



Management

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But She's Such a Hard Worker: When You're Asked to Consider Unqualified Applicants

by Kris Henige

Unless you work for yourself, or your company's primary business is technical communication, you will probably be asked at some point in your management career to interview someone without proper skills or training for an opening in your technical communication department.

place to go after his boss retires, her department is being eliminated, or he is too smart for their current job.

While these requests are annoying and frustrating, I have found ways to make them opportunities for educating, building business, and developing goodwill. And, I can

could tell from the tone in his voice that what I was interpreting as an edict to hire was simply a request for an informational interview. He just wanted to help a loyal employee find some direction and stay with the company. I did talk to her, and was able to suggest other areas in the company where her skills might fit.

“While these requests are annoying and frustrating, I have found ways to make them opportunities for educating, building business, and developing goodwill.”

Update the job description, or create one if none exists. The biggest hiring mistake made in my department was based on an outdated job description. It listed "keyboarding skills" as a job requirement, and it was the early 1990s!

My company requires that all job openings be posted internally for three days to allow other employees to apply. Whenever I hire an entry-level writer, I am approached at least once by a manager from HR, EEO, or elsewhere asking me to consider someone, usually from the secretarial or administrative ranks, for the job. When I tell them I only hire formally trained writers, I usually hear one of the following responses about the applicant: she's a hard worker, he needs a

still hire the writer I want.

Find out what you're really being asked to do. Our mailroom functions were outsourced a few years ago, and one of the employees that was rehired by the outsourcing firm was canvassing the building for a job so she could "stay" at my company. One of her managers asked me to interview her for the entry-level technical writer job that was posted. As I started to give my "only qualified writers" speech, the manager said, "That's fine...just talk to her, OK?" I

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Charlie's Column

by Charlie Breuninger

I'm outta here! Yes, indeed. My term as Manager of the Management SIG is officially over. I've had a terrific, four-year run, met many interesting people, and learned a lot about herding cats! I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed time, energy, and money to the SIG during my tenure. We've done many good things together, and the SIG today, with well over 1,000 members, is strong and healthy. I look forward to many more years of being a contributing member of the SIG.

Leadership team changes

In addition to me stepping down, we've had lots of recent changes on the SIG leadership team. Doreen Mannion, our fearless list-

Melissa Lowery has volunteered to be our new membership coordinator. This position involves sending out welcome packets to new SIG members. I'd like to thank Melissa for volunteering to help out and JoAnn Hackos and Comtech Services for providing this valuable service since the SIG's inception.

We'd also like to welcome Melissa Guthrie as the new Managing Editor for our web site. Melissa is taking over from Denise Roth. Thanks, Denise! Kudos also to Bill Albing, who started up and continues to provide critical technical support for the site.

Thanks to Kathleen Stehly for a great job as Production Editor for our newsletter, and special thanks to Brenda Huettnner, who will be

and personable manager assume leadership of the SIG. De took over management responsibility at the SIG business meeting at the 46th Annual Conference in Cincinnati.

Good Bye!

As I said, it's been great. I'd like to close with a note of thanks to JoAnn Hackos, who decided STC should have a Management SIG and recruited me to help her get it started. The SIG owes its existence to her vision and leadership, and I credit my term as SIG manager and my participation in many other STC initiatives and activities to her as well. Thank you, JoAnn, for your interest and support.

And thanks to all of you for a wonderful experience. Best wishes, health, and happiness!

Charlie Breuninger

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“We've done many good things together, and the SIG today, with well over 1,000 members, is strong and healthy.”

serv administrator, has handed over the list to Joseph van Oss. I'd like to thank Doreen for a wonderful job getting the list up and running and seeing the list through a period of rapid growth. I'd also like to welcome Joseph to the SIG leadership team.

continuing as Managing Editor for the newsletter. Brenda and Kathleen have enthusiastically engineered three issues of the newsletter since the last conference, which is a record for us.

Finally, please welcome De Murr as the new Manager of the Management SIG. De is a long-time STC member who has held numerous leadership positions at the local, regional, and Society level. We're fortunate to have such an experienced, insightful,

Hard Worker

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Besides discouraging unqualified applicants, a well-developed job description can educate your HR department on core competencies for technical communicators. Don't make the description so detailed that it will be outdated in a year, but focus instead on the traits of a great technical communicator that apply year in, year out. For me, those include superior writing and editing skills, the ability to keep up with changing technologies, and commitment to the field. I do not request specific software knowledge because that can be taught after someone is hired.

Many of the job descriptions posted in my building are so generic they seem to come from the same template. They might have been crafted to allow maximum "flexibility," but that is not appropriate for my department. If your job description could apply to anyone, don't be surprised if anyone applies.

Test for skills. While some experienced technical communicators find skills testing insulting, I have found it to be the only way to prove that someone is truly unqualified.

Talk to all internal applicants, no matter how unqualified. Why waste my time when I know a person isn't right for the job?

Because not only can I educate this person (and their boss) about

“While some experienced technical communicators find skills testing insulting, I have found it to be the only way to prove that someone is truly unqualified.”

I can spend days telling people what is required of a successful technical communicator, but showing concrete evidence that an applicant cannot spell or write a coherent sentence makes the point better than preaching. The tests show the applicants what kind of work they would do if hired, and help me identify any skill gaps in the person I eventually do hire.

The tests have been approved by our HR department, and are given to all internal and external applicants. Resumes and portfolios can inflate accomplishments and contributions, so the skills tests are the most objective tool I have.

my department and the technical communication field, but I might also gain new clients if there is a need for the services my department provides.

While the above strategies may not completely eliminate unqualified applicants and uninformed managers, they can help you gain control of the situation and educate others about the value of technical communication.

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To subscribe to the Management SIG listserv, send a note to majordomo@stc.org.
In the body of the note, enter:

subscribe stcmgmtpic-l youremailaddress

To remove your name from the Management SIG listserv, send a note to majordomo@stc.org. In the body of the note, enter:

unsubscribe stcmgmtpic-l youremailaddress

Note that the character after the hyphen is a lower-case L.

New Webmaster is Here to Serve

by *Melissa Guthrie*

As the new webmaster of the STC Management SIG web site, I'd like to start off by saying, "I'm here to serve." My goal is to make the site a valuable resource for SIG members and others who manage technical communicators or technical communication projects.

I'm a new member of the Management SIG and an on-again, off-again member of STC. For the past several years, I've been working as an organizational

I'll research topics and provide links to the best articles and reference sites I can find. I'll post information about upcoming conferences and link to the most educational and informative consultant sites.

What changes can you expect to see? You can expect to see a gradual evolution of the site, not an overnight transformation. Outdated content will be removed or moved to an archive section. Graphics will be minimal until the

- Managing stressed-out and overworked communicators
- Negotiating for workable development schedules
- Providing just-in-time training
- Streamlining processes to reduce redundancy
- Developing processes to create single-sourced documents

As more SIG members visit and use the site, I'll investigate ways to make the site more interactive by adding a search engine, content request forms, and surveys. I'll also work with interested SIG members and volunteers to develop a graphical interface that reflects the interests and professionalism of SIG members. In the process, the site will support and broaden other STC and SIG activities, and increase what the Management SIG can do for its members. If you have ideas or suggestions about the SIG web site, send them to me at tak2mel@aol.com. I'm at your service.

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“My goal is to make the site a valuable resource for SIG members and others who manage technical communicators or technical communication projects.”

communicator, focusing on developing and maintaining useful content for several corporate web sites. During this time, I've been active in the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), developing and maintaining a chapter web site, and giving several conference presentations on web-based communications.

As I begin work on the STC Management SIG web site, I plan to focus on providing useful information organized to be quickly and easily accessible. To learn what information SIG members want to see, I'll be lurking on the listserv, reading STC publications, and following up on tips SIG members send me.

content begins to take form. I'll develop a flexible navigation structure that is likely to change often as SIG members identify additional topics that interest them. Recent changes to the site (What's New) will be listed on the top-level page, as will a description of what types of information you will find as you follow each link off that page.

By mid-summer, you should see links to information on the following topics:

Check Out Our Web Site!

Access the Management SIG through the main STC web page at:
<http://www.stc-va.org/>

OR go directly to our page at:
<http://www.stc.org/pics/mgmt/>

HELP WANTED

The STC Management SIG needs your help! We have lots of opportunities for you to gain experience, learn new skills, and help the other members of the Management SIG. After all, the SIG exists to serve its members - all 1,000+ of us!

Web Site

We need people to suggest and contribute content; ideas for links; graphic design and production; and HTML coding, PERL scripting, and other kinds of assistance. Contact our Webmaster Melissa Guthrie at tak2me1@aol.com to volunteer.

Management Newsletter

As a manager, you know what the hot topics are in your field. Share your knowledge with fellow SIG members by submitting articles for inclusion in the next issue of "Management". You'll get your own byline and a great sample for your portfolio.

Submitting an article is easy - just send it by email to the editor at bphuettner@aol.com. If you send it as an attachment, make sure that you include your name and chapter with the text of your article. Its amazing how things can get separated accidentally.

Even if you can't commit to writing an article, you can help out by editing other articles, or suggesting topics. To volunteer to help with this newsletter, contact the Managing Editor, Brenda Huettner, at bphuettner@aol.com.

Conference 2000

You've heard lots of talk already about the year 2000, so it isn't too early to start planning for next year's SIG activities. The 47th Annual Conference will be held May 21st through 24th, 2000. The conference theme is "Renaissance Communicators - A Vision of Our Future", and the location will be sunny Orlando Florida.

As in the past, the Management SIG plans to sponsor many interesting sessions, including our ever-popular progressions. If you would like to be a part of the progressions, or can help out in any other way, contact any of the SIG Team Members. You can download a copy of the Call for Proposals from the STC website at <http://www.stc.org/conference>. Remember, the deadline is August 1, 1999, so get those proposals in!

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The staff of Management welcomes any news and information that would be of interest to members of the SIG. Please contact the Managing Editor for information about submitting articles.

Visit the Management SIG web site at <http://www.stc.org/pics/mgmt/>