



Memo To Members

Volume 1, Issue 3 September 2001

The Technical Communications Job Market by Mike Murray

How fast the economy does change. People who had secure jobs just a few months or weeks ago suddenly find themselves on less than solid ground. The employee job market that we all enjoyed in the recent past has quickly become an employer's market. What's a technical communicator to do?

In response to our recent "program preferences" survey to STC Orlando chapter members, we're pleased to present a special September 25 program intended to address many of the issues and concerns that technical communicators have these days. "The Technical Communications Job Market" will feature a panel of experts in various aspects of today's job market in the Central Florida area. Our special panel will include:

- *A technical recruiter* who will talk about the qualifications that customers are looking for in a technical communicator. Attendees will get ideas about what to focus on to keep their skills current in today's job market.
- *An independent contractor* who will share insights on the contract employment needs of customers. You will also get insights of the "promise versus reality" of independent contracting, as well as making the transition into contract work.
- *An educator* who will share what years of experience teaches us about the kind of graduates that the University of Central Florida is being asked to prepare to meet the talent needs of our region.

- *An employer* who will provide insights on what employers look for when seeking to hire new technical communications employees.
- *A chapter employment manager* who will review recent job trends based on processing numerous job postings. You will also get ideas on what to focus on to keep your skills current.

"The Technical Communications Job Market" will be presented on Tuesday, September 25, 2001 at the Winter Park Civic Center on Morse Boulevard (one block off US 17/92) in Winter Park. Light refreshments and networking begin at 6:30, with the panel discussion at 7:00. Don't miss this tremendous opportunity to explore a topic that's near and dear to us all! Guests are always welcome, so bring a friend.

Just a reminder

If you have not already signed up, please make sure to sign up for the listserv. This is the place where you'll find all of the important information and discussions regarding the Orlando Chapter, including the monthly "Memo to Members". Contact Dan Jones at djones@ucf.edu to sign up.

"Washlines VII" Continues With Lively Year-Opening Tradition

by Dan Voss

"Risky business"

"Crossing borders: tips for preparing your writing for subsequent translation"

"Single-sourcing: fundamentals and the right solution"

"Back to the drawing board: foundations for effective visual communication"

"Second place is just for the first loser" versus "there's more than one right answer"

These were just a few of the topics addressed at the August 29 meeting that raised the curtain on the 2001-2002 chapter year in a stimulating 7th edition of the "Washlines," which has become the traditional "first pitch" of our professional development season.

Panelists Karen Lane, Dan Lawler, Mike Murray, Dan Voss, and W.C. Wiese shared nuggets they gleaned from the technical sessions at the 48th annual STC international conference held in Chicago last May with a small but enthusiastic audience. The attendance still represented a 45 percent growth over "Washlines VI" last year, auguring well for a robust year in terms of meeting attendance--a key indicator of chapter health.

Preceding the presentations, a number of attendees pitched in to lend a hand to Education Committee members as they stuffed and sealed 243 mail-outs in support of the chapter's 6th Annual Florida High School Technical Writing Competition. With the extra hands, the mountain of envelopes melted rapidly--and the professional fellowship continued.

We expect to pick up right where we left off on September 25 with our next chapter meeting, "The Technical Communications Job Market" (see "Upcoming Events" ...on the fellowship, that is, not the envelope stuffing!

All things considered, "Washlines VII," patterned after the late Gordon McKenzie's innovative audience-centered format with which he broke new ground with his memorable keynote address at the 41st STC International Conference in Minneapolis in 1994, may have been the most successful yet. It certainly sparked a lively exchange of information.

We feel confident Gordon would approve.

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Creativity Crucial for Business Success

Creativity is crucial to business success. But too often, even the most innovative organization quickly becomes a "giant hairball" -- a tangled, impenetrable mass of rules, traditions, and systems, all based on what worked in the past. The "gravitational" force of the hairball exercises an inexorable pull into mediocrity, so says creativity expert, Gordon McKenzie, in his book, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball* (Viking Press, 1998).

Gordon McKenzie worked at Hallmark Cards for thirty years, many of which he spent inspiring his colleagues to slip the bonds of Corporate

Normalcy and rise to orbit. This orbit is found in dreaming, daring, and doing above and beyond the rubber-stamp confines of the bean counter mind-set. In his deeply funny book, vividly and imaginatively illustrated in full color, McKenzie shares the story of his own professional evolution, together with lessons on awakening and fostering creative genius. This book focuses on the intersection between human creativity and the bottom line. If you are looking for new ways to invigorate employees, motivate yourself to "think outside the box", or just want a fun read, take yourself to a bookstore or the online equivalent and consider putting *Orbiting the Giant Hairball* in your shopping cart.



Upcoming Events

September 25	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "The Technical Communications Job Market"
October 23	Chapter Meeting Full Sail Full Sail Tour (details in next issue)
November 27	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "Project Management"
December 18	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "Technical Communications and the Investment World"
January 22	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "Creativity"
February 26	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "Each One Teach One"
March 26	Chapter Meeting UCF "Special Speaker"
April 30	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "Writing Awards Banquet"
May 28	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "Emerging Trends"
June 25	Chapter Meeting Winter Park Civic Center "End of Year Banquet"

*Visit the Web Site at
<http://www.stc-southeast.org/orlando>*

Mentoring—A Gentle Alliance

by J. Suzanna Laurent
Director-Sponsor Region 5

Mentors. Role models. Idols. Call them what you like—chances are very good that one of them has impacted your life with such tremendous force the reverberations of that influence affect the decisions you make to this day. Perhaps it was a

- Demanding coach who always knew precisely which words would most encourage you.
- Favorite teacher who pumped a genuine love of learning into your heart.
- Devoted parent who not only spoke of virtues, but modeled them as well.
- Nurturing manager who offered you the gift of shared wisdom.

The pool of available mentors is made up of a diverse group of individuals. One common interest that unites them, however, is a desire to help their protégés reach their full potential. Successful people report that a large part of their success is due to the experience they gain through working with a mentor. Many of these mentoring relationships are informal—in fact, the mentor sometimes is unaware that he or she is fulfilling that role.

The mentor relationship has been called the "pinnacle of work relationships." A mentor is more than a peer, more than a coach, even more than a sponsor. Mentors typically have influence within the organization or community. They use this influence to empower their protégés. The mentor relationship is really a partnership—the mentor provides guidance and opportunities, the protégé provides energy and a fresh perspective.

Most effective mentor relationships vary in terms of length and degree of formality. They are initiated by the protégé. These relationships are true partnerships in which both parties contribute. They involve a mentor who has influence within the organization or community and is willing to use this influence to empower his or her. These are specific behaviors that mentors should practice:

1. An effective mentor helps protégés think in terms of success. You can do this by holding visioning and goaling sessions with them.
2. Counsel protégés when they have problems. Guide protégés through the thought processes necessary for developing their own solutions; don't solve their problems for them.
3. Provide feedback. Tell protégés how they are doing. When negative feedback is necessary, don't preach or be overly critical. Instead, ask insightful questions such as "What could you do differently the next time?" or "Why don't you think the project turned out as planned?"
4. Provide information. Mentors should serve as informational resources. Success secrets, short cuts, information about office politics, etc., will help protégés learn the ropes.
5. Delegate authority and express confidence in the ability of protégés to take on new tasks. A protégé's greatest need is for experience. Look for ways that will help protégés practice new skills.
6. Encourage exploration. Give your protégés as many opportunities to experiment with new ideas as possible, but don't be surprised if you learn something from them.
7. Look for opportunities to showcase your protégé's talents. Place your protégés in positions where they can meet people who can help them meet their goals. Networking events are great for this.

It may sound as though the mentor-protégé relationship requires a great deal of involvement on your part—that's because it does. Many chapters already have formal mentoring programs because the STC provides great opportunities for mentoring. Take advantage of STC membership by building a "gentle alliance" with another member who would benefit from your knowledge—you will both benefit from the experience.