado

Independent Contracting SIG
Manager — Gail Bernstein
Web site update — Gail Bernstein
Agency list updates — Julie Welander; Dee Gerber; Bill Sanders; April Stearns; Shirley Teter
SIG guest speakers — Stephanie Griffin; Jeff Rowe; Ryan Apastian; Laurie Lamar; Marc Lee

Multimedia SIG
Manager — Jerry Day

Northern Colorado SIG
Manager — Sandra Lieb
SIG guest speakers — Martin Smith; Cheryl Weeks; Catherine McClintock; Jim Ramsay; Bob Lobis; Don Zimmerman; Kirk Hallahan

Online Presentations SIG
Marella Colyvas; Kathy Ramsay

Info Design/Usability SIG
Manager — Frank Tagader

Western Slope Coordinator
Marta DeGraw

Additional Volunteers
Sarah Hogan
RMC

It's the Little Things in Life — Volunteer!

by Martha Sippel

Have you ever noticed that it's the little things in life that make a difference? Stop for a minute, take a couple of deep breaths, and be thankful for all the little things. Has a boss or coworker complimented your work? Did a friend or team member share some sincere thoughts or creative ideas? Did you notice the stars, constellations, and Milky Way on a clear, crisp night outside of the city?

This past year made me realize how much my family, friends, and coworkers mean to me. These people include your volunteers in the STC RMC. Why, you ask? Not only did September 11th affect me like many others, but I also experienced the sudden, unexpected loss of both of my parents within seven months in 2001. Talk about getting hit over the head with a cosmic two-by-four! Becoming a midlife orphan affected me like nothing else ever has. Not only did it change my life; it changed my way of thinking about life, and, hopefully, the way I live my life. Some of my friends can attest to that.

Questions to Answer

You may ask, "What does this have to do with me?" Bear with me. "I'm too busy to go to lunch" suddenly seemed trivial and became "Am I making a difference in my job and am I still doing the best job I can?" My friends were right — I needed to slow down. My deadlines and stresses at work didn't seem quite so important and I decided finally to implement my long-term plan to be my own boss.

I also wondered about my recent three-year commitment to the RMC as Vice President, President, and then Past President. Could I still fulfill my job and personal responsibilities as my parents' personal representative (a new term for "executor"), and also be active in the RMC? These questions dominated my thoughts for a month last summer. In retrospect, it seems that I had many more questions than answers.

Over time, the answer to my questions became clear. I decided that life is too short. Live life to the fullest. Follow your heart if you can. Love more. Call family and friends more. Read more. Write more. Do more for yourself. Do more for others. Volunteer. Make a difference in people's lives. These are the important things in life.

I decided to quit my full time job, as I had been planning to do for two years before these events occurred. Lowering my stress level helped almost immediately. I made a conscious decision to take some time to fulfill my personal responsibilities, start my own business, continue to volunteer, exercise more, and spend more time with family and friends. I'm glad I did. All these things are helping me to get through the grieving process and get on with my life.

Make a Difference — Volunteer!

Helping others is truly what volunteering is all about. My connection to STC strengthened over the last year in part because many of you reached out to someone in need, as you do in various capacities to many people throughout the year. Specifically and personally, you expressed your written or verbal condolences to me and sincerely offered your ears, shoulders, or help in any way. I can never accurately express what those simple words and thoughts meant to me. Knowing all of you has made a difference in my life. It's a great feeling to be a part of such a caring community.

Whether you volunteer for personal or professional reasons, it is a rewarding experience and a noble cause. Knowing you made a difference in someone's work or life makes the time commitment worthwhile. Something as simple as meeting others with your professional or personal interests brings a new dimension to your life. You may even find your dream job by networking as you volunteer. From experience, I can say that you usually reap more than you sow — which makes you feel good and want to do more.

Maybe you think that you simply don't have time. Maybe you don't have large chunks of time. Or maybe you feel you can't make bi-weekly or monthly commitments. All this is understandable. We all are busy with our professional and personal lives — I'm not suggesting you shouldn't spend quality time on your personal or professional life. Believe me, I do. But whether you have 30 minutes a year or 30 minutes a month, you can make a difference by volunteering.

I urge you to get involved in your Rocky Mountain chapter at some level. Make a small commitment, even if it is simply filling out a survey, offering to edit something, attending more meetings, or improving your skills by attending an STC-sponsored class or seminar. Join a committee — we are always looking for good people. The volunteers I've met and worked with over the last 10 years in STC are exceptional people! There are many options and it is easy to become more involved. Simply contact Helen Tuttle by e-mail at a1newwoman@hotmail.com or call her at (303) 457-0096.

I hope not only to see more of you attending RMC events, but that more of you become involved in your chapter this year and next, and in the future. It is truly an exciting time to be a technical communications professional and the people I meet and work with continually prove this to me. Get involved. Join our team. You'll be glad you did.

P.S.: Thanks again to everyone for your thoughts and prayers during a sad year for me. I will work that much harder this year and next to show my appreciation and respect for all STC RMC members. **RMC**

Rocky Mountain Chapter

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

For the latest chapter news, visit our Web site at www.stcrmc.org.

Upcoming STC RMC Chapter Meetings

June

For more information about chapter meetings, see the article on page 4 and the STC RMC Web site.

Human Factors for Technical Communicators

When: Thursday, June 20
Where: Tivoli Center, Room 440
          Auraria Campus, Denver
Cost: Members $5
          Non-members $8
          Students free

Agenda:
      5:45 - 6:45 p.m.   Online/Mulitmedia SIG meeting
      6:00 - 7:00 p.m.   New member orientation
      5:45 - 7:15 p.m.   Networking and snacks
      7:15 - 9:00 p.m.   Announcements and program

Summer Technical Communications Conferences and Events

For more information about the following conferences and events, see the STC Web site, www.stc.org/related.html.

July 8-12

Usability Professionals' Association (UPA)
2002 Annual Conference — *Humanizing Design*
Hyatt Regency Grand Cypress Resort
Orlando, Florida
www.upassoc.org

July 15-19

International Communication Association (ICA)
52nd Annual Conference — *Reconciliation through Communication*
Seoul, South Korea
www.icahdq.org

August 11-15

International Society of Logistics (SOLE)
37th Annual International Conference —
21st Century Logistics: The Global Bridge
Pointe South Mountain Resort
Phoenix, Arizona
www.sole.org

Technicalities

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