

# Mentoring in Technical Communication

By Bruce Garrett, Houston STC member

**M**entoring is the process of advising in one's area of expertise, skill, or profession. The dictionary defines a mentor as a "wise, loyal adviser." In the profession of technical writing, mentoring is an excellent way for the experienced technical communicator to share their knowledge and skills with someone who has less experience or someone brand new to the profession. This article summarizes Compaq's mentoring program and how we applied it to technical communication.

Compaq Computer Corporation started their mentoring program about four years ago. The employees who participate can come from similar job functions or be from different areas of expertise (I work *outside* of the technical writing profession). They are allowed to meet on a regular basis for six months or longer. The meetings are informal and can occur on a monthly, biweekly, or even weekly basis. These meetings allow the mentor to answer questions, give advice, share knowledge, and discuss different aspects of the job to help the person get a better understanding.

My mentor and I met over a period of one year, on a biweekly basis. Each meeting lasted one hour and was held during lunch or in the mentor's office. During our meetings, we discussed the roles and responsibilities of a technical writer and how they applied to various technical writing jobs. There were times our workload required us to reschedule the meeting or postpone for a week or more. Flexibility in our meeting time and location allowed the meetings to be more relaxed and enjoyable—we knew we were not under pressure to get any tasks done by a certain deadline. My mentor helped me in the following ways:

- Was willing to answer any question, no matter how simple or basic it was.
- Took adequate time to discuss a concept or principle. We spent many meetings discussing only one topic or getting just one or two questions answered. We also discussed the same topic at more than one meeting.
- Pulled from other knowledgeable people within the profession to let me get others perspectives. My mentor arranged for me to speak with some other technical writers. My mentor made some assignments that helped me learn outside of our meetings, too.

Here are the assignments, some of which were based on my own specific interests:

- Speak with other employees about working from home and telecommuting: I spoke with two people who were doing a telecommuting job for Compaq. They gave me pros and cons of doing that type of work. Speak with someone about working for a documentation company: I spoke with a lead writer who worked for a documentation company doing work on the Compaq campus.

## Highlights

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# U

The *TechniScribe* is published 11 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. The *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 credit is properly given and one copy of the reprint is sent to the *TechniScribe* 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 editor  
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*Web Version* Jeff Randolph

*Monthly Advertising Rates* 1/4 page \$40 •  
1/3 page \$45 • 1/2 page \$60 • Full page \$80

*Subscriptions* For one year, \$10 to members of other STC chapters.

*Printer* Print America, Aliso Viejo, CA

## President's Message

By Don Pierstorff, OCSTC Chapter President



Well, the holiday season is over except for the usual financial remorse and credit card bills that should by now have stopped rolling in. I know I got most of mine, and until now, I never knew what a nice guy I really am. Apparently I bought presents for people I've never met, but my wife

Jasmah assures me that I know them and that our presents were appropriate. However, I occasionally fall over bits and pieces of furniture that I did not know we owned. And so it goes.... The holiday season is over for 2002, and our year begins, with our returning to our workaday fog.

The term *fog* has several meanings, of course. Most commonly, it refers to that literal watery vapor that prevents us from getting to work on time. During winter, it lingers into the late mornings, and while driving through it we can see the dim shapes in front of us that we pray are cars and trucks, not rounded traffic barriers and abandoned tanker trailers. No wonder we need cups and cups of coffee after arriving to work on foggy.

There is another kind of fog that is more pernicious. The fog in writing. We've all read foggy writing, the kind that we think we can read and understand, yet which contains the kind of prose that occasionally requires us to get up from our desks and walk around for a while to clear our eyes and our minds. But we must remain clearly focused because one of our most important jobs as technical communicators is to let the sunshine of our clear writing rid documents of their polysyllabic morass of bewildering bureaucratic phraseology. We must transfer foggy writing into easily read text. We must attempt to inform with our writing, not write to impress.

Unfortunately, foggy prose has become an epidemic for which we have no cure. We are daily bombed with dim words and phrases as replacements for clear words and phrases. For example, one of my friends recently got laid off. But the memo he received did not say he was laid off. Instead, he had been "displaced." As a newly designated "displaced person," he has decided to write to his congressman and to the U.S. Department of State, requesting asylum, hoping that some governmental official will inform him that

# Next Meeting

Public Speaking for Technical Writers  
Speaker: Matthew Stern

**When:** Tuesday, January 21, 2003 from 6:00 to 9:00 P.M.

**Where:** Wyndham Hotel  
3350 Avenue of the Arts  
Costa Mesa, CA 92626  
(714) 751-5100

**Cost:** Members with reservations **\$21**  
Students with reservations **\$16**  
Nonmembers with reservations **\$23**  
Walk-ins or those registering after deadline **\$31**  
No-shows billed **\$11**

## Reservations

Reservations are due by 5:00 P.M., Friday, January 17.

## Registration

- Register at [www.ocstc.org/dinres.asp](http://www.ocstc.org/dinres.asp), or
- Call the OCSTC Hotline at (949) 863-7666, or
- Call Carolyn Romano at (714) 894-9221. Leave your name, membership status, and phone number.

**Parking will be validated at the door.** Please park in the Marriott lot. Do *not* park in the adjacent Koll Center Newport parking structure.

## Directions to the Wyndham Hotel

**Coming from north and central Orange County**  
Southbound on I-405, exit at Bristol Blvd. Turn left onto Bristol Blvd. Turn right onto Anton, left onto Avenue of the Arts. Turn right into the Wyndham parking lot.

## Coming from southern Orange County

Northbound on I-405, exit at Bristol. Turn right onto Bristol. Turn right onto Anton, left onto Avenue of the Arts. Turn right into the Wyndham parking lot.

# Editor's Desk

By Cassandra Hearn, Managing Editor



I always feel rejuvenated at the beginning of a new year. I feel as though no goal is too lofty, no task is too arduous. The introduction to a new year often looks to me like a crisp white canvas awaiting the paint that is my life.

Much like the art of painting, being a writer allows us to change a blank document in to anything we so desire. Words are our oil, our channel for articulating thoughts, emotions, ideas, and most importantly information. We are information engineers and artisans together as one.

Many companies take this time of year to evaluate employees performance. Some of us are called into an office to view our evaluation and discuss its outcome. For some, this ritual has become routine. Others find it nerve wrecking. I like to use my evaluations as an opportunity for change. I like to look at my performance canvas for 2002 as a completed piece of art. Some areas might seem a bit scattered; perhaps I was using the wrong brush. Other areas may seem too dark; perhaps I was discouraged by the economy. The middle might be overwhelmingly bright and full of color; this could be where I got it right.

No matter what your canvas for 2002 looks like, be open-minded about its interpretation. Everyone is free to interpret art differently, no matter what the artist's intention. Allow yourself the opportunity to change what you don't like from 2002. Permit yourself to grow. If you need to switch out that old brush for a new one, do so. If you want to change from bolds to pastels, go for it. If you need a much larger canvas for this coming year, by all means, build one!

Take this blank canvas that is 2003 and paint or write what you want all over it.

# Membership News

By Julie Dotson, OCSTC 2nd VP Membership

Happy New Year! What a year 2002 was! I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to whatever 2003 brings! Even though this means I now have to remember to write the correct year on everything again. I'm still getting used to "20" rather than "19."

We had ten new members in November. Welcome all! New members are:

Jean Gottschall  
Kris Houser  
Darlene Koplien  
Sarie Kran  
Art Lee  
Judy McLennan  
Stacy Pham  
Sandi Wagner  
Georgiana Willis

*Don't forget!  
The membership renewal  
deadline is February 28th.*

Our chapter's general health is very good. We're still having successful meetings, providing community outreach, and sponsoring seminars. Some of our newest members have become active volunteers. We have energetic leadership and are attracting excellent speakers. Our members have held national STC offices, volunteered for regional activities (tech pubs competition and the regional conference), and are committed to the chapter's viability. Our chapter membership number is on the rise, but monthly meeting attendance is still down. It's a difficult feat to claim that we are in excellent health given the unstable membership count and current economic condition.

OCSTC has been very busy this past year. Some of our accomplishments in just the past four months include:

Leadership Day, September 21, 2002. Eighteen participants from the Southern California Chapters (all but Santa Barbara had at least one member present), five were from OCSTC—Don Pierstorff (Chapter Pres.), Jack Molisani (1st VP and leadership meeting facilitator), Julie Dotson (2nd VP), Elaine Randolph (Immediate. Past Pres.), and Jeff Randolph (Employment Mgr. & Webmaster).

Community Outreach Drive, spearheaded by the PR Committee, soliciting member funds used to buy items for the Friendship House, a shelter for the unhoused in Laguna Beach, CA. We achieved our goal (\$500 in cash donations) for food and grooming supplies to the 29 residents of the shelter. Members also volunteered time for shopping and wrapping gifts.

We successfully conducted and judged entries in a Pubs and Online Document Competition. The Orange County Society for Technical Communication provided the following:

Competition Co-chairs: Adrienne Escoe and Kara Dodge

Judging Coordinator: Jack Molisani

Entry Coordinator: Megan Doherty

Web site, including online competition application and backend database

entry programming: Jeff

Randolph

Publicity: Elaine Randolph and

Jim Rohrs

We set up a Membership Renewal Scholarship Program, and received a monetary donation to the chapter for scholarship

awards, membership drive funding, purchase of software, and membership mailings. The deadline for renewal is February 28<sup>th</sup>. For those of us who are unemployed, please take advantage of the scholarship. Don't let a money shortage keep you from renewing!

Jeff Randolph, our OCSTC Employment Manager, has accepted the invitation to be the STC Employment Information Manager and to staff and lead the volunteer effort for the booth at the conference.

Our greatest challenge continues to be the unemployed status of many of our members and the lack of jobs available. Our meetings are structured to include a brief introduction, prior to the (networking) break, of those who have jobs to fill and those who want to fill those jobs. Networking is a huge value add and lately there have been few introductions of those with job to offers.

Another challenge will continue to be member attrition, and those who are out of work *not* taking advantage of volunteer opportunities. People out of work are not volunteering, even though such activity presents a wonderful opportunity to gain more visibility and enhance their professional reputations. They are missing out on learning new things, and in a sense, rejecting free "training" that may increase their marketable skills and give them experience that could be included in their resumes and portfolios. Some committees have suffered from lack of volunteers. So, we need you!

We have had some great meetings too! September, "Uh Oh, the Job Ad Says O-O, An Introduction to Object Oriented Programming" with speaker



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Susan Gallagher (San Diego STC).

October, "Round trip XML: Single Sourcing Using FrameMaker 7.0 + XML, presented by our very own Senior Member Mary Ann Howell.

In November, Suzanna Laurent came all the way from Oklahoma to give her Presentation on "Revealing Your Hidden Value."

And at the December meeting Lance Gelein, came down from the Sacramento Chapter and gave his presentation: "A New Year, a Renewed Career: How to Manage Your Career."

The new year promises to be even better. The best is yet to come. We're going to have great meetings and speakers and plenty of volunteer opportunities. I'm looking forward to working with everyone!

## Membership Count:

**Orange County Chapter  
393**

**International Society  
21,456**

## Colophon

The *TechniScribe* was produced using Adobe PageMaker 6.52 for PC. Zapf Humanist and Humanist521 were used for text and heading fonts.

All original art work was created using Adobe Illustrator 9.0. The PDF on the OCSTC web site was distilled from an EPS using Acrobat Distiller 5.0.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Worst Manual Contest

**J**ust a reminder for the new year: when all else fails, read the manual.

Have you ever been so frustrated with a manual or set of instructions that you cursed the author and wished you had never bought the product in the first place?

Sound familiar? How about \$100 for your frustration? Technical Standards, Inc. (TSI), a Southern California documentation services company, is offering \$100 for the winning entry in their third annual 'Worst Manual Contest.'

Send a manual or set of instructions that is hard to understand, poorly written, or just plain wrong. Send it if it has bad grammar, too much legalese, is poorly translated, or has missing steps. If it is the worst entry, you will win \$100.

"We thought we would have fun with this contest. Everyone has had trouble with an instruction manual," says Michelle Wier, Director of Operations of Technical Standards, Inc. "That's why we started our company. People like products they can understand how to use, and good technical documentation reduces the need for technical support. That's why good manuals are so important."

You don't have to send the whole manual; excerpts of the worst parts are okay. The deadline for submissions is January 31, 2003, so check those holiday gifts for potential entries. Entries must be in English. For complete contest rules, see the TSI Web site at [www.tecstandards.com](http://www.tecstandards.com). The winner will be announced there on February 28, 2003.

Contact: Jim Desmond

Phone: 760-402-0448

Email: [jimd@tecstandards.com](mailto:jimd@tecstandards.com)

*Technical Standards, Inc. specializes in contract technical writing projects, technical writer staffing, and training. Since 1993, TSI has provided writers and editors to the high-tech community who produce printed documents, online Help, and Internet documentation.*

## Chapter Contacts

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**erandolp@ix.netcom.com**

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Work with Adobe Acrobat by working in the graphics group at Compaq. I learned about PDF files and Acrobat when I met with the manager of the graphics department. I also worked with one of the writers in the group and did some basic assignments from my mentor and from the writer in the graphics department.

- Read portions of the book *Managing Your Documentation Projects* by JoAnn Hackos.
- Generate a writing portfolio: I collected some technical articles I had generated in my current job and took a 3-day technical writing class on campus, where I got to use them in some class assignments.
- Answer a written list of questions that summarized all that we discussed during our meetings over the year (final exam!): After I finished the questions over the next few weeks, we reviewed and corrected them during our last few meetings.

Speaking for my mentor here, we both enjoyed participating in the program. I look back on it as a great learning experience. We also developed a good friendship. Whether your company has a formal mentoring program or not, you can apply these principles to a relationship with someone you admire and believe can help you, or with someone who wants your help. I encourage those of you with good experience in the profession to mentor a coworker—either informally or as part of a company's established mentoring program. It's an experience that will enrich both of you.

*This article was reprinted from Dateline Houston Volume 41, Issue 8 April 2002.*

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records show he was born in the Queen of Angels Hospital in Los Angeles. Armed with that information, he wants to return to his former place of employment to show his former manager that he cannot legally be a "displaced person" because he is a citizen. I told him that I did not endorse his plan. (I did not tell him, however, that I hope he does all that he says he intends to do. I wish him good fortune.)

And good fortune to all of you and to your families. May you also do what we all strive to do, our jobs and our thinking plainly, driving through the fog of our current recession, on our way to our jobs. May we all be fully employed, well before the end of 2003.

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Kathy Broman, Independent Technical Writer



# Jeff Randolph Makes it in High Society: The Evolution of an Employment Manager

OCSTC Employment Manager, Jeff Randolph, has accepted the position of STC Employment Information Manager, effective immediately. Jeff is well-qualified for this responsibility because of his contributions at the chapter level and support work performed for previous STC Employment Information Managers Roger Masse (1995-2001) and Martha McLoughlin (2001-2002).

Jeff became interested in the work of employment manager in May of 1998, when he volunteered to help staff the employment booth at the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Anaheim. He has continued to do this at every subsequent annual conference.

In January of 1988, Jeff succeeded Bill Darnall as OCSTC Employment Manager. At that time, his work involved accepting job information through voicemail, fax, and e-mail, then distributing information via e-mail. His first priority was to develop a process and a schedule to post employment information on the chapter Web site on a weekly basis. Current listings gave us greater credibility with employers who wanted their openings posted in a timely manner. As a result, our job listings grew rapidly. Jeff also contributed to inter-chapter relations by sharing this innovation. Employers saw their openings posted immediately, and writers were able to gain access to listings that were already categorized by either contract or staff position.

Inspired by the Carolina Chapter, Jeff began posting PDFs of chapter member resumes in May 2000. Although it took about six months before members really started sending their resumes for posting, the idea caught on. We currently have about 50 resumes on the Web site.

Also in 2000 at the STC 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Orlando, Jeff was invited by Roger Masse to participate in a presentation entitled "How STC Chapters Deliver Employment Information". Jeff talked about how he used ASP to automate the process of delivering employment information to chapter members. This presentation gave our chapter visibility for its innovations in automation.

As a result of Jeff's ongoing participation at the employment booth during the annual conference,

he agreed to develop a database for Roger Masse that would be a repository for information for chapter employment managers. This database is hosted on our chapter Web site. The database serves up two kinds of information: a reference of chapters that have job info on the Web and a contact list of chapter employment managers. This database and its accompanying ASP programming streamlined cumbersome maintenance work that Roger had previously carried out in Word and sent out the various employment managers for updating. The new method enabled the STC Employment Manager to directly make updates that would be posted upon the two information pages.

Here is what Jeff has to say, "My main task is to support the Employment Information Booth at the STC Conference. I have some ideas on making the experience more interactive or proactive. I would also like to reestablish periodic contact with the chapter employment managers for information and idea sharing."





# Join the Nominating Committee

By Mary Ann Howell, Senior Member

It's that time of year when the nominating committee gathers names to consider for next year's administrative council elections. Please take some time to consider giving back to your chapter by serving for one year. The experience you gain is the big payback, and an STC position of responsibility looks great on your resume.

The nominating committee's goal is to have at least two candidates running for each position (the max is three). If you're good at organizing and keeping track of wandering details, please consider sending in your name, or if you know someone who would be a good fit, surprise them and send in their name.

You need to commit to serve for one year and to attend the monthly administrative council meetings. These meetings are set up at an agreed on time and place that works out for everyone.

Your term would begin in May 2003. The outgoing council member is happy to hold your hand, train, and advise you. No experience required. Here is a brief summary of the administrative council positions. For more detailed descriptions, please go to **OCSTC.org** under Membership, Chapter Bylaws.

## **President**

Executive administrator, responsible for all chapter operations.

## **First Vice President, Programs**

Assumes the duties of the President if the President is absent, and plans the monthly meetings.

## **Second Vice President, Membership**

Recruits and welcomes new members and provides the council and the international Society office with membership data.

## **Secretary**

Sets up the monthly administrative council meetings, prepares the agenda, and keeps the minutes. The secretary also takes care of the chapter's voice mail, writes chapter correspondence, and maintains the non-financial records.

## **Treasurer**

Pays our bills, takes care of the chapter checking accounts, presents a monthly statement at the council meeting, and a yearly statement to the chapter. Once a year the treasurer submits the end-of-year Chapter Financial Report to the chapter Audit Committee and then to the STC Treasurer.

Beside the administrative council positions listed above, there will be two nominating committee openings. Nominating committee members serve for two years.

## **Nominating committee member**

Selects candidates for chapter office and conducts the annual membership election.

## **Dates**

### **February 1**

Nominating committee's announcement of candidates

### **March**

Online voting

### **Early April**

Announcement of election results

### **June**

Term begins for all except Treasurer

### **July**

Treasurer's term starts

Interested? Please contact any nominating committee member:

Mary Ann Howell [maryann@hikaripub.com](mailto:maryann@hikaripub.com)  
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Arlyn Lee [alwrite@hotmail.com](mailto:alwrite@hotmail.com)  
Mark Bloom [mhbloom@aol.com](mailto:mhbloom@aol.com)  
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# Society Pages



## STC Mission Statement

Designing the Future 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 20,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, printers, publishers, photographers, educators, and students.

Dues are \$115 per year, plus a one-time enrollment fee. 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.

STC headquarters contact information:

### Society for Technical Communication

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## OCSTC Employment Information

By Jeff Randolph, Employment Manager

Our job listing is entirely online at the OCSTC Web site, and the pages are updated as jobs are submitted.

### Staff Jobs

[www.ocstc.org/employe.asp](http://www.ocstc.org/employe.asp)

### Contract Jobs

[www.ocstc.org/contractme.asp](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](mailto: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 [www.stc.org/jobdatabase.htm](http://www.stc.org/jobdatabase.htm)

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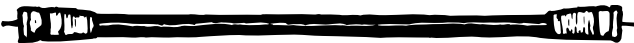
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it!**

# Calendar of Events

January 7 Administrative Council Meeting, 5:45 P.M., ProSpring Inc.

January 21 OCSTC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Wyndham Hotel

## January Meeting Topic: Public Speaking for Technical Writers Presented by Matthew Stern



**A**re you afraid to give presentations? Does going on a job interview give you jitters? If so, the January meeting of the Orange County STC will give you the encouragement and help you need.

Matthew Stern will present "Public Speaking for Technical Writers," a fun and informative program that shows you how to overcome your fear of public speaking and speak more effectively. He will cover the following:  
How improving your public speaking skills will help you find and excel in your job.

Ways to manage nervousness.

How to prepare a speech so that you can deliver it easily.

Techniques to help you speak more effectively.

The best way to use computer-generated presentations in a speech.

You will also have the opportunity to practice public speaking with a fun

and supportive exercise.

Matthew Stern is a principal technical writer at Best Software, Inc. in Irvine and a senior member of STC. He joined Toastmasters in 1991 to overcome his nervousness about public speaking. He has competed and won at a number of speech contests, served as a club president, area governor, and was honored as Division G Toastmaster of the Year in 2002. For more information, visit his Web site at [www.matthewarnoldstern.com](http://www.matthewarnoldstern.com).

### OCSTC Mailing Address

P.O. Box 28751  
Santa Ana, CA 92799-8751  
(949) 863-7666 (recording)

Address Service Requested

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