

Keeping you informed of the latest trends in technical communications management!



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

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SIG Manager Thoughts: Playing the Bad Guy

By [Elizabeth Bailey](#), Manager, STC Management SIG

Within a performance driven organization, we, as managers, are constantly trying to find ways to improve performance. If we had the user's guide online, would it save us time? If we trained our staff on the newer features of FrameMaker, would it save us development time? We are frequently looking for ways to make ourselves and our teams better.

As a manager responsible for curriculum supporting numerous business units, my toughest job is playing the bad guy. When business leaders define a behavior change in their office, they constantly say "We need training!" Amazingly enough, training is not always the answer. Interesting concept, eh?

You might find this example conversation interesting, especially when you think about how that makes me the bad guy....

"We need writing training," says a business unit vice president. Nodding my head, I respond "I am glad we are able to discuss it. Tell me a little more about what you are seeing your staff do that tells you that your people need to be trained."

"I have someone who is writing about widgets and she never seems to meet a deadline," she replies.

Beginning to feel this is not at all about training, I ask, "Do you feel comfortable telling me a few more specifics around this incident to give me a better understanding of the training issue?"

After pondering a moment, the manager responds, "Sure. You see, this writer, although it seems to happen to others as well, is given a deadline and never makes the deadline."

"That must be frustrating," I respond. "Tell me a little more about how the writing deadlines are provided," as I begin to think about the poor writer!

"Each week, the team leader updates a project plan and sends it out by e-mail to all the team members. Then, the team leader goes to each person's desk to confirm dates," the manager expressively relates.

As I wonder about this process I ask, "Would you mind if I spoke with your team leader to collect a little more information?" The manager graciously approves and agrees to allow me time to explore the issue.

Knowing that this team leader only has a few direct reports, I flit through the cubicle farm and have a mid-morning "hello" discussion with the team members – we all tend to chat

Newsletter Deadlines

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since we work together on so many writing projects. Out of the blue, I ask, "How do you get your writing assignments?"

One writer pops up, "We get an e-mailed project list that when printed has to be printed on legal paper to be legible and prints up to 23 pages! It is amazing how much work we have."

"But, that is job security!" one announces.

Another writer pops up, "And, we have to keep track of what changes have been made in every column and on every row. It can be very cumbersome."

Continuing to ask probing questions, I ask, "Surely, you also discuss those issues with your team leader, to find a way to discover those changes that are specific to you without having to read the entire document?"

The first writer snaps, "And, just when would we have time to do that?"

Thanking them, I return to my desk. My first gut feeling is that this is not a training matter. I can already see where over-worked writers may fail to see a change in a 23 page report, and perhaps where a team leader may not be taking the time to identify clearly the deadline changes to specific team members. No wonder the manager was seeing deadlines being missed.

My next task becomes returning to the manager with information that will not result in training, but will add work to



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Advertising Policy

We encourage advertising as long as it follows the STC guidelines and promotes services to the Management SIG members. Ad sizes and rates are:

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Business Card (3.5x2): \$25 (1 issue); \$100 (4 issues)

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SIG News: www.stcsig.org/mgt/newsletter.htm

SIG E-mail List: Open to all STC members. Join by visiting www.stcsig.org/mgt/mdomo.htm

SIG Mission Statement

To facilitate exchange of information and accumulated expertise related to the challenges and trends faced by technical communication management professionals; to support members who manage communication projects, people, and/or departments; to provide resources for member interaction including forums and networking opportunities; to mentor and support new or aspiring technical communication managers or those interested in acquiring and applying management skills to their work.

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her task list – mentoring and coaching her team leader to be a better communicator. Here I am a bad guy, adding to her workload instead of resolving her problem. So, what can I do as a training manager to assist her in this task?

As part of management, we face these types of problems and issues each day. Managing the performance of a team is more than just managing the people; it is also managing the processes and being willing to try new things.

Taking my thoughts back to the manager, I offer to conduct a continuous process improvement lunch-and-learn where I will invite team leaders for a two hour discussion where lunch will be provided by the company.

Pre-work for the discussion includes them contemplating their existing processes and e-mailing me one issue where they have a known problem they would like to resolve.

I am hoping that the team leader in question will bring this issue. Up my sleeve is the plan to use this issue for the discussion, regardless of what I get in e-mail. The manager gratefully accepts my offer, with the hope that she will see a change in her team members' ability to meet deadlines.

For the meeting, I present the issue as a case study from another company for about 30 minutes. I then ask the entire group to split up into teams of two, and spend an hour discussing the issue among them as they eat, and come up with potential solutions. As a

result of the group gathering, they are to come back to the class and each group will



present its solution. Then, for additional discussion, I ask if anyone has an existing process that might benefit from trying this solution.

After discussion, I invite the participants to return to their teams and try out their selected solution for a couple of weeks, and ask them to return for a follow-up meeting in two weeks where we can discuss what worked and what didn't.

Two weeks later, I meet with the team leaders as a group and discuss what has changed within their teams. All teams identify how they applied one technique or the other and how the team is responding.

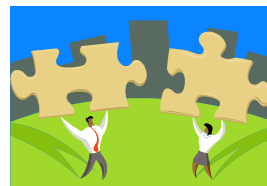
Discussing the case study again, I ask the participants to consider whether long-term effects may result. During the discussion, the participants share that they are eager to continue watching their teams and working to identify other areas of potential improvement. One even pops up with the idea of having a team meeting and allowing his team members to brainstorm ideas and implement them! Whoohoo – a protégé has emerged!

A week later, I meet with the manager who tells me that her team members are meeting deadlines and there seems to be a better cohesion among the team members, and even between communication

between the teams. The team leaders are talking to each other more, and the team members themselves seem to have a better idea of what is happening within their teams.


Note that the ideas discussed and brought forward by my facilitated discussion of the case study do not come into play in my description of the intervention in this article. These solutions do not need to, as the actual ideas should always come from those who are dealing with the situation, not by management or by a facilitator.

If the team leaders were not allowed to identify and implement their own solutions, there would have been less buy-in and less ability to apply the ideas in their own environments. Just getting the team leaders together and allowing them to understand that others have similar



problems to their own and that they are not alone help the team leaders in defining their own process improvement methods.

So, playing the bad guy, and asking the hard questions can bring about change AND nurture your team members to start analyzing their own processes and being productive process improvement practitioners.

Elizabeth Bailey is the new Manager of the STC Management SIG. 

From the Newsletter Editor...

By [Jan Lowry](#), Managing Newsletter Editor

New Associate Newsletter Editor

Directives welcomes [Saurabh Kudesia](#) as the new Associate Newsletter Editor. Saurabh has more than eight years of experience in knowledge management principles, information management, and software documentation.

Saurabh has contributed more than 50 articles and research papers to various magazines and journals.

He is the co-founder and current administrator of the KnowGenesis online library for technical communication – India's first online library for technical communication, and the Editor-in-chief of the *KnowGenesis International Journal for Technical Communication* (IJTC).

Putting the Newsletter Online


Our goal for the December issue of *Directives* is to put



the newsletter online as a series of Web pages within

the Management SIG Web site. We're really looking forward to having the newsletter available in this format as well as retaining the PDF format for those who prefer that means of delivery.

Not only are we putting the newsletter online, we're also going to enter our "makeover" in a few STC publications competitions.

If anyone who reads the newsletter has Web design experience and wants to help us with this project, please let [me](#) know as soon as possible! 

FEATURE ARTICLE

How to Write an Effective White Paper

By [Jean Church](#), Member, Northeast Ohio chapter

(This article originally appeared in Lines and Letters, the Northeast Ohio chapter newsletter.)

Of all the sessions I attended at the [2007 Annual STC] Conference, I liked this session the best. Manuel Gordon was a good speaker and gave clear instructions for constructing five types of white papers. His logic seemed sound and founded on his past successes. I feel I am much better prepared to write a white paper now that I took his session, and I hope to have the opportunity to write one where I work.

Some of my notes from this session follow:

A white paper is a pre-sale document that is designed to educate and inform potential customers who have not yet made up their minds.

A white paper:

- Contains useful information that is intended to generate leads; build trust; and build credibility
- Form and content is not quite:
 - A technical manual; not dry
 - A research paper; not academic
 - An article by a journalist
 - A glossy brochure
- Definitely NOT marketing fluff
- No name of the product goes in the title
- Sounds authoritative, but is not worldly; does not talk down or use clichés

A white paper explains your technology:

- Why we chose to do it this way
- Why it's efficient
- Why it's robust
- Why it will improve their ROI
- Why they should use our product

Some pitfalls:

- Don't write for everyone; choose your audience
- Limit the scope to one of these document types
- Length: 4-24 pages; 10 is typical
- Tone: neutral, authoritative; NO HYPE!!!!

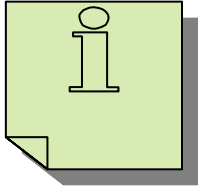
Success factors include:

- Mandatory, strong, in-house support, preferably from a VP or higher
- Short deadline that is unmovable – to make people act
- Company has something to say

- Writer has good understanding of the product
- Ready access to SMEs
- Everyone shares ownership and a sense of urgency

Types of white papers include:

- When buyers are researching a problem (Technology Guide,



Position Paper, Business Benefits Paper)

- When buyers

are making their selections (Competitive Review, Evaluator's Guide)

Technology Guide

- Explains the Business/Technology problem
- Explains the product's underlying technology
- How technology solves a problem
- How OUR technology is better than the competitors'
- May NOT mention the product's name – not trying to sell
- Trying to educate the customer
- It's about you, the customer, and the customer's problem

Position Paper

- Explains and advocates a standard, trend, or technology
- Explains why this standard, trend, or technology is important to the customer and the benefits of this business/technology

- Says why the world, and the customer, should move in this direction to stay competitive
- Do NOT mention the product name
- Best Practices: state that our products can do these "things" for YOU!

Business Benefits Paper

- Explains the Business/Technology problem
- Explains the product's underlying technology
- How technology solves a problem
- How OUR technology is better than the competitors'
- MAY mention the product's name
- Must use "ROI" on every page
- Aimed at non-technical people
- This is a "How to Sell Your Boss"-type of paper
- Should be short; five pages max

Competitive Review

- Positions your product
- Differentiates it from others
- Try to create a checklist that favors your product
- Usually describes your product


Evaluator's Guide

- Provides thorough explanation of features and functionality
- How to quickly install and deploy
- Outlines the "Getting Started" tasks
- Focus is on the product
- Geared toward the IT Manager

Here are some Web sites from the session speakers:

- www.gordonandgordon.com/downloads/State_of_the_White_Paper_2004.pdf
- <http://www.thatwhitepaper.orguy.com>
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): <http://www.thatwhitepaper.orguy.com/faq.html>
- How to use white papers to grow a healthy crop of leads: 20 tips from Bitpipe and KnowledgeStorm: http://www.thatwhitepaper.orguy.com/article_bitpipe_andknowledgestorm.html
- White papers help Vircom build mindshare, win awards, and sell software (case study and 19+ tips you can use to follow their lead) http://www.thatwhitepaper.orguy.com/article_vircom.html

Here are some Web sites where you can find white papers:

- <http://www.knowledgestorm.com/>
- <http://www.bitpipe.com/>
- <http://www.itpapers.com/>
- <http://www.itworld.com/whitepapers/>
- http://www.softwareceo.com/white_papers.php
- <http://www.forrester.com/>
- <http://www.aberdeen.com/> (these are expensive – you are buying their name and company letterhead)
- <http://www.idc.com> 

ARTICLES

Exposing Underachievers

By [Jan Lowry](#), *Managing Newsletter Editor*

It's not always easy to spot the underachievers in your group. You may have employees who seem unenthusiastic about receiving a



great assignment, or rarely ask for additional work, but that doesn't necessarily mean those people are your underachievers.

So, how do you spot underachievers? You look for employees who continually use the following statements:


- *"We've tried that before."* Solution? Convince the employee that just because it didn't work before doesn't mean it won't work now.
- *"That will never work."* Solution? Get the employee to look at the project in a more positive light. If you can't change the person's mind, don't put him on the project team – he'll just try to convince everyone else that the project is doomed to fail.
- *"They'll never let us do that."* The employee probably has had some of

her ideas ignored and blames management for the lack of interest. Consequently, she thinks management will just turn down this new idea, too. Solution? Put her on several simple projects that you absolutely know will succeed, then encourage her to share her ideas by discussing them with a trusted colleague or friend before presenting the ideas you (and possibly your manager).

- *"Yes, but..."* The word "but" is just another word for "no." Solution? Try getting your employees to follow your example of saying, "yes, and ...". Using this phrase emphasizes how you'll accomplish the goal instead of finding fault with it.
- *"That's not how I would do it."* Some employees think the resolution is more important than successfully completing the goal. Solution? Prove to them that there are several ways to arrive at the same goal and that criticism just gets in the way of completing the process and reaching the goal.
- *"Nobody else does it that way."* Everyone on your staff probably has a different idea of how to get a project done because they all came to you from other employers and other experiences. How do they know no one else does it that way? Solution? Ask them to find another way to do it so that your department

can be more competitive than other documentation companies. Encourage employees to get feedback from other people in the organization, including other members of the documentation team. And, talk about the possibility of "showing off" your new and different idea by submitting the project to an STC competition for feedback.

- *"We have more than enough good ideas."* Solution? Remind your employees that there's no such thing as too many good ideas. And, if some of your initial projects fail, you'll need every one of those extra ideas.
- *"Whose idea was this anyway"?* Instead of learning from their errors, some employees like to attach the blame for failed projects to other employees and managers. Solution? If a project fails or an idea doesn't work as expected, get your staff together to talk about what went wrong. Do not talk about who made the mistakes; no one needs to be identified as the person who messed up the project. Focus instead on doing the project right the next time around.

(For more information about this and other related topics, read ["Forget for Success: Walking Away From Outdated, Counter-productive Beliefs and People Practices,"](#) by Eric Harvey and Steve Ventura.) 

Gear up for Next Year's Appraisal, Now

By [Rahul Prabhakar](#)

(This article originally appeared on the author's Web site at <http://2brahulprabhakar.blog.spot.com/>)

So, you've had a bad appraisal. What can you possibly do to avert the damage, before the company writes you off as deadwood?



Considering most performance appraisals are formally conducted once or twice a year, you can use the evaluation period as an opportunity to summarize what you have demonstrated.

Appraisals often state the goals, roles, and expectations for the coming year...perhaps all of them were not met or addressed as expected. Before you get all worked up and annoyed with the appraiser, let the raging and rampaging devil in you calm down somewhat, and evaluate your appraisal on a broader level.

In anticipation of your next appraisal, you can gear up by adding some valuable tools in your arsenal.

A bad appraisal does not come as a surprise, unless the employee is an earthling and the manager a Martian, and there is a complete

mismatch in just about everything.

The company has already invested heavily in you as an employee, and just one bad appraisal should not push them in firing you. Bear in mind, the appraisal is in line with the company goals – not just your personal preferences (which are also a part, but a secondary one.)

Reviewers' Recommendations

Did you record the reviewers' recommendations during your last appraisal? If your answer is in the affirmative, this may be the ideal time to act on those suggestions. See what went bad in the last appraisal and why. Notwithstanding their criticism, reviewers often try to get you on the right track, ensuring you meet the company-defined goals with proper quality measures. Do not brush aside their feedback; try to understand and incorporate the same into your work.

As Bill Swallow, Engineering Practices Leader (Documentation) at Pitney Bowes MapInfo, puts it, "Feedback should always be delivered at the end of a project. If it's not, the project leadership isn't doing its job. Yearly reviews also have value; they track improvement over time. You can have a good project and a horrible project. A project by project review only gives you localized feedback, but a yearly review by someone employed as your manager (one who is responsible not only for your performance,

but also for coaching you through your career growth) looks at everything, not just project work, over the past year and evaluates you on your total performance. Or, at least they should be."

Disconnect the Ego

Make certain you understand what the rating means, as specifically as possible. A skilled manager will have very specific data points, describing the behavior and results that lead to the appraisal. Address those issues and make sure your efforts are noted. Remember it is not 'you' under fire, but 'your results.' Disconnect your ego as much as possible, and form a conversation.

Define Your Job Description

Consider your job description. Is it clearly defined? Do you completely understand your role, duties, and responsibilities within the company? More importantly, does your manager, reviewer, or appraiser have a clear understanding about it? If not, press the panic button immediately.

Position Goals Alongside Challenges

Review each goal or target set out for you during the last evaluation. Once you have a clear understanding of the goals, position them alongside challenges. Some challenges can restrict you from meeting the company's goals. Talk to your reviewer about it and garner his support. If the support is hard to come by, ask him to assess your performance in

the light of the problems and frustrations faced.

Press for Training or Extra Resources

Suggest the provision of extra resources or specific training opportunities, stressing the benefits that will accrue to the company. Summarize the conferences, seminars, and training courses attended in the assessment form.

Keep a Check on Your Accomplishments

Maintain a regular status report of your tasks at workplace throughout the year. This report can be



daily, weekly, or monthly. If you use project management software like Microsoft Project, use the tool to track your critical deadlines and milestones. In addition, generate reports of your work after accomplishing a particular task to assess the time spent on each project. Since it is practically impossible to remember your accomplishments during the evaluation period, you can use these reports to highlight projects completed on or before time.

Some projects you worked on will garner more appreciation and applause from stakeholders than the others. Appreciation will usually come in the form of verbal praises, emails, monetary

benefits, special bonuses, team outings, and so on. Create a file or folder to save all the appreciation notes and e-mails from stakeholders, including those from clients, supervisors, or senior people in your department/ team/ company.

Do not hesitate to request a letter of recommendation in case you receive a special mention for your efforts in any project. Certification, press releases, newspaper articles, testimonials, and other awards also hold prominence, provided they enhance the quality of your allocated work.

Finally, describe your contributions and achievements, along with the difficulties encountered.

Strike a Rapport with the Stakeholders

Track your progress and accomplishments on your own. While a skilled manager will try to "catch you doing good things," a busy one may not be aware of all you do. Make certain you can tell your boss everything (sell yourself), so that he or she has the data to appraise your efforts appropriately.

Jayanath Perera, a senior techie at Autodesk, Singapore, states, "In my company, performance appraisals are linked to the goals for that year. My manager and I sit down together at the beginning of the year and set goals. We try to use SMART goals. At the end of the year, we sit and chat about how well these goals were achieved."

An integral part of our appraisal process is 360-degree feedback forms. My immediate supervisor is overseas, and never gets to see what time I arrive at the office or leave for home. She depends on the feedback that my peers or those I work with give her. I, too, have to provide 360-degree feedback on others. I have to state five things that went right and five things that need improvement. All statements must be substantiated with an actual incident that happened. This also means that I can't suck up to my boss and be nasty to others.

Selling your services is a continuous process. You need to master the art of interacting with stakeholders for seeking project information or requirements. While it is not necessary to befriend the stakeholders every time, sharing positive vibes with people you work for certainly does not hurt. More often than not, happy clients can get your company's repeat business or references to other prospective clients. If you are successful in bringing business to the company, it will directly translate into better grades during appraisals. Therefore, work out a way to build a rapport with stakeholders.

Highlight the Additional Responsibilities

Have you taken on any additional responsibilities or extra projects after your last appraisal? The reviewer must be aware that you are capable of handling extra work. By being indispensable

to the company, your services can be used for multiple projects, which in turn can put you in a better stead than the rest of your colleagues. What you are doing in the process is increasing your value to the company.

Deal with Facts and Handle Criticism

A good manager would answer all your questions at the time of delivering the appraisal. Try to leverage this opportunity by being open-minded and cooperative. Fix whatever you were doing that was "bad." Do not hide in your shell. Acknowledge problems, and deal with criticism using a positive approach. Ask for clarification. It is highly unlikely you will be in complete agreement with the appraiser. If you disagree about your goals or targets, say so in as many words, but assertively.

Prashanth Vijayan, a senior technical writer at Manhattan Associates India, says, "Where I work, an employee who is found to be below par is sent on a 'PPP.' It's some sort of improvement program where someone watches every step the employee takes in the next six months. If the observer thinks that the employee has not improved, he or she is shown the door."

I have been on both sides of the appraisal process. When I was at the receiving end, I would hate the whole process and take advice with a pinch of salt. When I started appraising my team

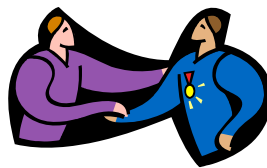
members, I understood how elaborate our appraisal process is. We do a "normalization" with other departments (such as QA and Development) and then with other teams (Services organization). Each team leader or manager has to fight it out with her counterpart in other departments to justify a rating. This ensures the appraisal is not lopsided.

Summarize Your Overall Contribution to the Company

Employers love the word "contribution." Stress your overall contribution to the company, focusing on the value to stakeholders. Tell the appraiser how you could do more than you were hired to or how something you did saved the company some dough.

Perform a Trial Run

Before you head for the next appraisal, prepare documentation, and try your arguments on some friends. Consider objections your manager might raise during the evaluation. Do not forget to tie your answers around how you have helped the company grow.



Finally, yet importantly, you have been eyeing that promotion, and it is time to prepare the turf and put your best foot forward. If it is a fair appraisal given by a good manager, then use it to help turn your weak areas into

strengths. Otherwise, head for the exit.

[Rahul Prabahakar](#) is a full-time technical writer with Samsung Electronics Company Limited in South Korea. He is a leading member of the Indian technical writing community, having spearheaded several initiatives to elevate the profession in the country. Rahul's articles have appeared in print and in online magazines such as PC Magazine, Dataquest, The Smart Techie, IIPM's India Economy Review, The Economic Times, INTERCOM, and Directives. 

Looking into Graduate Schools?

A member of the Management SIG listserv recently asked for information on graduate degree programs in technical communications.

Features of a Technical Communications Graduate School Program

Listserv member [Kit Brown](#), who graduated from Colorado State University with an MS in Technical Communications



in 1991, replied to the listserv post with a list of features she considers important in a technical communications graduate school program.

(Editor's Note: These are just some of Kit's thoughts about graduate studies in technical

communications. Also, note that her response was to a specific question posted on the listserv. For further discussion of this topic, see the listserv's archives from the past 2-3 weeks.)

According to Kit:

- "An MS in technical communications is more rigorous and science-based than an MA, and has a research/statistics requirement that is lacking in the MA (and in my opinion you more hire-able)
- It is not enough to have the latest technology available, but the program needs to be flexible enough to react to trends in industry, give you a good grounding in how to learn new technology, and [teach] logic/critical thinking
- It needs to have a strong business/project management component
- It needs to focus on the information design/architecture aspects of technical communications (these concepts can be applied universally because the focus is on analysis and problem-solving rather than specifics)
- It needs to provide a good grounding in usability analysis/testing and user interface design
- It needs to provide a foundation for instructional design
- It needs to provide at least a conceptual understanding of internationalization, globalization, and international business

- It needs to emphasize learning to work on teams, both company-located and virtual
- Writing/editing skills also are obviously needed, but the future of being a senior technical communicator is oriented more toward the ability to design information
- The program should include flow/architecture and give you an understanding of how people use and acquire information/knowledge
- Additional classes in organizational psychology/psychology of learning would also be good classes to take
- There should be a requirement to be proficient in a technical area (for example, biology, chemistry, computers, engineering, and so on.)
- There should be classes that explore beyond corporate technical communications opportunities (for example, technical journalism, technical marketing writing, science writing, book and Web publishing, and so on.)"

Kit then referred the listserv poster to the STC Academic database for more information:

<http://www.stc.org/academic/index.aspx>.

Graduate Studies at Mercer

Listserv poster [George Hayhoe](#), Director of the MS Program in Technical Communication Management in the Department of

Technical Communication at the Mercer University School of Engineering also responded to the posting on graduate studies in technical communication.

"Mercer University's MS program in technical communication management is broader than publications management and narrower than management," Hayhoe said. "It addresses management of the technical communication functions within an enterprise."

"Our audience consists of those who aspire to managing one or more of these functions, as well as those who currently are managers but whose companies require that they obtain a master's degree to advance further. All of our students must have at least three years of work experience, but the average is more than 10 years' experience."

The program at Mercer includes publications management (without the presswork component) as one half of one of the 10 required courses.



Other courses include usability, multimedia, and knowledge management.

Instead of focusing exclusively on the theory or the "how to" as other graduate programs do, Mercer's program considers what managers need to know to use the results of usability


studies to improve their information product portfolios, to manage multimedia projects, to start up a knowledge management pilot, or to implement a content management strategy, Hayhoe says.

"Students don't learn to use any tools in our program, but they do learn how to evaluate tools of various kinds."

According to Hayhoe, "three of the four faculty members in the program have extensive industry experience, including significant management experience in a variety of companies. Two are winners of STC's Jay Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication."

All are active members of STC, regularly attend STC conferences, and work to stay informed about trends in industry, Hayhoe adds.

"Projects in our courses have a practical focus and often require students to apply what they have learned in the course in their own workplaces.

Hayhoe says "this isn't the right program for everyone interested in graduate study in our field." But he encourages anyone interested in pursuing technical communication management to give [Mercer University](#) a look. 

Upcoming Conferences

(Editor's note: Here are two upcoming conferences that look like good investments. "DocTrain East 2007" includes a special program for managers, while "The Crucial Communicator" offers several interesting sessions aimed directly at managers.)



If you're a documentation manager, think about attending the [Documentation and Training East Conference](#) October 16-29 in Lowell, MA.

There's even a special program just for managers (although you can attend any sessions) that covers the following topics:

- The X Factor in Content Management
- Strategies For Communicating The Value of Structured XML
- Authoring To Authors
- Avoiding the Content Conveyor Belt Trap: Enabling Interdepartmental Collaboration
- Understanding and Communicating the Financial Impact of XML and DITA
- Successful Processes for Selecting a Content Management System: How to Become an Expert in Technology Acquisition


- Content Quality Management: Using Software to Manage Quality and Track Metrics
- Before and After Implementing a Content Management System: My Experience At GE Healthcare

According to [Scott Abel \(The Content Wrangler\)](#), one of the conference planners and presenters, "the Management Summit at DocTrain East is an opportunity for managers to learn how business-critical technologies like content management and industry standards like DITA can impact their organizations (the pros and cons)."

Scott says he doesn't know many managers who wouldn't benefit from this 2-day intensive program.

Since the Management Summit is a special track at DocTrain, Scott says there is no additional cost to attend the Management Summit. "If you buy a ticket to the DocTrain conference, you can attend the summit and the other three days of workshops; it's a great deal."

Scott says conference attendees "will learn to avoid the big mistakes made by other writing groups and discover how to communicate the value of new technologies to upper management (by first learning how to measure what it costs them to do business today)."

To learn more about the DocTrain Management Summit, go to: http://www.doctrain.com/east/program_by_track/C52/. 

The Crucial Communicator

By [Bob Young](#), President,
Northeast Ohio chapter

If you didn't have an opportunity to attend the STC Conference in Minneapolis this year or want to hone your technical communication skills, we have the ticket (an affordable one) for you!

[The Crucial Communicator](#), the Northeast Ohio STC Chapter's Regional Conference, is Friday, October 12, 2007, from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn and Gateway Conference Center in downtown Cleveland.

Session topics include Web 2.0, structured authoring, Captivate for e-Learning, DITA, integrated authoring and translation, international documentation standards, and XML solutions. Dr. Melvin Smith of Case Western Reserve University will give the opening keynote address on "Emotional Intelligence."

List of Presenters and Topics

- Scott Abel:
"Understanding Web. 2.0 and Its Impact on Technical Communication"
- Lisa Adair, Kelly Graham:
"Growing and Managing a Formal Editing Process"

- Keiran Dunne: "Bridging the Gap between Authoring and Translation"
- Richard Hodgkinson: "International Standards for Software Documentation"
- Alan Houser: "The Darwin Information Typing Architecture: What it Means for Technical Communication"
- Neil Perlin (Two Presentations): "Structured Authoring Without FrameMaker or DITA" and "Creating Visual Training Using Captivate"
- Annette D. Reilly: "Xtreme Management for Technical Communication"
- Thea Teich: "When Did Google Become a Verb?: American English as a Moving Target"
- Russell Ward: "A Bit of XML to Solve a Boatload of Problems"

Meet Presenters

Meet notable STC presenters such as Neil Perlin, Scott Abel, and STC Executive Director Susan Burton.

Also, we are privileged to have the ISO JTC 1 SC7/WG2 Group, international experts in standards and user documentation from the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

Vendor Demos

MadCap Software, Star Group and The Geo Group will demonstrate their latest products and services.

Hotel Discount


There is a discount on rooms at the Hilton for \$109 per night if you make your reservations before September 10. Call 1-216-658-6400 and ask for the "NEO" block code.

"Rock & Write" Welcome Reception

Join us Thursday night for a complimentary reception at the Hilton Hotel, starting at 5 p.m. This will be a wonderful opportunity to network with peers, guests, sponsors and vendors. Dinner will follow at the Hard Rock Café for \$25 per person.

Join Us in Cleveland

This learning opportunity is available at an incredibly low price of just \$150 per STC member. Register today at www.neostc.org/conf. Space is limited.

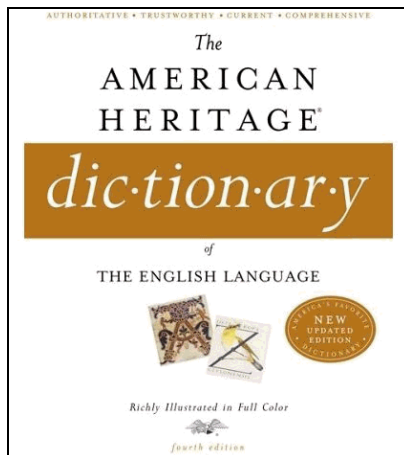
Bob Young is a senior member of the Northeast Ohio chapter of STC and a past-president of the chapter for 2005-2006. As a Senior Documentation Specialist for MAXIMUS, Inc., which develops and maintains judicial software applications, Bob is responsible for all content, editing, and the design of user manuals in PDF and online formats for case, jury, and jail management applications. 

Book Review

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

By [Jeanette Evans](#), Member, Northeast Ohio chapter

The fourth edition of [The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language](#) (AHD) includes, according to its Web site, revised biographical and geographical entries as well as up-to-date charts and tables for topics such as world currencies and chemical elements.



Among the 500 entries new to this update are:

Amber Alert, blogosphere, gravitino, halo effect, hawala, lycopene, malware, micropolis, proteome, Qi Gong, SARS, shout-out, speed dating, Sudoku, Texas hold'em, text message, and wiki

(Wiki)pedia explains the history of this dictionary, noting that the first edition

appeared in 1969. Its creation was spurred by the controversy over the Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

James Parton, the owner of the history magazine *American Heritage*, was appalled by the permissiveness of Webster's Third, published in 1961, and tried to buy the G. and C. Merriam Company so he could undo the changes. When that failed, he contracted with Houghton to publish a new dictionary. The AHD was edited by William Morris and relied on a usage panel of 105 writers, speakers, and eminent persons for usage notes. The AHD made the innovative step of combining prescriptive elements (how language should be used) and descriptive information (how it actually is used).

The AHD is larger than a desk dictionary but smaller than *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* or *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*. A lower-priced college edition includes monochrome printing. This dictionary can also be purchased with a fully loadable CD-ROM that contains the entire text of the updated Fourth Edition, 68,000 audio pronunciations, 1,000 full-color photographs and illustrations, and a college-level thesaurus with more than 260,000 synonyms. The CD-ROM has spell-check capability and can be used in conjunction with any Microsoft Office

application to get definitions at the click of a mouse.

This updated edition does not disappoint. The content is as good as ever, including the helpful usage notes. The paper version still has the striking illustrations and beautiful packaging that includes the recessed index tabs.

In *Slaying the English Jargon* (an STC publication), Fern Rook notes that there are many English language dictionaries. The ones she considers to be the best are the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the M-W unabridged and collegiate dictionaries, and the AHD. Others, she notes, are the Random House unabridged and collegiate dictionaries and *Webster's New World Dictionary* (from World publishing). Several others use the Webster name.


Rook says that most dictionaries do a good job in the four most important functions of spelling, meaning, pronunciation, and syllabification. However, there are differences in other areas that you should consider when deciding on purchase or use of a new dictionary. She cautioned us by pointing out Dr. Samuel Johnson's statement that dictionaries are like new watches: the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true.

Rook stated that the M-W unabridged is the most prestigious in the United States, considered to be the

authority by librarians and linguists. The appearance of *The American Heritage Dictionary* was notable in that it was the first to have made the bestseller list. M-W dictionaries concentrate on what is widely used. The AHD provides usage guidelines for those who need to find out whether a word is considered to be standard usage. For example, for "grub," AHD shows "Slang Food" in the entry. M-W shows simply "food" for its entry.

Rook says one of the best features of the AHD is that it lists the most common meaning first, not the historical order, as M-W does. AHD is the most readable dictionary. If you need to know how a word is commonly used, AHD is a good choice. An M-W dictionary or *The Oxford English Dictionary* is a good choice if you need to know historical information about a word.

[The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition](#), Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, \$60.00, 2112 pages, hardcover, ISBN-10: 0618701729

Jeanette Evans is a senior member of the Northeast Ohio chapter of STC. Jeanette writes many articles for various STC publications. This article originally appeared in "Lines & Letters," the Northeast Ohio chapter newsletter. 

Employment Opportunities

Occasionally, this newsletter will highlight management-level job positions. Other resources include the following.


STC Career Center

You can visit the STC Technical Communication Career Center at <http://jobs.stc.org> for employment opportunities in your geographic area. 

SIG Employment Postings

The Management SIG's [discussion](#) listserv occasionally includes job postings. To locate these postings, join the listserv by visiting <http://www.stcsig.org/mgt/HotTopics.htm>. 

Educational News

Tell us about a great degree or certificate program, a non-STC-related seminar that you've attended, or other educationally-related events that may appeal to technical communicators. 

Letters to the Editor

We always welcome letters to the [editor](#).



Also, if you're interested in writing an article, a series of articles, or a book review, please contact the editor.

Thanks for your feedback! 

Events Calendar

STC Telephone Seminars Time 1 pm-2:20 pm EST Cost \$99

The seminar program for this year (August 2007 - May 2008) is currently being developed.

STC and Non-STC Events

October 04, 2007
DITA East 2007 Conference
Raleigh, North Carolina
<http://www.travelthepath.com/dita2007/ditalocationeast.shtml>

October 12, 2007
STC Region 4 Conference: The Crucial Communicator
Cleveland, Ohio
<http://www.neostc.org/conf/>

October 16-20, 2007
DocTrain EAST 2007: Advancing Your Career
Lowell, MA
www.doctrain.com

October 22, 2007
FrameMaker 2007 Chautauqua
Raleigh, North Carolina
<http://www.travelthepath.com/conf/chautindex.html>

November 26, 2007
Boston, MA
Web Content Management - CM Pros Fall 2007 Summit
www.cmprosevents.org