



AuSTCom

Newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication, Australia Chapter

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 3, FEBRUARY 2005

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Michelle Hallett, President, STC Australia Chapter, president@stc-aus.org.au

A big "Thank you" to all who participated in our most successful competition to date. We had 23 entries in total: 13 in the Technical Publications competition, eight in Online, and two in Technical Art. Congratulations to those who achieved an award and, in particular, our Best of Show entries which were:

- a cleverly written and illustrated booklet entitled "Your Money" (produced by ASIC)
- an informative and well-designed help system for collections and catalogue management software (designed by Ilana Cohney for KE Software, Melbourne)
- a series of animated illustrations demonstrating the installation of sensor equipment (by Colin Dawson of Info-Action).

The entries covered a wide spectrum of competition categories, including help and tutorials in Online; and training materials, manuals, promotional and informational materials in Technical Publications. The two Technical Art entries included the series of animations described above and an annual report designed around the theme of string. All entries were of a very high standard; six received a Distinguished award and were entered in the international competition. I hope to have the results available for you next time.

Last time I asked for suggestions as to how the chapter could benefit you as members. I have to confess that I was disappointed in the result and would encourage you to email me at president@stc-aus.org.au with any ideas or queries. I hope we have been able to help those members who did email us.

In particular, we were asked to help regarding the STC seminars held over the Internet using Webex software. Members have said they would like to attend these seminars but cannot due to time differences (they are held around 6am Eastern Standard Time; 4am in Perth). We have made a request to our director on the STC board that these seminars either be held at varying times, or that recordings be made available. He has promised to take our request to the next board meeting. Hopefully, I will be able to report a positive result in our next newsletter, along with a list of future seminars.

(continued on page 2)

FROM THE EDITORS

Jean Hollis Weber and Robin Swindell

Welcome to the February issue of AuSTCom! In this issue, we have a number of interesting articles from STC members around the world, including "Just Call Me Coach: Ten Ways Coaching and Management Go Hand-in-Hand" by Stephanie Morgan on page 8. We also continue our Technical Communicator Highlight series; this issue we interview Michelle Hallett on page 13. If you have an interesting technical communication story to tell, please share it! We are always looking for suggestions, feedback, or submissions. You can get in touch with us at newsletter@stc-aus.org.au. We welcome your input!

—Robin Swindell

CONTENTS

President's Message	1
STC and Chapter News.....	2
Request for Feedback on PhD Research.....	2
Looking Back, Looking Ahead, Looking Around	4
Transformation News	5
Review: "Is the Help Helpful?"	6
The Dynamic Duo: Motivation and Recognition	7
Just Call Me Coach: Ten Ways Coaching and Management Go Hand-in-Hand.....	8
Technical Communicator Highlight: Michelle Hallett	13
Haiku from the Web.....	12, 13

STC AND CHAPTER NEWS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (CON'T)

Unlike most chapters in the US and elsewhere in the world, chapter meetings are difficult for us due to our large geographic area. We have given some thought to conducting online chapter meetings, possibly three or four each year. We would like to trial this in the next couple of months and would appreciate your input.

Would you attend an online chapter meeting? Would you prefer it to be held during business hours, in the evening, or on a weekend? What time would suit you? What would you like the meeting to include? Would you prefer a short meeting with a report on our activities and a general discussion, or would you like us to include speakers on a topic of interest? Again, I'd appreciate your answers. Please send them to president@stc-aus.org.au. Meantime, I remind you that we have a bulletin board available at our website <http://www.stc-aus.org.au> and we welcome your participation.

You may have heard that the Australia Chapter was invited to host the STC's 2007 Region 8 Conference. We have concluded that the Chapter does not have the resources (money, people, time) to organise it, so we have declined the opportunity.

Finally, a reminder that elections will be held in May for next year's committee. I would like you to consider nominating for the committee. The positions of Treasurer and Newsletter Editor will be vacant, but you can nominate for any position. Location is not a barrier to participation – I am based in Sydney, and our committee includes members located in North Queensland, Brisbane, Canberra, and Perth. We have had past members from Melbourne, though as yet no one from Adelaide, Darwin or Hobart. We meet once a month, online. If you are interested, please email me.

NEW SENIOR MEMBERS

The Australia Chapter would like to congratulate the following people who have become senior members of the STC in the past six months:

Smita Char
Kirsty M. Taylor

We'd also like to welcome the following new member of the chapter:

Gregory Balcombe (WA)

CHAPTER BULLETIN BOARD

For those who haven't already done so, do have a look at our bulletin board

<http://www.stc-aus.org.au/bbs/>

HOW TO CONTACT US

To contact a committee member, send e-mail to [position]@stc-aus.org.au and it will be forwarded to the appropriate person. (Exceptions: Use pastpres and vp instead of the full position titles.) For example, to reach the newsletter editor, send a message to newsletter@stc-aus.org.au

REQUEST FROM TECHNICAL COMMUNICATOR FOR FEEDBACK ON PHD RESEARCH

April Weiss

I am currently working on a PhD in Visual Communication at RMIT University entitled "The iTour Project: A Study of the Design and Testing of Effective On-line Animated Tours as a Form of Interactive On-line Documentation". The purpose of this research is to specify guidelines to promote effective communication when designing online animated and interactive tours. I would like to receive feedback on the guidelines, which will be completed in the near future. If you are interested, please contact me on april.weiss@rmit.edu.au.

Information on the researcher and the research: I have 23 years experience in the information technology industry, working in and around technical communication. For five of these years I managed a technical communication and software implementation company, and for five was a manager in the team that designed and developed the RMIT Online Distributed Learning System (Online@RMIT). This system provides online learning to 40,000+ students world-wide.

Through the iTour Project I am researching the design and testing of on-line interactive animated tours. Research is action based and includes case studies focusing on the creation of three separate designs, a review of literature from supporting fields, critical analysis of comparative designs, and thematic analysis of the artefacts resulting from the research. From this body of work the final guidelines are being written. It is these guidelines on which I will be seeking feedback.

STC TRAINING PROGRAM

Editors' note: Although these sessions are being held in the USA, we are including this information in case you might be in the area on other business at the time.

STC is pleased to announce that our first Training Program will be held October 20-21, 2005, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Crystal City, Virginia, just minutes outside of Washington, DC.

STC's Training Program offers 5 two-day, comprehensive courses on topics geared to the interests of technical communicators who are seeking to further their skills and marketability. The following courses will be offered:

Creating and Using Personas to Improve Usability
Instructor: Whitney Quesenbery

Focusing on Content: Making Web Sites Work for Users
Instructors: Ginny Redish and Caroline Jarrett

Leadership in Information Management: Developing the Business Framework and Implementation Roadmap for Single Sourcing, Content Management, and Knowledge Management
Instructor: Rosaline Tsai

The Architecture of Content
Instructor: Jonathan Price

XML: From Hand-coding to WYSIWYG Authoring
Instructor: Neil Perlin

Program attendees will receive two days of instruction from experts in the field, as well as a certificate upon completion of the course. STC members receive a discount on registration fees, which are as follows:

- Member with hotel accommodations*: \$1,295
- Nonmember with hotel accommodations*: \$1,455
- Member without hotel accommodations: \$1,095
- Nonmember without hotel accommodations: \$1,255

*Three nights' lodging at the Hyatt Regency. All registration fees include two breakfasts and two luncheons. (Discounts for multiple registrants from one company are available.)

Attendance is limited to 60 students per course and enrollment is expected to fill quickly; as a benefit to our members, the first few days of registration will be open to STC members only. Registration opens in early May.

A Web site providing more details about STC's Training Program, including course descriptions and registration information, will be available in late April on the STC Web site. In the meantime, if you have questions, please contact Buffy Bennett at buffy@stc.org.

STC's 52ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

STC's 52nd Annual Conference Web site is live! The site contains everything you need to know about STC's upcoming conference, to be held May 8-11, 2005, in Seattle, Washington, USA.

Point your browser to www.stc.org/52ndConf to:

- Peruse the schedule of events
- Browse technical sessions by topic of interest, keyword, day/time, or conference stem
- Register at advanced registration prices
- Arrange lodging at special conference rates at five Seattle hotels, all within walking distance of the Washington State Convention and Trade Center
- Read articles detailing Seattle attractions
- Take advantage of conference rates for air travel and car rentals

STC's 52nd Annual Conference is the largest gathering of technical communicators in the world, and the profession's premier forum for education, networking, and the exchange of ideas. Advance registration closes April 22, so don't delay!



NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION DATES 2005

February, June, September, November

Please have articles, notices, advertising, etc. to the editor by the 15th of January, May, August, or October. Send to newsletter@stc-aus.org.au

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD, LOOKING AROUND

Region 8 Director Beau Cain reviews his term of office so far, and peers hopefully into the near future.

This time of year, I feel like examining my recent past and seeing how it might help me foresee the near future, perhaps like the Roman deity of portals, Janus, whose two faces looked into the past and into the future simultaneously. Here's my attempt at that for December 2004 and January 2005. I hope you'll read it and consider whether I, as Region 8 Director, am delivering what you expect of me.

Looking Back

Since I took office as Director of Region 8 in May 2004, I've done the following:

- attended Board of Directors meetings in Baltimore and Montreal
- met chapter leaders and volunteers at the STC SoCal Leadership Forum in Chatsworth
- directed the resolution of the 2004 Regional 8 conference (my trial by fire, I sincerely hope) with guidance from hearteningly dedicated and humbly knowledgeable volunteers and leaders
- deliberated how to produce a technical communication competition with STC NorCal chapter presidents at a charming French bistro in Berkeley
- represented the Board and presented at the Region 5 conference in Salt Lake City
- addressed chapters and councils about the Transformation Initiative and about the current Rechartering in Berkeley, San Francisco, Sacramento, and Honolulu
- presented at chapter meetings in Berkeley, East Bay, Orange County, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, and Silicon Valley

Along with gratitude for all the kindness my colleagues lavished on me during my travels, I feel most impressed by the dedication and competence of the leaders and other volunteers who gave their time, effort, and expertise to keep our operations running. More than anything else, I'm looking forward to collaborating with these and other leaders and volunteers throughout the rest of my term of office.

Looking Forward

The rest of my term of office is two and a half years long, which seems rather a lot to prognosticate. So

instead, I'll write about what I'm looking forward to for the next six months, which should take us as far as the upcoming 52nd Annual Conference in Seattle in May 2005.

By the time this article is published, I'll have enjoyed both the San Francisco chapter and Silicon Valley chapter's end-of-year holiday gatherings. Both are significant. This will be the first time in a few years that Silicon Valley chapter has offered a chapter meeting in December, and it will be a social event rather than a presentation, a very rare event for Silicon Valley chapter. I hope the event proves popular enough to produce again next year.

More poignant is San Francisco chapter's holiday gathering, which will be their last one at the intriguing London Wine Bar. The chapter has been meeting in the cellar of the historic watering hole for many years. The current president of the Silicon Valley chapter, Marie Highby, tells of romantic rendezvous there that she and her husband Paul enjoyed years ago. I'm sure there are other stories of pleasant evenings shared with friends at the London Wine Bar.

Susan Becker, San Francisco chapter president, I salute you and your chapter's officers as an era passes on your watch.

January 11th, I expect to present at the Los Angeles chapter's meeting, and also to present a half-day workshop for the Houston chapter January 29th. As well, I'll be semi-sequestered with your Board of Directors in Houston the weekend of January 21st for my third Board meeting. However, it won't be as onerous as it may sound. I was a member of the Houston chapter for seven years, and I'm certain there will be some happy reunions with long-time friends while I'm there.

March 12th is the date for STC NorCal's Leadership Event III, which I may be MCing. If this one is as successful as the first two, then STC NorCal will move into the future providing improved inter-chapter collaboration among the six STC Northern California chapters.

Looking Around

After that, the only clear STC plans that I have are to remind chapter officers on a more timely basis to submit Chapter Activity Reports, PR Award, Newsletter Award, and Chapter Achievement Award applications, and nominations for Distinguished Chapter Service Awards and Associate Fellowship. Pursuing recognition is a good way to ensure that our chapters provide value for their members. I've set repeating reminders in my computer's

calendar program, so that should help keep us on schedule in the future.

Things I'd like to do between January and May, 2005, either as Region 8 Director or as a technical communication professional:

- attend the next STC SoCal Leadership Event
- present workshops on Oahu and Hawaii
- meet with officers of the Sierra-Panamint and Southern Nevada chapters
- make a significant contribution to the Board committee to examine regional conferences
- become better acquainted with leaders of the Australia and New Zealand chapters
- publish my first book, "Building Books With Microsoft Word"
- see all my friends and colleagues at the Society's 52nd Annual Conference in Seattle

Have I learned enough in my first six months to help me be successful in my second six months? Am I addressing my constituents' needs as I serve the Board of Directors? Let me know what you think.

I thank you for helping me bring 2004 to a satisfying close, and I wish everyone a happy new year!

Beau Cain
Director, Region 8
Society for Technical Communication
ds8@stc.org

TRANSFORMATION NEWS

The second issue of *Transformation News* (an emailed newsletter from STC) was published on 23 February 2005. For those of you who have not subscribed, here are some excerpts.

Here's a quick list of new items available from the Web site, <http://www.stc.org/transformation/>.

January 2005 Board Meeting Report. We're trying out a new format to provide you with more information.

Two new articles from members: Member perspectives on the transformation!

Brian Martin's "Chartering, Re-chartering, and All That Chat", <http://www.stc.org/transformation/article12.asp>

Jackie Damrau's "Change isn't painful", <http://www.stc.org/transformation/article11.asp>

Audio recording of "Representation in STC," the February Town Hall meeting, at <http://www.stc.org/transformation/02-05-01.wav>.

President's column in Intercom, covering the transformation initiatives.

"Directorship, Sponsorship, and the Leadership Community", the follow-up to my January column, <http://www.stc.org/transformation/directorship.asp>

Rechartered communities -- So far, 24 communities, both chapters and SIGs, have rechartered!

Judy Glick-Smith appointed to head the Leadership Community/Resource.

What's coming up:

Updated FAQs with a special emphasis on the referendum (first round), community sponsorship and support (second round), and community funding and finances (third round)

Articles to further discuss information provided in the January Board Meeting Report: bylaws changes, community criteria.

March Town Hall meeting to discuss community sponsorship and support. Date: Monday, March 7
Time (chosen to favor Europe):
18:00 GMT (UTC) / 19:00 CET / 13:00 EST /
10:00 PST / 23:30 pm UTC+5:30 hrs

April Town Hall meeting -- Topic, date (first or second week of April), and time (to favor Asia-Pacific region) TBD

May Town Hall meeting -- Topic, date (face-to-face, during the conference) and time TBD

Summary of transformation information available at the STC Conference -- Much of leadership day will be devoted to the transformation and things you need to know as a result of transformation improvements

Transformation News is just one of the many transformation information and communication options available to you. Here's what's available today:

Transformation Web site -- Articles, presentations, FAQs, Town Hall recordings, etc.

Transformation News list (subscribe at <http://www.stc.org/transformation>)

transform@stc.org -- Ask questions, provide feedback, and make suggestions

President's column in Intercom -- Addressing different aspects of the transformation each month; now available through the new Intercom Online site!

Andrea
STC President
pres@stc.org

BOOK REVIEW OF *IS THE HELP HELPFUL?*

Jill Nicholson

Let's look at first impressions—a nice neat package. I like the format, I like the layout, and I like the use of icons to highlight 'tips', for example.

The introduction to the book defines the audience, the important content, and what is and is not in the book. The audience for the book is '... students, writers, and editors who are developing online help for computer software, and for their managers and clients.'

What's in the book is '... the principles of planning, writing, editing, and testing online help, regardless of the operating system running the application, the type of help being produced, or the tools used to produce it.'

However, if you are after specific help-authoring tool technology detail, you will need to go elsewhere.

The highlights of the book, as given in the introduction, are:

- The 10 most common complaints that users have with online help, the causes of the underlying problems, and ways to avoid these problems
- The 11 steps in the ideal help-development process, their benefits, and the problems that arise when a step is left out
- Techniques and examples for planning, writing, editing, reviewing and testing online help
- Sample plan and specifications for your help project

I like books that give a list of chapter headings before the detailed list of contents. This enables the reader to get an overall feel for a book before plunging into the details. The feeling I got was good; Jean started with planning the online project and worked her way from analysing the audience, developing specs, prototyping, producing a TOC and an index, providing links, to editing and usability. There are also chapters on avoiding common problems and meeting the needs of novices to experts.

Now I cannot say that any of this is new, but it is always available in such a disparate way that this book becomes a gem—all you need for the creation of online help in one neat package. The book is also written by a person with extensive practical experience—this is always a bonus in my opinion.

There is a great deal of very useful information in this book and like most IT and related technical books it is chock full of information that cannot be summarised easily. I will detail one chapter and then finish by

assessing whether the promises made in the introduction were fulfilled and to what degree.

Chapter 7: Providing Navigation and Context

The chapter begins with a definition of navigation. Then there is a bulleted list of the 6 types of navigation within a help system:

- Providing a table of contents, index, and search function (discussed in Chapter 6, "Producing the Table of Contents and Index")
- Using cross-reference and other links
- Using expanding sections
- Providing for reader-defined navigation
- Using visual aids such as icons or color
- Using browse sequences

Jean then takes each of these criteria and deals with them in depth, with explanations and examples. Each category is sub-divided into individual topics where necessary. In most cases the topic ends with a review consisting of a checklist written as questions. For example at the end of the "Using visual aids such as icons and color" section, the first review question is: 'If visual aids are used in the help file, are they helpful or are they confusing or irrelevant?'

Each chapter has a unique, internally consistent layout which makes the book easy to follow. While I applaud the style of the book, this style categorises the book as a practical guide. With the exception of a couple of references to well-known authors, Jean does not once go into discourse mode or use the expression "research has shown"! And if you are after deep and meaningful discourse, this book is not for you.

Yes the book completely fulfils the promises made in the introduction and I recommend it to all practitioners and would-be practitioners of online help systems.

Book Details

Is the Help Helpful? How to create online help that meets your user's needs

Jean Hollis Weber

Hentzenwerke Publishing, USA, 2004

The book includes provision for access to source codes or samples files referenced in the text and a PDF e-book.

You can order the book from the publisher's website (www.hentzenwerke.com), or from your favourite bookstore.

THE DYNAMIC DUO: MOTIVATION AND RECOGNITION

By Suzanna Laurent, STC First Vice President, and Associate Fellow, Oklahoma Chapter

Have you ever wondered why some volunteers put forth more effort than others?

Look around you. Observe the way other leaders treat people. You may observe that some leaders command confidence, loyalty, and admiration while others do not. If you look closer still, you'll also observe that the leaders who command the most respect are also the most successful.

What is the explanation? It's that successful leaders learn how to develop commitment and motivation in their volunteers. They lead by example and recognize workers for a job well done.

What is the best way to help volunteers develop stronger commitment and motivation? How can we ensure that their spirits and motivation are kept as high as possible?

By recognizing the creative potential of the people on their teams and using that potential wisely, leaders become more successful. Recognizing and rewarding volunteers isn't just a nice thing to do. When done appropriately, recognition raises the self-esteem and confidence of volunteers, increases their willingness to take on new challenges, and fuels their eagerness to contribute ideas that can make your community excel.

STC recognizes the need for treating all members and communities equally. We are therefore providing two new tools for leaders to use as they strive to recognize and motivate their volunteers. These tools are two new recognition programs: the SIG achievement award and the distinguished service award for students. These programs are similar to programs already available for chapters and professional members.

New Recognition Programs

The SIG achievement awards program recognizes SIGs that demonstrate outstanding, innovative, and sustained performance in advancing the goals of the Society. The awards not only acknowledge that the obligations of a properly functioning SIG have been met, but that the winning SIGs have performed well beyond expectations.

The distinguished service award for students acknowledges the work of those dedicated students who repeatedly provide exemplary service to the Society through their activities. Student chapter advisors will work in conjunction with the student chapter administrative councils to select an outstanding candidate for recommendation annually.

You can access the guidelines for both of these awards programs from the STC Web site.

Fostering a Winning Spirit

It is the nature of human beings to want to succeed. We enjoy feeling that we have contributed, and that we are needed, liked, and appreciated. Don't let anyone fool you, though: It takes hard work and a positive attitude to be a winner. That is why it is so important that your recognition makes volunteers feel like they are winners! People who enjoy their work and succeed at it are generally enthusiastic, willing to try their best, and optimistic about challenges. These people have a winning spirit that puts them ahead of the game! As you become more adept at developing commitment and motivation in your volunteers and recognizing them for their contributions, your volunteers will naturally strive to do even more. Whether you manage a department or a volunteer community, or run a family business with just one employee, there's an essential principle that's too often overlooked: What motivates volunteers most is recognition!

ADVERTISING RATES

We are happy to run advertisements for organisations and activities that are in line with the objectives of the STC. We do not give anyone copies of our mailing list, but we will deliver advertisements on your behalf. We'll also put meeting notices on our website. Contact the newsletter editor or the Webmanager for more details.

Our fees for advertising in a single issue are:

- Full page—\$75
- 1/2 page—\$35
- 1/3 page—\$25
- 1/4 page—\$15

Send enquiries and copy to newsletter@stc-aus.org.au. Deadlines are the 15th of January, May, August and October, but earlier booking of space would be appreciated. We will invoice you for payment upon publication.

The STC is a not-for-profit organisation and does not charge GST on advertising.

We reserve the right to refuse to carry any advertisement.

JUST CALL ME COACH: TEN WAYS COACHING AND MANAGEMENT GO HAND-IN-HAND

Stephanie E. Morgan

Drawing on insights from legendary coaches including Mike Krzyzewski, Vince Lombardi, Joe Paterno, and John Wooden, we will uncover ten fundamental requirements for leading teams of varying abilities towards realistic goals.

Pre-Game Warmup

Most of us do not leave college with management skills; we leave with degree specialties. At some point over the course of our careers, we may be thrust head-first into the sizzling frying pan that is management.

Of course, experience is the best teacher, but without it, we are forced to rely on our resources. Some liken management to parenting, but I found my experiences as an athlete, and later as a coach to be the most applicable to my new job requirements.

Like managers, coaches are expected to inspire their teams to greatness, regardless of resources or obstacles. Few coaches have been as successful as Hall of Famers, Mike Krzyzewski (college basketball), Vince Lombardi (professional football), Joe Paterno (college football), and John Wooden (college basketball). Their insights are combined here with professional experience to unearth ten fundamentals for coaching/management success.

Step One: Scout the Recruits

Fit your game to the talents of your team: A team works together most successfully when each individual component is used to best advantage. Tailor your approach to fit the abilities of your team members. (Lombardi, Jr. 24)

When you step into a management role, there are two things you can be sure of. The first is that there are objectives hanging over your head that you need to find a way to meet. The second is that you likely inherited someone else's team and need to quickly understand if you have the personnel to feasibly meet your objectives.

In Lombardi's world, you would be able to:

- Take the time to review evaluations from previous managers,
- Find out what projects your team members are working on or have worked on in the past, and evaluate those projects,
- Spend time with each employee asking about projects, preferences, etc.,

- Then, with a clear idea of your group's objectives, begin to match up people with responsibilities.

Some people may fit more than one objective, while others may not. Furthermore, you may not have the luxury of shifting responsibilities quickly, if at all. You need to determine what is feasible *and* what will establish (or not jeopardize) your team's much-needed chemistry.

Regardless of what timing allows, don't lose sight of the transitions you want to make with your personnel. When all is said and done, your primary responsibility as a manager is to understand both what each person brings to your team, and what voids have yet to be filled.

Step Two: Set the Rules

Too many rules get in the way of leadership...I don't want to be a manager or a dictator. I want to be a leader—and leadership is ongoing, adjustable, flexible, and dynamic. As such, leaders have to maintain a certain amount of discretion. (Krzyzewski 10)

Like the sporting world, Technical Communications involves internal (writing style guidelines) and external (employee handbook) rules. For Technical Communicators, rules are increasingly important as the profession continues to incorporate new levels of singlesourcing. Seamless transition from author to author has always been a struggle that rules help to allay. Technical Communications rules can include general guidelines for grammar and consistency, project setup, review, etc.

Your role in establishing rules does not have to be purely tyrannical, nor does everyone need a vote. In fact, the more you invite debate, the harder it will be to establish rules for consistency. Because of this, we try to follow the *Chicago Manual of Style's* guidelines for usage. In addition, we are in selective conformance with the *Microsoft Manual of Style*. Still, as much as we try to document deviations from these standards, yearly style meetings (which could actually be even more frequent) are an absolute must.

Guidelines for style and usage are far less complicated than behavioral ones. Let's face it—people are naturally competitive and tend to keep score. If you let Bob leave early on a sunny afternoon because he's worked hard and deserves time to be with his family, chances are good that Sue is going to want the same benefits, even though her work suffers and she takes "mental health days" that your company doesn't offer. Your company should have hard and fast rules available via its employee handbook. Outside of that, you need to be as consistent as you can be with your rules and consequences. Even if your rules change over time, establishing them is critical to identifying your expectations for behavior and performance.

Step Three: Maintain the Best Equipment

Set the stage psychologically, and give people the tools and skills they need to succeed. Preparedness is the ultimate confidence builder. (Lombardi, 30)

Remember, no one wants to shoot hoops with a deflated ball. Likewise, your team will have a legitimate gripe if its equipment is one step above the abacus. Accessibility to the equipment and software tools that will help your professionals continue on their growth path will increase their longevity with your company.

You need to make it a priority to ensure that you have the tools and equipment you need to meet the goals set out for your team. That does not mean that you need the latest and greatest of everything. Quite the contrary, it is your responsibility to assess what you need to get you from point A to point B. If an upgrade to your documentation tool of choice does not have features that you will benefit from, then you should not upgrade just for upgrade's sake. It takes time to evaluate making the right purchases at the right time, but rest-assured that in these financial times (and pretty much all other times), someone will be looking at your department's bottom line, and those frivolous expenditures will come back to haunt you. Conversely, there may also be times when you just cannot spend money, even though it is the absolute right thing to do. In either case, communication is the key to maintaining reasonable expectations for your team.

Step Four: Offer Training Camps

As we communicate the vision we have for others and the expectations that we hold for them, we create an almost magnetic pull that draws them in the direction of those expectations. (Wooden, 7)

A large part of recruiting and retaining employees is providing the reality that they can have a career complete with professional development and goals. I like to refer to it as a "choose your adventure" book.

I can honestly say that I have learned almost everything I know about the software tools I use today through on-the-job training. When I started, fresh out of college, my company provided me with tutorials and training both on the software I'd be documenting and the documentation tools I'd be using. When I made a move into the Marketing department, it was more self-paced and out-of-house training. And now, as a manager, I attend training and workshops on a regular basis. The investment my company makes in me means a tremendous amount. Whenever I think that my career has stalled or that there is nothing more to learn about my job, my company—and more specifically, my boss—has seen to it to match my strengths and interests with

appropriate professional development. He has a plan for me in his head that time and opportunity has unfolded. I try to supply the same room for growth and development to my employees.

Of course, there can be conflict when everyone has the same goal; say, management, for example. That is when you must rise to the critical challenge of finding ways to empower and train your employees. Project management, research, client exposure, professional association involvement, etc. are all outlets that you need to explore to make sure that you are allowing your employees the growth they need to stay challenged and loyal to your company. If you don't have the budget, then find ways to make room for self-paced exposure in the overall schedule.

Step Five: Choose the Schedule

Adjustments are not unusual, they are usual. So a leader's ability to think on his feet—to react accordingly, to do things without instruction, to react to voices on the court, and to think outside of himself—is of particular importance. (Krzyszewski, 121)

In many organizations, the schedule is already laid out for you. You will, however, need to assess the project/opponent, and the skill level availability to match the most productive pairing of talent with challenge.

In my company, schedules seemed to emerge from a mystical land of fantasy and hallucination. That is, it rarely seemed in any way feasible that we would be able to meet the target date with an acceptable level of quality. That methodology was left over from the days when product development was also doing the testing, documentation, and support, selling the product, and writing all of the ads and press releases. Back in those days, it made sense that only one group needed to know the schedule, because only one group would be accountable for sticking to it. Suffice it to say that those days are long gone. Not only are there separate departments covering the wide array of responsibilities accompanying a product release, there are also significantly more products supported by the same departments and overlapping releases throughout the course of a year.

As a manager, I take personal responsibility for relaying, —early and often—my team's ability to meet or fall short of scheduled deadlines. Where it once seemed devastating to be the bottleneck at the end of a long development process, we are now comfortable enough with our technology and abilities to either accept our station in the release cycle (i.e., deal with the fact that documentation will always have to wait until the product is finished) or to find ways to achieve our documentation goals without sacrificing a release date (i.e., shipping

documentation as is at the time of code freeze, then releasing documentation updates via our website). Granted, neither situation is ideal, but the ability to control our own destiny using the technology we have invested so much in provides the much-needed ability to balance expectations with reality.

Step Six: Argue the Calls

People are not going to follow you as a leader unless you show them that you're real. They are not going to believe in you unless they trust you. And they are not going to trust you unless you always tell them the truth and admit when you were wrong. (Krzyszewski, 153-4)

Management carries with it a different set of rules for engagement than you dreamed possible. It's your job to determine friend versus foe and strive to pick battles you absolutely cannot work around. More importantly, you should remember that it is important to communicate your status on such debates to your team to maintain/establish your credibility with them.

My first lesson as a manager was that complaining is much easier than doing something about it. I had gotten so used to being able to blame my disgruntledness on my manager...until I *became* the manager. I cannot tell you the number of times I went to my manager (youngest child that I am) and said something to the effect of, "He's picking on me," or "They aren't listening," etc. How furious I would get if I felt she had ignored me. And yet, when I filled in those shoes, I could understand things a little better.

When something is important to my team, I should be the one to fight for it (unless I disagree, which is a completely different discussion) or to at least offer a reasonable explanation as to why I haven't. For example, if we want to incorporate embedded help into a product, then I should fight that battle (when I say fight, I really mean negotiate). That may result in more work for us, where we either do the research on how to do it or where we actually implement it ourselves. Some may say that it's not our job to do the research or implementation. But, I beg to differ. Doing those things allows us to take the vantage point of the developers. It may take an inordinate amount of time to implement embedded help, or maybe our products just aren't coded to incorporate it easily. I would prefer to be told "no" with justification that I can understand and relate to, rather than feeling dismissed and misunderstood.

I have rarely found pointed confrontation productive in any way, and fortunately do not work in an environment where it is encouraged. I may get myself in trouble now and again because the messages I thought were subliminal in a fiery email, indeed were not. But, for the

most part, my company has evolved to where communications is an almost entirely integrated piece of the development cycle. It is just those missing elements that I am left to struggle over, and they are mostly misunderstandings that can be resolved with a candid one-on-one discussion. In the rare instance where that doesn't work, I talk it through with my Manager and implore his help.

Step Seven: Recognize All-Star Performers

...what every individual needs—is to be recognized, by their leader and their peers, for outstanding individual performance. (Lombardi, 45)

I consider myself lucky. Though I have survived the unfortunate task of relieving people from employment, I also have a core of exceptional employees. They are self-motivated, insightful, innovative, and passionate about writing descriptively and technologically superior documentation. I would be devastated to lose any of them, so I am constantly trying to stay in touch with what keeps them happy.

Of course, money talks louder than anything else, but financial recognition requires financial success. Unfortunately, that has been far too elusive since my cross-over into management. As a result, I have had to be more creative about how I recognize all of the consistent good work my team is doing. Some things I've tried include:

- Department lunches – Whether I treat the team or we do a potluck lunch, I try hard not to let birthdays, holidays, or special occasions go unnoticed.
- Recognition board – I try to keep track of good feedback from our SMEs and clients and mentions of our group in the press on our suite's bulletin board.
- Tolerance award – Some years ago, I bought an inflatable punching bag through a mail order catalog. Its sole purpose was frustration ventilation. I turned it into the Tolerance Award with the intent of passing it around to writers who showed particular patience.
- Excused absence – Let's face it—if someone puts in a 50-hour week one week and needs to take their child to the doctor the next week, only a fool would have them use vacation time. My company does not have a comp time policy. However, as a general rule of practice, I do. I can't expect my employees to work extra hours, but when they voluntarily do, I need to be open-minded about repaying the favor with time.

- Company-wide recognition – The work that my team has been doing over the past two years is absolutely exceptional given the deadlines they have faced, the company’s cutbacks, and the learning curve for new products and processes. At every given opportunity (and even those I’ve made myself), I have been sure to celebrate their achievements through company-wide emails and recognition in the company newsletter, in addition to positive announcements at leadership meetings.

Yes, I have shamelessly crossed over into the “corny” in an attempt to make sure my team knows that I appreciate their hard work. Some things work better than others, and I am keenly aware that the most tangible form of recognition can be deposited in the bank. So, I make the best cases I can to either move my employees up the professional ladder or secure spot bonuses (no matter how minimal) when they become available.

Finding ways to recognize strong, consistent performers is difficult. Even more of a challenge is hoping to retain employees who have expanded their marketability while working with you. At some point, money will win out. Until that happens, it is your job to find ways within your means to let your best performers know they are appreciated.

Step Eight: Design the Plays (But Rely on the Team to Run Them)

People who truly excel don't fear or resent excellence in others. People who shoot only for success, however, always feel threatened by other people's success. (Paterno, 126)

Today's leadership must learn to be far more concerned with empowerment than with power. (Wooden, 27)

Perhaps the hardest part about coaching/managing is the vulnerability. While it's your responsibility to plan and oversee, your perceived success relies on the successes and failures of the team you have assembled. Nothing is more critical than the confidence you have in your team and it has in you.

In late 2001, one of my employees began researching trends in documentation tools. My company was planning to totally reconstruct its legacy software tool, and my group was awarded the rare opportunity to evaluate its own tools and recommend a new path forward. By July 2002, we had settled on Adobe® FrameMaker®. At that time, only one employee out of five had ever used the tool. Today, less than two years later, FrameMaker is our only tool. We are singlesourcing and are selling a plug-in for FrameMaker, two employees are Adobe Certified Experts, and three are speaking at the STC 51st Annual Conference on topics they were

introduced to through their use of FrameMaker. All this, and I have a very vague idea how to use the tool.

I used to know how to use the previous documentation tools, but as my group has grown and my responsibilities cross over into marketing, I spend more time managing and less time writing. When I really stop and think about not knowing how to do what my employees are doing, I absolutely shudder. *But*, I cannot rightly object to updating our processes just so I can maintain control.

I brought this to my manager's attention on several occasions, and he assured me that this is a growing pain most managers encounter. Indeed, there are tools I know how to use that my own manager does not. The challenge is understanding what's going on enough to make informed decisions. I rely heavily on the research that my team members relay and the trends I read or hear about in the industry. At the end of the day, no one is more accountable than I am, so trust and research are critical.

So far, the results have heavily favored both my team and my company. My team writes more consistently and efficiently for more products with less staff. In return, they are getting continuous professional development and are gaining the professional recognition that they deserve for their ingenuity.

Step Nine: Motivate, Motivate, Motivate

I know the power of concentrating your brain, your whole body, your whole nervous system, your adrenalin, all of your will, on a single goal. It's an almost unbeatable concentration of force. (Paterno, 122)

Regardless of obstacles created for you or by you and regardless of what side of the bed you woke up on, you are supposed to be a source of reassurance to those assigned to your charge. Commiserate, contemplate, but don't ever get stuck with a defeatist attitude, or your team will too.

I am the youngest of three children and am the only girl. As such, I could have grown up expecting everyone to do everything for me or I could be aggressive. I think that for the most part, I am much more the latter. I do not set goals for myself with the expectation that I will fail. I have tried to encourage the same mindset when setting group objectives.

It seems that every company has financial woes these days. Some employees are motivated by the thought of losing their jobs, but that is not a fair card to play. My team is self-motivated (i.e., aggressive, competitive, overachieving, and inquisitive), so my job is relatively easy. But there are times when I have to dust off the pompoms and give a little cheer. Do they buy it? Who

knows? Should I do it? Absolutely! There are also times when I need to crack the whip, which is not a personal favorite. There should never be too much of one or the other for any employee, or your actions will lose their effectiveness.

It is your responsibility to stay informed of deadlines, goals, and outside conflicts. It is also your responsibility to have a good idea of what might motivate an employee to action. In my management experience, I have had to use both disciplinary threats and potential rewards. It is far easier to ask someone to continue doing a job well than it is to tell someone they need to start doing a job well...or else. I have had to do both. Whether it's the promise of new PCs or software, a free lunch, leaving early, or taking a personal day, rewards are far more fun to dispense than discipline (and are generally received much more positively). But discipline is a necessary evil as well, and you need to make sure that your message is not lost in either a lengthy explanation of the problem or the expectation for moving forward.

Step Ten: Take the Heat/Divide the Glory

Character-based leaders behave with consistency, courage, and trust. Because they know that the scoreboard does not determine their value and effectiveness as leaders, they are eager to make the tough decision and to place a higher level of trust in their team. They are willing to risk looking for the best in others because they are not threatened by others' excellence. (Wooden, 39)

At the end of a championship season, should the coach be the first person to kiss the trophy, or should the players? As both a former player and a former coach, I say the players deserve the glory. For as much as I might lock myself away pouring over plans and objectives, at the end of the day, my team members are responsible for getting the overall job done. It's my opinion that a plan is only as good as it is executed, and every day, I rely on three technical communicators to finish the work of seven. I don't want any credit when they are successful. But, if they struggle and I do nothing to help them, I deserve every ounce of criticism.

You need to be prepared to be the scapegoat just as much as you'd prefer to be a glory seeker. Your team will respect you for accepting failures on its behalf, but will despise you for taking credit where it is due to them. Make sure you strike a reasonable balance.

The Final Whistle

Many people, particularly in sports, think of success and excellence as though they are the same. They are not. Success is perishable and often outside our control. In contrast, excellence is something that's lasting, dependable, and largely within a person's control. (Paterno, 125)

The coaches quoted in this paper are champion leaders. They have mastered motivation, planning, and execution. And yet, none of them have zero losses in their career records. Why? Sometimes coaches make mistakes. Sometimes players make mistakes. Sometimes officials make mistakes. And sometimes, it just isn't meant to be. As a manager/coach, whether you win, lose, or don't finish at all, you should always treat others as you would like to be treated...I believe that was one of the first lessons two of my greatest coaches, my parents, ever taught me.

References

- (1) Biro, B., Wooden, J. *Beyond Success: The 15 Secrets to Effective Leadership and Life Based on Legendary Coach John Wooden's Pyramid of Success*. New York: Perigee, 2001.
- (2) Krzyzewski, M., Phillips, D. T., Hill, G. *Leading With the Heart: Coach K's Successful Strategies for Basketball, Business, and Life*. New York: Warner Books, 2001.
- (3) Lombardi, V. *The Lombardi Rules: 26 Lessons from Vince Lombardi—The World's Greatest Coach* (The McGraw-Hill Professional Education Series). New York: McGraw-Hill Text, 2003.
- (4) Paterno, J., Asbell, B. Paterno: *By the Book*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1991.

Stephanie E. Morgan
Manager, Communications
Advantica
1170 Harrisburg Pike

Carlisle, PA 17013
+1 717 243 1900
steph.morgan@advantica.biz

Stephanie Morgan is a member of the Susquehanna Valley Chapter of STC and oversees marketing and technical communications at Advantica, Inc. in Carlisle, PA. She earned a BA in English, Professional Writing from Elizabethtown College in Elizabethtown, PA.

Hal, open the file
Hal, open the damn file, Hal
open the, please Hal
— Jennifer Jo Lane

To have no errors
Would be life without meaning
No struggle, no joy
— Brian M. Porter

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATOR HIGHLIGHT:

Michelle Hallett



In August 2002 I received a retrenchment package. For a few months I revelled in the freedom to follow my own muse and, when the money ran out, I decided to become a contractor. I liked the idea of variety and time off between projects.

Since then I've had varied jobs, including a return to the employer who retrenched me. Most jobs have been interesting and most have taught me many things. By far the most interesting has been training project for the NSW Ambulance Service.

I first took the job around Christmas of 2003. Training included a visit to Sydney headquarters, where the emergency calls are answered and ambulances are dispatched around the Sydney area. It was while listening to a telephonist trying to pacify a hysterical caller that I began to feel that this was a job worth doing. I've always enjoyed my work, but never before have I felt it might matter in the grand scheme of things. With this job, I thought, I might one day, indirectly, save someone's life. Far-fetched, I know, but it felt good.

Over many months, we travelled around to ambulance stations in Sydney, training ambulance officers in the use of a mobile data terminal which allowed them to receive full details of each case while travelling towards it. The purpose was to save time. The NSW Ambulance processes around 1500 calls a day in the Sydney area. Most are not urgent, but some are life-threatening and all are treated with the best possible response.

I met people I would never meet in corporate Australia. Most ambulance officers want to do their job. Some regard it as a calling. Many complain, but few quit. They

complain about the health service and the long delays at hospitals. They complain about their bosses and the ambulance bureaucracy. But they seem to do their job every day with joy and they welcome outsiders, like me, to their stations.

At Engadine station, one officer tried to convince me to join the ambulance. I asked him question after question and he always had an answer. Each answer was a positive one and a reason why I should join. So I asked him the big one: what happens if someone you're tending dies? He shrugged and told me it was part of the job. He was so effective, for months afterwards I considered joining and though I ultimately decided against it, I still question if that was the right decision.

At Randwick station, I met a man who complained long and loudly that they should be sending everyone to headquarters at Rozelle for training. They shouldn't be expected to train while waiting for an emergency call. I invited him to try the new system and had him trained and certified within half an hour. When they rang from headquarters to see how I was doing, they asked if I'd had any trouble with this man. When I told them he was now trained, they were amazed. They started to call me their secret weapon and sent me to all the stations where there were difficulties with staff. If only such small things could make my bosses happy at other companies.

At Caringbah station, one senior officer who didn't like training pulled the plug on my equipment, causing equipment failure. It might have been accidental. The other staff didn't think so but it wasn't a problem. Quick as a flash, some officers found a replacement terminal so training could go ahead.

One day whilst driving to a station, I heard on the radio that Sydneysiders had voted ambulance officers the most trustworthy of all public officials. I believe it. I certainly enjoyed meeting them.

Login incorrect.
Only perfect spellers may
enter this system.
— Jason Axley

The Web site you seek
cannot be located but
endless others exist
— Joy Rothke