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Advice to a New Writer

By David F. Chinell, Senior Member, Suncoast STC Chapter

A contributor to the techw-r-l listserv wrote, "I went from a programmer/developer to technical writer in three days... can you folks offer any personal kind of advice?" Here is David Chinell's reply:

A newbie asking for advice! Hold me back!

Generally, fight fires as needed, but be aware that things will never be totally under control. That means you must force yourself to set aside time for tool development and housekeeping. It's the same thing you learned as a programmer.

Find material you respect—publications and online material from reputable software firms—and use it to guide the development of your craft. Learn to analyze what others have written.

Be prepared to write and rewrite before anyone sees your drafts. You needn't write it perfectly the first time. Get it on the page.

Consider creating a house style guide by looking at existing guides and considering your special needs. You could start with:

- *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* for spelling, usage, and hyphenation
- *Microsoft Manual of Style* for style issues concerning software
- *Chicago Manual of Style* for other style issues

The critical dimensions of anything you write are: Audience, Purpose, and Subject. If you define these for a topic, chapter, or manual, you can produce a focused, effective product. "Purpose" is very important—it defines the scope and context of the information needed.

Wherever possible, create larger works by assembling topics—such as concepts, procedures, or references. Learn what business tasks the reader is expected to accomplish with the product, and write topics that show how to accomplish them.

Technical publications are best seen as components of other products. Everything my firm designs has hardware, software, and information components. We design the information components, which should be an integral part of the product, not collateral or add-on material.

Now, stuff others may find fault with: My personal observations. They might seem counterintuitive, but I think they're valuable.

We read with our bodies, not our minds, so all our designs have to accommodate the body. We can't use reason—we can only measure what works (or rely on others' measurements).

There is no meaningful distinction between format and content.

Continued on Page 5 >

Publication Policies

TechniScribe is published 12 times a year as a benefit to the members of the Orange County Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. The goal of the publication is to reflect the interests, needs, and objectives of OCSTC members. *TechniScribe* strives to be an advocate for, and an inspiration to, technical communicators by keeping them connected to each other and to opportunities for professional growth.

Articles published in this newsletter may be reprinted in other STC publications if permission is obtained from the author, credit is properly given, and one copy of the reprint is sent to the *TechniScribe* managing editor.

Submission Information

The editorial team retains and exercises the right to edit submitted and requested material for clarity, length, and appropriateness.

When submitting material, please remember to:

- Include a 25-word biography about yourself.
- Send articles in Word format, RTF (Rich-Text Format), ASCII, or in the body of an e-mail message.
- Send material to the managing editor (techniscribe@ocstc.org) five weeks before the date it will be published.

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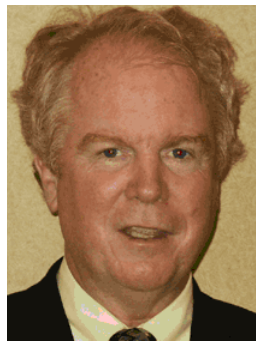
\$10 a year to members of other STC chapters.

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President's Message

By Jeff Randolph, OCSTC Chapter President



Have you set your goals (resolutions) for the New Year? OCSTC's commitment for the coming year is to present a broad range of relevant meeting topics. In addition to the compelling Sue Heim, we have an employment panel discussion—"What Employers Are Looking For"—in March, which will include "How to Bullet-Proof Your Career." In

April, we will have a Policies and Procedures panel moderated by Raymond Urgo.

Continuing my review of *Winning*, by Jack Welch, we look at the subject of "Hiring," and what it takes to hire the right people. This is the toughest part of managing, and Mr. Welch sums it up succinctly, "Hiring good people is hard. Hiring great people is brutally hard." Mr. Welch offers a number of points we can draw upon to improve our positions in interviews.

The first hurdles are the "acid tests," *integrity, intelligence, and maturity*.

- The integrity test involves telling the truth, taking responsibility for past actions, admitting mistakes, and fixing them. The ideal candidates need to be transparent in all aspects of their career, and their values need to match the company's values.
- Intelligence involves intellectual curiosity, and problem-solving ability.
- Maturity is demonstrated by the ability to withstand stress, celebrate success, especially the success of others, and by not being arrogant.

The next area is the evaluation according to the 4-E and 1-P Framework. The 4-Es are *self-energy*, ability to *energize* others, *edge* (ability to make decisions in absence of all the data), and *execution* (according to your mission and the company's mission). The 1-P is *passion*, a genuine excitement about work, plus excitement about friends, colleagues, and employees winning. The truly passionate people are ones who are excited about everything in their lives.

When you pursue a senior- or management-level position, there are three additional characteristics you need. The first is *authenticity* that someone knows who they are, what they believe, and stand tall behind their actions. The second characteristic is "the ability to see around corners."

Building on the first two characteristics, senior people need to be able to "know what they don't know" and have the ability to surround themselves with people sharper than they are.

Continued on Page 3 >

Next Meeting

Topic: Indexing—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Speaker: Sue Heim

When: Tuesday, January 16, 6-9 PM

Where: DoubleTree Club Hotel
Hutton Centre Drive
Santa Ana, CA 92702
714.751.2400.

Cost: Members with reservations \$23
Students with reservations \$17
Nonmembers with reservations \$28
Walk-ins, or those registering after
the deadline \$32
No-shows billed \$23

Reservations:

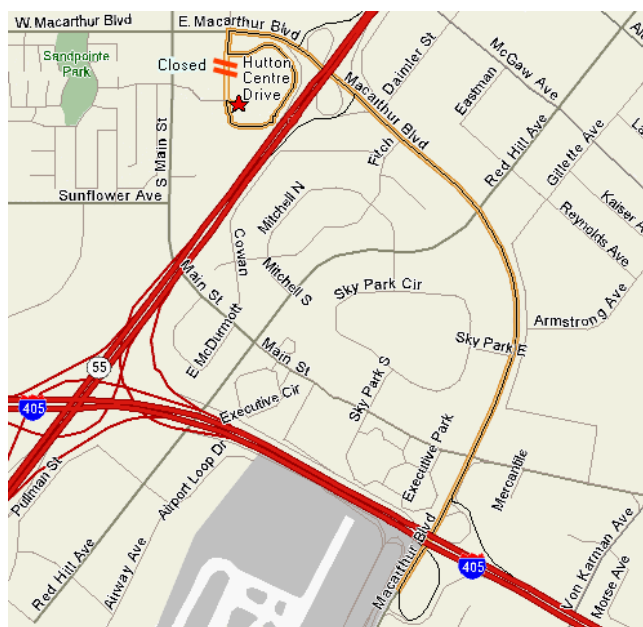
Due by midnight, Friday, January 12

Registration:

Online at <http://www.ocstc.org/dinres.asp>

Directions to the DoubleTree Club Hotel

Map of the I-405 and SR-55 area. The star below indicates the hotel location. Parking is FREE.



Colophon

TechniScribe is written using Microsoft Word, and assembled using Adobe InDesign CS2 for PC. Arial and Palatino Linotype are used for heading and text fonts.

PDFs are produced using Adobe Acrobat professional 8.

Editor's Desk

By Jim Marchant, TechniScribe Managing Editor



The adage that it's harder to write short than to write long is also true when assembling *TechniScribe*. The press of holidays called for an abbreviated edition, so the one you are holding has fewer pages than usual.

After I have toiled to make things fit in small spaces, the contributors of articles this month may feel, to put a positive spin on it, that their writing has been "artfully tightened." Or they might say they have been "hacked to bits." I hope the essential meanings have survived.

The colophon is different this month, as well, reflecting a conversion to newsletter production using Adobe InDesign. As an old QuarkXPress hand, I've quickly found the ways to apply most techniques I am familiar with and use frequently. However, this has not been without a number of trips to the internal help file by way of the F1 key, in which I so far have found all I have looked for.

So the learning curve added some time to production work. But the remarkable improvement in layout flexibility and versatility already has improved efficiency. Therefore, on the whole, this issue came together faster and more cleanly than before.

It appears that Adobe's hyphenation and justification formulas make the text slightly more compact, so the authors would have been cut back even more under the old method.

Here's hoping you don't even notice, but if something is missing or askew, please let me know right away. And I'm always looking for contributions. ♦T♦

President's Message

< Continued From Page 2

Skipping forward, let's look at what constitutes the "right job." When you find the right job, "you'll never really work again." The signals are in five categories—people, opportunity, options, ownership, and work content.

You know it is a good sign if you like your coworkers, and they share the same values you do. It is also good if the job gives you the opportunity to grow as a professional, and you are in a business and an industry that has a future. Furthermore, you know what the expectations are, you own those expectations, and are at peace with the circumstances. Finally, the "stuff you do" gets you excited and touches your soul.

Next month will be the final installment, where I'll tie up the loose ends, including a look at the question of work-life balance. ♦T♦

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December Meeting Review

By *Bruce Giddens, OCSTC Member*

Sharon Burton—Wonderware Manager of Technical Publications, UC Riverside instructor of writers and engineers, technical writing entrepreneur, newspaper columnist, and sometimes stand-up comic—delivered a sparkling presentation at the OCSTC December meeting describing how to use surveys to serve your company and serve yourself.

Sharon has been successful at Wonderware in improving document quality through the use of customer surveys.



Overcoming corporate ignorance, apathy, and resistance by means of schmoozing, coffee, and flowers, she first created a widespread awareness of the problem of poor documentation by talking to everybody. (“Hi. Isn’t this coffee great? Aren’t our documents terrible?”) Creating an awareness of the problem took six months. Creating an awareness of the solution took three more. Then she had to sell the solution to management.

Selling means you identify a customer problem and then solve it. With management, though, it’s always about money, by increasing sales or reducing costs. The customers complained to sales and upper management that the documents were useless, but Sharon talked about reduced sales and how much it costs to create bad documents.

Selling to management, Sharon pointed out that happy users use products more than they return them. More usable products lead to increased sales. Good documents make good products. Frustrated users reduce sales. Features no one wants reduce sales. Providing what users want or need increases sales or reduces costs.

Further points Sharon made were:

Always speak of the survey in management’s terms.

“Finding out about our users will help us increase sales because we’ll know what our users want.”

“Finding out about our users will let us better solve their problems and will increase sales.”

Ask managers and others if they have two questions they would like to ask users. Use those questions if possible. You’re building a reputation and credibility. Share the data after you complete the survey. Write the results in numbers and narrative. Post them on your intranet.

In summary, talk about your issues in the same terms management talks about their issues of reduced costs and increased sales. Identify a problem. Offer to solve the problem with a survey. Get others to participate. Then share the data. ♦T♦

OCSTC Needs You!

By Suzanne Madison, OCSTC Senior Member

What does membership in STC mean to you? What do you hope to gain from paying your annual dues? If you know anything about physics, you know that you have to put more energy into a system than you hope to get out of it. I have always been of the

Advice to a New Writer

< Continued from Page 1

Neither exists without the other, and both are equally important in communication. Settle on a collection of structures before you start writing, and make the content fit them. (The distinction between format and content is only valuable when analyzing a work after its completion.)

You can't tell the whole story or the complete truth about anything. All you can do is write enough to answer the question, complete the task, or understand the concept. Your words will always be an approximation. Your job is to make the model match the reader's purpose. A reviewer may quibble about facts you've missed, but if those facts do not directly serve the reader's purpose, what's the point? Omit them.

David Chinell is a Technical Editor for GE Security. He can be contacted at david.chinell@ge.com. Reprinted by permission. ♦T♦

opinion that you get back what you give. This applies to relationships with family, friends, and co-workers, educational experiences, as well as professional and social organizations. Nowhere can you apply this concept more than to your membership in OCSTC.

The nominating committee is currently searching for candidates to run for leadership positions of our chapter for the 2007-2008 year. Whether you have leadership experience to share, want to gain some leadership experience, or perhaps want to see the chapter move in a new direction, this is an opportunity to contribute and to watch our chapter benefit as a direct result of your contributions.

The elected positions that are available are:

- President
- First Vice President, Programs
- Second Vice President, Membership
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Nominating Committee (2 positions available)

To learn more about these positions, contact a nominating committee member, and/or download the Statement of Intent to run for office at <http://ocstc.org/election/default.asp>.

There also are several appointed positions available, including managing editor of *TechniScribe*, and assisting with the Education website/portal. Do consider giving your time to make OCSTC *your* chapter. ♦T♦



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STC Mission Statement

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

Positioning Statement

STC helps you design effective communication for a technical world through information sharing and industry leadership.

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the world's largest organization for technical communicators.

Its more than 15,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, printers, publishers, photographers, educators, and students.

Dues are \$55–150 per year. Membership is open to anyone engaged in some phase of technical communication, interested in the arts and sciences of technical communication, and in allied arts and sciences.

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If you would like to receive e-mail notification about upcoming OCSTC meetings, visit http://www.ocstc.org/list_redirect.asp.

Click Join. This list broadcasts only meeting notices and STC announcements

OCSTC Employment Information

Our job listing is entirely online at the OCSTC web site; pages are updated as jobs are submitted.

Staff Jobs

<http://www.ocstc.org/employme.asp>

Contract Jobs

<http://www.ocstc.org/contractme.asp>

If you have an inquiry or a job to post, e-mail Jeff Randolph at erandolp@ix.netcom.com.

A limited number of printed copies of the OCSTC web site listings are available at monthly chapter meetings.

Society-Level Job Listings

STC maintains job listings on the Internet. You can download the listings from the STC web site at <http://www.stc.org/jobsdatabase.asp>.

Meeting Fees Increase in January 2007

Due to an increase in meal rates by the Doubletree Club Hotel, the OCSTC chapter council has approved an increase in meeting fees, starting with the January 2007 meeting.

The increase will be only \$1 more than the current fees for all attendee categories. Here is the new schedule:

Members with reservations	\$23
Students with reservations	\$18
Nonmembers with reservations	\$28
Walk-ins or those registering after deadline	\$32
No-shows billed	\$23

This is the first increase in student fees in about five years.

Orange Juice:

Membership News

By Michael Opsteegh, OCSTC 2nd Vice President, Membership

OCSTC Members: 286

STC Members: 15,765



Happy New Year, everyone! I'd like to start off the New Year by welcoming the new and returning members who joined OCSTC: Yasmine Bhuj, Robin Currier, Linda Dao, Barbara DeShenn, Jonathan Finley, Virginia Janzig, Sonia Lansberg, George Metafas, Sarah Pirch, Jane Routt, and David Winton.

According to the membership numbers reported in last three January issues of *TechniScribe*, OCSTC has held its own when compared to the Society as a whole. These figures show that OCSTC's membership rates have kept pace with STC's rates.

	STC	OCSTC	% of STC members who affiliate with OCSTC
2006	16,976	301	1.77
2005	18,196	327	1.80
2004	20,300	374	1.84

Our membership numbers have declined considerably, but our share of the STC pie has remained the same. OCSTC's numbers have dropped 23 percent during this period—STC's have dropped 22 percent. With new membership options such as "eMember" and "limited," it's remarkable that so many still choose OCSTC, which attests to our value.

Now that the holidays are over, it's time to reflect on your professional life. Examine where you are in your career and where you want to go. It's time to update the tools and skills in your résumé. Remove outdated tools, like WordStar and Adobe Photo Deluxe, and skills like Pascal programming.

Take time to read the latest issues of *Technical Communication*, *Intercom*, and *TechniScribe*. They contain useful information about the latest professional tools and trends, written by technical communicators like you.

Visit job websites (Monster, HotJobs) to determine what qualifications are being sought. Even if you're not looking for a job, you will learn what to

emphasize in your résumé.

Attend technical communication meetings to discuss the latest tools and trends. Attend industry meetings to find out about advances in the fields you write, or want to write, about.

If you have any questions about membership, contact Michael Opsteegh at octechwriter@yahoo.com. ♦T5♦

EduNotes from B&B

By Bill Darnall, OCSTC Senior Member

Practitioners of information architecture are called information architects. Practitioners of information design are called information designers. Is there a difference between an information architect and an information designer? Where do technical writers fit in the scheme of information architecture and information design?

Consider some of the differences between building architects and interior designers. Architects are concerned with a building's structure, its traffic flow, and the location of electrical, air, and plumbing systems. Interior designers are concerned with aesthetics, including the color and texture of the walls, the furnishings, and overall style.

Similarly, information architects are responsible for the structure, organization, and general accessibility of documents. Information designers are responsible for the general appearance of the information, including typography, illustrations, color, and style.

However, content is a third element. Technical writers should be fully responsible for developing content. They may or may not be responsible for information architecture and information design. These three categories are probably less distinct in hardcopy documentation than they are in the online world. Online information architecture often is the responsibility of a Web designer. Online information design falls to a graphic designer. Online technical content should be the responsibility of a technical writer.

Technical writing is not an isolated profession. We must be aware of evolving communication requirements and standards. We must become more than writers. We must be fully equipped communicators. We need more than excellent writing skills. Elements of technical communication involve system design and project management.

By the way, we are not members of the Society for Technical Writers. We are members of the Society for Technical Communication.

Contact Bill at mesawriter@sbcglobal.net ♦T5♦

Calendar of Events

- January 9 OCSTC Council Meeting
January 10 San Diego STC Chapter Meeting, "Product Design: Bridging the Gap between Product Management and Development," Sean Van Tyne. Spectrum room at the Marriott Courtyard, 8651 Spectrum Center Blvd, San Diego, CA 92123, 5 PM-8PM
January 16 OCSTC Chapter Meeting
January 18 Inland Empire STC Chapter Meeting. Peking Chinese Restaurant, 6:30 PM-9 PM.
February 13 Los Angeles STC Chapter. Embassy Suites, 1440 East Imperial Ave., El Segundo, CA 90245, 6 PM-9 PM.

January Meeting Topic

Indexing—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly



In this presentation you will learn indexing from Sue Heim by viewing samples—the good, the bad, and the ugly. You will learn about the two types of indexes. You will learn how indexes assist the user and provide additional knowledge. You will learn the differences between an index and table of contents. You will learn the reasons why it is better to have no index than a bad index. Finally, you will learn which phase of the documentation process is the best time to create an index. Sue has been a technical writer and online help author for more than 17 years, and a freelance indexer for more than seven years. She has presented at the WritersUA Conferences. ♦TS♦

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