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Marc Smircich, Editor
Marilyn Latham, Assistant Editor
Keith A. Albert, Quality Control

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For information about copyrights, reprinting articles, and submitting articles, see the article submission policies on page 5.

This printer-friendly version of the ActiveVOICE includes the same content as the online newsletter on the chapter Web site (www.stc-sf.org). The text has been reformatted to reduce the number of pages required to print the newsletter.

October 2005 Meeting -- Don't Be a Schmoie with SMEs -- and Other Tales of How Becoming a Better Speaker Will Make You a Better Writer

Presented by Marianne Fleischer

The October meeting is on Wednesday, October 19, 2005, from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the Elephant & Castle in San Francisco's financial district. For details about the location and instructions for purchasing tickets, visit www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm.

About the Presentation

Are you a wonderful writer but would rather have multiple root canals than speak publicly? Consider a hard truth: We are not just judged by how we write. We are also judged by how well we move hearts and minds on our feet. Don't overlook this critical aspect of your career. You can continue to hug your keyboard or learn how to get more respect and better assignments. Public speaking -- at meetings or at the podium -- is like any skill that can be learned. Come hear how to spot and pitch communication needs, instead of waiting for assignments. Learn how to be a better technical communicator through -- perish the thought -- public speaking.

About the Speaker

Marianne Fleischer is a senior communication strategist and writer-producer. She specializes in news, technical writing, marketing, and corporate communications. After receiving a Masters degree in Communications from the University of Massachusetts on a full fellowship, Marianne began her career as a newscaster back East. She then became a documentary and talk show producer for KRON-TV, KPIX-TV in the Bay Area and did national PBS-TV series.



Working as an independent writer-producer for 15+ years, Marianne helps firms tell their stories better in print, online, speeches, corporate events, and video. Clients include Hewlett Packard, Sony, Apple, Schwab, Varian, WebEx, Solectron, Genentech, etc. Her specialty as a speechwriter, speech coach and media trainer grew out of her academic, media and corporate careers. She has spoken at STC chapters throughout the Bay Area.

November 2005 Meeting -- The Future of Technical Communication: A San Francisco Perspective

A panel moderated by Barbara Giammona with Andrew Davis, Meryl Natchez, and Julia Cope

The November meeting is on Wednesday, November 16, 2005, from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the Elephant & Castle in San Francisco's financial district. For details about the location and instructions for purchasing tickets, visit www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm.

About the Presentation

The San Francisco Chapter STC celebrates its 25th anniversary with a panel of past, present, and future chapter leaders speaking on future trends in technical communication, with insights from the past.

Come enjoy a lively discussion among our panelists: past presidents Andrew Davis and Meryl Natchez, current president, Julia Cope, and new chapter member, Barbara Giammona. Find out where they think technical communication is headed in the Bay Area and hear some tales of earlier times in our chapter. Bring your questions and be prepared to add your insights.

About the Panelists

Barbara Giammona. The moderator, Barbara Giammona, relocated from New York City to the Bay Area in March 2005. She is currently a vice president at Morgan Stanley on assignment as a business analyst and formerly was the Manager of Communications for the Company IT Division. Barbara has been a technical communicator for more than 20 years and a manager of technical communicators for more than 15 years.

Barbara's article, "The Future of Technical Communication: How Innovation, Technology, Information Management, and Other Forces Are Shaping the Future of the Profession," published in *Technical Communication*, the Society's journal in August 2004, was the recipient of the Frank R. Smith Award for Distinguished Technical Communication.

Andrew Davis. Andrew Davis was a Tech Writer of sysadmin and developer docs for 8 years before starting Synergistech Communications in 1995. Synergistech was a respected recruiting firm for technical writers and similarly skilled professionals in the Bay Area until its 'hibernation' in late 2001. Andrew is now readying Synergistech "v2.0", as a full-spectrum IT recruiting firm, not one focused only on information developers. He is currently filling requisitions for all kinds of IT profes-

sionals on the West Coast and even as far afield as China.

Andrew was chapter president in 1993-94.

Julia Cope. Julia Cope is an assistant vice president and Communications Manager for Wells Fargo's Private Client Services (PCS) in San Francisco. As part of the Internal Communications team, she currently manages the PCS Intranet, fulfilling the duties of project manager, editor-in-chief, information architect, graphic designer, and content strategist for an audience of 6,000+ financial services and support personnel.

Julia is the current president of the San Francisco Chapter STC and has served as vice president and webmaster.

Meryl Natchez. Meryl Natchez has been CEO of TechProse since 1982. TechProse specializes in providing technical writing and training for clients in corporate and public sectors. Meryl developed TechProse from a single-person operation to a corporation with over 75 employees. An alumna of Harvard University, Meryl has received numerous awards for business development and community service. She is a founder of OPTIC, a nonprofit organization that provides low-income Contra Costa residents with technology, literacy, and life skills to become economically self-sufficient.

Meryl was chapter president in 1991-1993.

July 2005 Meeting -- Zero-Search-Time Documentation: An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Presented by Peter Schorer and reviewed by Reyn Johnson

In the July meeting presentation, Peter Schorer, author of *How to Create Zero-Search-Time Computer Documentation*, outlined the ZST method for producing documentation. ZST documentation allows users to find the information they want in less than 25 seconds at least 80% of the time. The method is technol-

ogy independent, and thus can be applied to the creation of online and/or paper documentation.

Even at this late date, the fields of documentation and human factors (computer-human interface [CHI] design) do not have a simple metric for the effectiveness of their products. And yet measurement of results is a central requirement of any technical field. Peter believes that the simple metric is "look-up-time": the speed with which users of the product can find how to do what they want to do. As he has written: "Strange though it may seem, everything falls into its proper place once we make look-up-time the central criterion of success: the organization of indexes and of instructional text, the order in which the work of documentation is to be done, what should be covered, the relative importance of writing style -- all fall into place when lookup-time is the central concern."

ZST documentation provides what past attempts at measuring quality of technical writing -- usability studies and user tests -- have not. It provides a metric that offsets our work environment: the remnants of the economic recession and off-shoring of technical communications jobs. ZST provides a remarkably simple and effective numerical measure for the quality of a piece of documentation, in that users should be able to find what they are looking for in less than 25 seconds at least 80% of the time. The steps to produce ZST documentation begin with an old familiar one: establish minimum skills and vocabulary for an audience. Next, construct your index by "things" (nouns), and not verbs. Immediately under each thing, indented, list all the common tasks performed on the thing with a link to instructions.

Instructions should not be more than seven main steps, with each step broken down again into less than seven sub-steps. Each procedure should be preceded by a description of its purpose, for example, to transfer a file from your computer.... Begin each step with an imperative verb, for example, Define, Copy, Access, Use, and Terminate.

The design of ZST documentation includes an "outside in" design. First define the first screen that the user sees when the program is run, which specifies the major tasks that can be performed with the program; then, define the next-lower level of screens, which defines the top level implementations of the major tasks; then, the next-lower level itself, which defines steps to implement top level implementations, and so on.

In the ZST documentation model, programming should come after the user interface has been designed, "Use It Before You Build It!"

For more information, refer to Peter Schorer's book *How to Create Zero-Search-Time Computer Documentation*, available online free at www.zsthelphelp.com, or in paperback from www.amazon.com. Peter may be contacted at (510) 548-3827 and peteschorer@cs.com.

Reyn Johnson is a technical writer with over 14 years experience in the semiconductor, Internet commerce, and software industries. Currently, Reyn develops storage management/information life cycle software documentation.

August 2005 Meeting -- Get Organized for Success

Presented by Emily Wilska and reviewed by Marilyn Latham

Emily Wilska wants you to get organized! She's so committed to the concept that she started her own consulting business to help her clients organize themselves and their offices.

The concepts may seem pretty simple, but if so, why do so many of us have such a hard time putting them in place? Certainly some people are more inherently organized than others. For the rest of us, here's what Emily had to say in her presentation to the San Francisco Chapter STC's August meeting.

First of all, what is being organized? It's having easy access to the things you

need, use, and love. It's having *time* for people and activities, and *systems* for paper, stuff, and scheduling. It does not mean having things perfect, neat, catalog-beautiful, paper-free, and based on a single system. This is too time-consuming and likely to require more time for organizing than actually working!

So, what are some of the common obstacles to organization?

- Insufficient or inappropriate systems for paper, stuff, and scheduling
- Lack of clarity as to what to keep and what to toss
- Overwhelming decisions
- Too much paper, too much stuff, too many tasks

Emily provides four (count-em, just four) steps for getting organized:

- Step 1: Figure out what isn't working, and why.
- Step 2: Get a sense of how things should work.
- Step 3: Break down the project.
- Step 4: Attack!

Let's break these down.

Step 1: To figure out what isn't working, and why, brainstorm and make a list:

- What frustrates and overwhelms you?
- What do you always seem to lose or misplace? What things don't have a place at all?
- What tasks never seem to get done?
- What makes you cringe every time you look at it or think about it?

Step 2: Then, think about how things should work. To do this, you'll need to brainstorm some more and make another list:

- What would an ideal workday be like?
- What would an organized office space look and feel like?
- What things would be easily accessible and what would be stashed far away?

- Which tasks would you focus on and which would you jettison?

Step 3: Now you're ready to break down the project. To do this, you need some guidelines:

- What things stay and what things get tossed?
- What papers, tasks, and things are the most important?
- What other factors do you need to take into account as you organize?

Step 4: Attack. This could be the hardest part! So, Emily has some suggestions:

- Start small and simple.
- Finish one task before starting another.
- Work from the broadest tasks (e.g., sorting and purging) to the most specific (such as labeling).
- Feeling overwhelmed? Focus on maintenance for a while.

And once you've finally gotten there, and achieved the seemingly impossible, here are some suggestions for staying organized:

- Remember that organization is like any other habit: it takes time and repetition to become ingrained.
- Whenever possible, Do It Now.
- Create an inspiration point.
- Focus less on the effort and more on the results.
- And finally, remember that backsliding often happens. Don't let it discourage you.

Emily also offers some Quick Tips for staying organized. Learn them, use them, live them!

- Think twice before printing documents or taking handouts at meetings. The less paper you accumulate, the less you'll have to deal with later.
- Standardize the categories you use so they're similar across formats (electronic and paper) and applications.

- Whenever possible, scan reference and archive papers and get rid of the hard copies.
- Keep tabs on your information intake, and don't be afraid to cut yourself off when you're overwhelmed.
- Schedule 10-15 minutes at the end of each day to put away stuff you're done using, update your task list, and get ready for the next day.

If after all that, you still find yourself surrounded by paper, clutter, and disorganized piles, and you feel like there's just never enough time to get it all done, Emily is always available for personal consultations. It's what she does.

Contact her via:

- The Web -- www.organizedlife.org -- Her Web site features a Tip of the Week (also available by e-mail) as well as a list of organizing links and resources.
- E-mail -- info@organizedlife.org
- Phone -- (415) 252-9779

Marilyn Latham has worked in communications for over 10 years, as a writer, editor, and project manager in various positions in corporate communications, marketing communications, and technical writing. She lives in San Francisco and has recently been doing contract technical writing, but is seeking a permanent writing and communications position.

President's Notes and News

By Julia Cope

It's a New Term & We've Got a Plan

For my first column as SF-STC's president, I'd like to say that I'm excited about the upcoming year. Our leadership team has identified three key strategies for delivering added value and services to you, in addition to our already great line-up of speakers for our chapter monthly meetings. Your membership is

important to us, and we want to actively support your growth and development in the technical communication profession.

Inspired by the STC Strategic Plan.

As a leadership team, we reviewed the STC Strategic Plan for 2002-2007 to align our initiatives with the national organization's long-term goals. In the process, we identified some key objectives that will provide the basis for our chapter's "customized" strategic plan. The top three objectives, as cited in the STC Strategic Plan, are:

- STC is instrumental in developing leaders, professionals, and the professionals of tomorrow.
- The technical communication profession is well-known and respected.
- STC delivers substantial value to its members.

With these points in mind, our team brainstormed our own "strategies" designed to ensure time and resources are devoted to providing you with increased professional opportunities over the coming year.

And the Three Key Strategies Are...

Based on our discussions, the team identified three overall strategies for our chapter:

- Training & Professional Development -- Provides education and training, such as seminars, short-courses, and tools instruction, as well as networking opportunities
- Membership Recruitment & Retention -- Promotes the profession, facilitates participation in chapter events, and encourages volunteerism
- Chapter Services Support -- Identifies and implements added-value services for chapter members

Implementation & Timing.

Leadership team members have formed committees and will be working to identify and schedule specific activities that align with these overall strategies. It may take a few months to develop new programs, but we are confident that by

working together, we can begin the process of developing new and interesting opportunities for our members.

What You Can Do. Volunteer! You can be on a committee or attend our next leadership meeting, which will be held later this year. We want to know what is important to you, but also need your expertise, know-how -- and participation -- to fully execute our plans for the year.

For More Information. Contact julia.cope@sbcglobal.net or attend our next monthly chapter meeting on October 18th.

New Volunteer Treasurer Found!

Congratulations to Gilbert Gonzalez, our new chapter Treasurer for the 2005-06 year.

Gilbert Gonzalez is an information developer with over 15 years experience writing software documentation. For some time, Gilbert has been an important part of the San Francisco STC leadership team and has already assisted with this year's budget planning process. In the past, he has served as the Web site Meetings page Manager, Announcements Manager, and most recently, functioned as Executive Director of the Touchstone 2005 competition. Gilbert's ongoing participation in chapter events and general leadership qualities make him an exceptional addition to our slate of officers. We are very lucky to have him...thanks Gilbert!

I'd like to thank Marc Smircich, last year's treasurer, who recently completed his term, yet has continued to serve until the position could be filled. We couldn't have kept all those dollars and cents together without Marc's careful attention to detail and excellent follow-through on budget planning. He has been an excellent treasurer and we are very glad that he will continue as editor of our chapter's award-winning newsletter.

New and Transferred Members

By Marc Smircich

As of August 31, 2005, the chapter membership was 210. We welcome Donald C. Lee, who joined our chapter in August.

ActiveVOICE Article Submission Policies

The ActiveVOICE welcomes articles from technical communicators. Having a published article is a good addition to your portfolio. This document describes the guidelines for submitting an article to this newsletter. If you have any questions, you can email the editor at newsletter@stc-sf.org.

Publication Information

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Submission Guidelines

Submit all articles via email to the newsletter editor (newsletter@stc-sf.org) in either of the following ways:

- Microsoft Word format as an attachment.
- Plain ASCII text in the message body or as an attachment.

If your article contains copyrighted materials, you are responsible for obtaining permission for the ActiveVOICE to publish the copyrighted materials.

Please include the following with your article:

- Your name. Please spell it exactly as you want it published.
- The title of the article. If you get to choose the title, make it descriptive and inviting. When readers are looking at the front page of the online newsletter, the title is the only basis they have for deciding whether to click on the link to your article.

NOTE: For recurring monthly articles, such as reviews of meetings, you do not get to choose the title.

- Headings. Please include headings so that it is easy for busy readers to scan your article (just as you do when reading technical publications). Headings are especially important when people are reading online. If your article does not have headings, the editor may add them.
- A brief bio (no more than 50 to 75 words). This bio is a chance for you to say a little bit about yourself that you want to share with the world.

Articles Published

The ActiveVOICE publishes the following kinds of articles:

- Reviews of previous meetings. Each edition contains reviews of previous meetings. Normally, they should be no more than 1,000 words, but some meetings may require a longer article for adequate coverage. The purpose of these articles is to provide a summary of the meeting for those who did not attend.
- Columns by STC officials. To keep our audience informed of what is happening with the STC, the newsletter accepts articles from STC officers at the chapter, regional, and international levels.

- Publicity for STC events and other professional organizations. The newsletter accepts publicity articles for conferences, seminars, and other events sponsored by the STC, an STC chapter, an STC SIG, and closely related non-profit organizations.
- Articles related to technical communication. The newsletter accepts software reviews, book reviews, information about industry trends, tips on how to use popular software packages, and other such articles. To be accepted for publication, the primary purpose of the article must be to inform and educate, rather than to market a particular product or service. If you have an idea for an article, please contact the newsletter editor at newsletter@stc-sf.org.

Editorial Discretion

The Society for Technical Communication, San Francisco Chapter reserves the right to edit all submitted articles for length and appropriateness. The chapter is the sole arbiter of whether to accept an article for publication and when to publish it, either in whole or in part.

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