



Management

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New Teams Step Up to Help the Boss

By Mike Donoghue

"A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him . . . But of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: We did this ourselves."

- Lau-Tzu, sixth century Chinese philosopher

communications department increase due to growing complexities of the job and advancements in information distribution technology, the focus and guidance that a manager provides in directing a department is becoming increasingly harder to maintain.

ative ideas, or by delegating more than just routine jobs (such as filling out forms) . . . people who have never been asked for the time of day are given problem-solving tools and opportunities to contribute."

- James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*

"When a manager shares responsibility and disburses some of that authority to staff teams, both managers and staff members quickly feel the rewards."

Here we are in the Information Age. Do you feel informed or just overwhelmed? Are you going to meetings for every project under the sun? How about that overload of e-mail from human resources and senior management? Tired? Tapped out? Maybe this is a good opportunity to disperse some of that managerial weight off your shoulders.

The basis for most traditional management structures is a pyramid concept where the manager resides at the top and distributes tasks downward to staff members. This system provides managers with power and authority but requires total control of all departmental issues (i.e., administration, purchasing, etc.) and personal involvement of some degree in all unit projects. As managerial duties of a technical

To help share the burden of managerial decisions, the business community has been slowly adopting the principles of empowered teams. While this concept of team creation is not new, the methodology used to define these teams for a technical communications department has evolved beyond its origins. Inspired from the ideals of Total Quality Management and Self-Managed Teams, these new teams are created by collaborations between managers and staff that help redirect supervisory energies to where they are needed and involve staff in important decisions vital to the success of the unit.

"Look for ways to add challenge to people's work. You can do this by asking people to join you in solving problems or starting a new service or process, by asking them for cre-

For a technical communications and documentation manager, making the transition to an empowered team managerial model is a natural step. The department personnel are trained professionals who already take on a number of roles to meet deadlines, negotiate resources, and manage projects, but usually lack the authority that is inherent to a managerial position. When a manager shares responsibility and disburses some of that authority to staff teams, both managers and staff members quickly feel the rewards.

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"If I don't have to make all the decisions about operational issues, I'll have more time to do strategic planning and relationship management, which ultimately have a lot more value."

-Charles L. Breuninger, Consultant

Creating a Structure

Once senior administration and the unit staff give support to the creation of this shared management environment, the manager then has to negotiate with each area to outline the basic territories of responsibility. Top management commitment and involvement is vital. This process also involves soul-searching on the part of the technical communications manager who needs to evaluate this undertaking to clearly identify those areas over which he or she has strong concerns and may need to retain control. Just as a manager needs to "look inside" to determine if they are up to this challenge, the staff members also need to examine their skills and identify their individual strengths and weaknesses. Honesty, clarity, and approval from all three of these parties is essential if the idea is to take off (and take root).

Another essential part of the process is in the shaping of the teams themselves. In a communications and documentation environment, the composition of these groups varies since the continued evolution in the profession has allowed for more occupational diversity. New disciplines, tools, and business strategies all allow for increased areas of specialization and new avenues for team creation.

Here are some examples of how the core skills of technical communicators can be deployed:

Teams Based on Products/Projects

If it is the nature of a company to make large scale releases, teams can capitalize on that energy and be designed along product lines. A byproduct of this team structure is that product groups within a company may more actively seek a communication team's participation and create closer collaborations for each release.

"Open communication is essential and the most successful team structure is a democratic one."

Teams Based on Discipline

Teams structured by discipline, such as Editing, Internet/Intranet presence, online Help, design and standards, etc., help unit members bolster their skills and learn new ones. Decisions regarding unit direction are made by the people in the trenches because they more closely understand the benefits and limitations.

Functional Teams

Department personnel make decisions such as choosing new employees, project assignments, group and department goals, conflict resolution, travel and training suggestions, implementation of new projects, and resource distribution for resources like new computers, PC hardware, and offices. How many of these routine but essential duties can be handled better by a team process?

Integrated Teams

Integrated teams incorporate many disciplines. A real life example was provided by an engineering firm: each team consisted of a Technical Writing Lead, Contracts Representative, Estimator, Procurement Representative, Configuration Management Reviewer, and Technical Lead. These teams prepare proposals for managers who manage a discipline (for example, technical writing) but who also act as mentors on projects.

After team identities have been agreed upon, team membership then comes into play. Some teams may be more popular than others, so that could raise additional issues and concerns. Having staff members be part of more than one team helps to reduce team popularity problems while also broadening individual knowledge base. Team leadership is another issue that could pose a problem. When possible, all of these decisions need to be made by the group with the manager, including the development of the process on how future decisions are to be made. Open communication is essential and the most successful team structure is a democratic one.

"We also documented the procedure we will follow to assign projects. This precludes the manager always giving the new, important, or cool projects to the one person that is always in the group who is full of energy and ideas and gets things done."

- Susan Strain, VLC

What is the Manager's Role?

It is difficult for a manager to reassign duties they previously performed and watch as staff struggle through them. In most team environments however, a manager must still keep track of high level aspects, as well as

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approve and discuss decisions of the teams. Once the manager trusts the team-based process however, teams must eventually make their own decisions, despite what misgivings the manager may have. It is important that the responsibility of success and failure be shared experiences. A true leader works to motivate, empower, and protect workers, not to control them. After some initial frustration with the change, team members will rebound and have high levels of morale and commitment.

"Only on rare occasions do I intervene in team processes. Because I find it impossible to stay in continuous contact with staff, we have created a team representatives group. Although it looks suspiciously like a supervisor's committee, it isn't one. Teams select their own spokespersons and can rotate representatives whenever they want. We are truly democratizing the workplace."

- Robert Threlkeld, *Distance Education and Self-Managed Teams*

To maintain high morale and commitment, the team culture model must also be recognized and encouraged both by peers and other supervisory staff within the corporation. Various methods can be employed to demonstrate support for the undertaking while also providing credibility to the endeavor. This credibility is an important factor in the performance of the new teams in addition to reinforcing the manager who helped implement the team concept.

The most widely used and appreciated rewards for team players are through promotion and compensation. Upon creating the team environment, members begin deciding roles and responsibilities. Working with the unit, the manager then asks each group to examine the need for team leaders. Discussing the ground rules for leadership including how rotation

and democratic process will operate in the teams and how it provides opportunities for all members.

The manager also needs to discuss with the unit the subject of remuneration. A subject most managers shy away from, financial reward is a well received method of recognition for performing additional work. It demonstrates true acknowledgment for a job well done without lip service. Together the manager and his or her unit determine the benchmarks of success and failure and establish compensation guidelines. Coming up with the right formula for milestone achievement drives teammates to be individually responsible for the group's success.

The End Result

The success of decision-making teams is well documented. When set up correctly, they benefit both management and unit staff members. They are constantly evolving creatures though, and need to be set up to be as dynamic as the workplace they strive to support.

As training and support people are increasingly replaced by hands-on tutorials, multimedia presentations, and other instructional tools, it has become necessary for technical communications departments to

take on additional tasks thereby increasing the overall duties of its management. To better address this condition, supervisors are working to place many managerial duties with trained staff teams. While serving to assist the managerial burden, the distributed responsibility serves to enrich staff and ultimately strengthen the entire unit.

Sources:

The Leadership Challenge

James M. Kouzes, Barry Z. Posner. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 1995

Distance Education and Self-Managed Teams

Robert Threlkeld, Dean, Learning and Technology, California State University, Fresno

Empowered Teams: Creating Self-Directed Work Groups That Improve Quality, Productivity, and Participation.

Richard S. Wellins, William C. Byham, Jeanne M. Wilson, Jossey-Bass, Inc. San Francisco, CA 1991

Team Players and Teamwork

Glen M. Parker, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco 1996



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Pssst . . .

We're on the web.

Visit the Management SIG web site at

<http://stc.org/pics/mgmt/>

for access to the latest developments in the management of technical communication.

Send comments about our web site to Denise Roth at
rothd@avl.com

Charlie's Column

Welcome to the latest edition of Management, the Management SIG newsletter. Those of you who are longtime SIG members and accustomed to receiving one printed newsletter a year are probably wondering how we managed to produce this one so quickly after publication of the last one. I'm pleased to report that it's due to the planning and work of our new newsletter team, led by Brenda Huettner and Kathleen Stehly. Our goal for this year is to produce printed and online newsletters quarterly. We're off to a great start, and I'd like to thank Brenda and Kathleen, as well as all the SIG members who wrote and edited articles.

Is That All There Is?

Alternative career opportunities is a popular topic at STC conferences, particularly for people who have been in the information development field for some time and are interested in trying something new. We managers frequently fall into this category, because many of us have been around for awhile and often have advanced as far as we can in our existing career paths.

In STC, we have numerous examples of people who have made the jump from "technical communication" into some other field. Often these moves are made into another communication specialty, such as marketing communication, public relations, and journalism. People with strong technical backgrounds sometimes move into more technically focused careers, such information technology, engineering, and the sciences.

Another possibility is the training field. Indeed, evolving information technology and market factors are driving an increasing number of companies to attempt to meld training and documentation into a more integrated functional unit. While the two fields are by no means identical, there is some overlap in the competencies and skill sets they comprise. For example, effective training requires a considerable amount of well-designed and professionally developed information products (courseware, in the jargon of the training world). There are plenty of opportunities in the training field for technical communicators with good information design and development skills.

I recently made the move from managing an information development organization to managing an educational services organization. I should emphasize that, for me, this was a step up in most ways, not a lateral move. So far, I've found that my main developmental needs in my new position are to learn the fundamental concepts of instructional design and development, learn the system for which we provide training and educational services, and to build my internal network of contacts. Of these needs, only the first is unique to the training field. The other two are things that I've had to do in every information development job I've held. I can tell you that there is plenty of readily available, excellent information on instructional design, and in the three months I've been here, I've learned enough that I can sell our

services, provide guidance and support to my staff, and manage our business without embarrassing myself or the firm.

So, in case you're wondering, there are places you can go and things you can do if you're feeling constrained by your current position. Your management and information design skills are eminently transferrable; don't think technical communication is all you can do.

We're Online!

Yes, the Management SIG is definitely online. We have both a Web site (www.stc.org/pics/mgmt/) with links to some interesting management-related information and a listserv. I'd especially like to call your attention to our listserv. It's the first of all the SIGs' lists to go live, and it's by far the liveliest. We have lots of good posts, with SIG members asking for (and receiving) advice and raising and discussing a host of management-related issues. The list is one of the benefits of Management SIG membership, so if you have Internet e-mail, I encourage you to subscribe. Here's how:

Send a note to majordomo@stc.org. In the body of the note, enter:

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subscribe stcmgmtpic-l  
<youremailaddress>
```

Note: The character after the hyphen is a lowercase L, not the numeral 1.

After you send the note, you'll receive a note saying your request has been forwarded to the list owner for approval. Within a day or two, you'll receive another note saying you're subscribed. Then you'll start receiving posts and can send your own posts to the list. It's easy! Do it now!

And happy managing!



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To subscribe to the Management SIG listserv, send a note to **majordomo@stc.org**.

In the note body, enter:

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subscribe stcmgmtpic-l  
youremailaddress
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where the character after the hyphen is a lowercase L.

Books for New Managers

By Andrea Kenner

Hi everyone! I want to thank all of the people who sent me recommendations for good books for new managers. As promised, here is a quick, informal summary of the recommendations I received.

The recommendations fell into three categories: project management, people management, and general. In addition, I received a few recommendations for other types of resources, including magazines, articles, and training. I checked all of the book references with amazon.com. With one exception, all of the books are available within 2-3 days, and many were available within 24 hours.

The following list is organized into four sections: one for each category and one for the other information (and for the book I couldn't find in amazon.com). The list includes the title (and author) of each book.

Enjoy! I think there's a lot of good reading in this list!

Project Management

- Managing your Documentation Projects (by JoAnn Hackos)
- Microsoft Project 98 Bible (Nancy Stevenson and Elaine Marmel)
- Using Project 98 (Tim Pyron)
- The Project Manager's Desk Reference (James P. Lewis)

People Management

- One Minute Manager (Kenneth Blanchard)
- Putting the One Minute Manager to Work (Kenneth Blanchard, Robert Lorber, and Spencer Johnson)
- The Art and Science of Leadership (Afsaneh Nahavandi)
- The Leadership Trapeze (Jeanne M. Wilson, Jill George, Richard S. Wellins, and William C. Byham)

- People Skills (Robert Bolton)
- Managing for Dummies (Bob Nelson and Peter Economy)
- Managing Technical People (Watts S. Humphrey)
- The Art of Managing People (Phillip L. Hunsaker and Anthony J. Alessandra)

General

- Growing a Business (Paul Hawken)
- Getting to Yes (Roger Fisher and William Ury)
- You Just Don't Understand (Deborah Tannen)
- Management (Patrick Montana and Bruce H. Charnov)
- First Things First (Stephen Covey)
- Becoming a Manager: Mastery of a new Identity (Linda A. Hill)
- The Rule of Benedict: Insight for the Ages (Joan Chittester)
- The Tao of Personal Leadership (Diane Dreher)
- The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management (Jerry B. Harvey)

Other Resources

- Successful Manager's Handbook (ISBN 0-938529-03-X)
- A subscription to the Harvard Business Review
- A course in Situational Leadership
- Article in the newsletter of the STC Management Professional Interest
- Committee, Winter 1997: How to Succeed as a New Manager (Jocelyn Alexander)



Happy Reading!
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Making Networking Work for Managers

by Brenda Huettner

There are many forms of networking - the kind you do when you are looking for a new job, the kind when you are looking to hire someone, and the kind you do when you want to see how someone else in your position has solved a problem. Unfortunately, as a manager in the technical communication field, we do not often have the opportunity for this third type of networking, actually talking with other managers. Carol Szatkowski, President of Clear Point Consultants in Boston, MA, saw this while working with her clients. "One manager would come to me with a problem, and I could almost always think of another manager who was going through the same thing, or who had recently solved that particular problem."

Carol's solution to this lack of networking opportunities was to find a way to get together a Documentation Manager's Luncheon. "We wanted to establish a place where our clients could network and learn from each other," says Carol, now in the second year of has this successful program. The response has been enthusiastic, with as many as 70 Documentation Managers signing up for a hour-and-a-half session. Each session consists of a facilitator who speaks on a documentation management topic while attendees enjoy lunch (the event is held at a banquet hall in a local hotel). In fact, they have had to limit the number of attendees at each session in order to retain a successful networking atmosphere and keep the program manageable.

Topics and Facilitators

Before each meeting, Carol chooses a facilitator on topics such as Hiring, Web Presence, or Dynamic Help. Carol explains, "I've never had trouble finding a facilitator—we've had lots of people who want to volunteer for this".

Facilitators speak for 45 minutes to an hour, including time for questions from the audience. One recent facilitator, Greg Bartlett of The MathWorks, Inc., described a survey he had conducted about documentation at other companies. Also discussed were the approach that MathWorks has taken towards online documentation as a result of this survey.

During another luncheon, Peter Orbeton, Senior Manager of Lotus Domino/Notes User Assistance, spoke on his department's experience building a web presence which offers both documentation and other information, as well as collects feedback from customers. The presentation included samples of his web site as well as some of the comments they've received from customers and others. In another session earlier this year, Wendy Capland of Vision Quest Consulting spoke about conducting interviews with candidates during the hiring process.

every other month, from 12 to 1:30. The location in Lexington is central to many people in the greater Boston area, and convenient to the major routes.

The session itself begins and ends with networking time. During the meal, people talk amongst the managers at their tables. Then the facilitator present the topic of the session, sharing knowledge experience. Finally, there is a question and answer period, encouraging participation from all attendees. "The facilitators are very informative - providing exactly the kind of thing I'd want to share with other documentation managers" says Ken Jackson, Documentation Manager at Harlequin, Inc.

At the end of each session, attendee who wish to stay to continue conversations or talk with the facilitator are encouraged to do so - the room remains available until the last managers leave. Later, Carol provides notes of the meeting

“Getting together with other documentation managers does not have to be limited to the Management Stem sessions at the STC Annual Conference - you can make it happen in your own local area.”

Program Format

A few weeks before the day of the luncheon, Carol mails out a flyer describing the topic, the facilitator, and the meal. Reservations are taken over the phone; each attendee pays a small fee toward the meal and gets a pre-printed receipt on the day of the lunch. "We always use the same location and time to make it easy for people to plan their schedules," says Carol. Last year, the lunches were on the third Thursday of

to the attendees. "These luncheons are informative and interesting," says Carol Bruse, Manager of Documentation for the OLAP Products Division of Oracle Corporation. "It's helpful to have an idea of what other people are doing, and how they are doing things."

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Need Experience?

by Kathleen Stehly

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Setting up a Program

For anyone who'd like to set up this type of program, Carol has several suggestions based on her experiences so far:

- 1 Be really clear on your intention. The choice of facilitators, of location, of times are all dependent on the intent of the gathering. For example, if your intent is to share problems and solutions amongst documentation managers, you may not want to have a facilitator whose intent is to sell a certain product.
- 2 Limit the number of attendees. Too few people will not mingle well, too many will not mingle at all. Carol now limits the lunches to 50 or 60 people "We find that 40 to 50 attendees is about perfect. It allows everyone time to mingle without getting that 'auditorium' atmosphere."
- 3 Keep an eye on the time. If you have allocated an hour and a half, make an announcement at the end of that time to ensure that people know the time is up. At the end of the session, those who need to dash back to work do so; others may remain to continue conversations or ask questions of the facilitator.

Getting together with other documentation managers does not have to be limited to the Management Stem sessions at the STC Annual Conference—you can make it happen in your own local area.



Brenda Huettner, Senior Member,
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Have you scanned employment advertisements only to find that employers are looking for skills that you don't have? What happens when we don't have those skills—how does one gain experience if there are no new opportunities at work?

Based on my experience, I recommend getting involved in STC to build your skills and your resume. Here are some suggestions.

Do you need publication experience?

Consider writing an article for the *Management* newsletter or your local chapter's newsletter. STC publications such as *Intercom* and the *Journal* are a good place to get published also.

Are you looking for web site development or listserv experience?

Volunteering to develop or maintain a chapter or SIG web site is a great way to try out or enhance your web design skills. You can volunteer to create forms or online surveys to get CGI scripting or Java experience too. If you are looking to gain some technical skills outside of web development, try volunteering

to be a listserv moderator. (The Management SIG needs a new listserv moderator . . . hint, hint.)

Are you looking to gain desktop publishing experience?

Volunteer to do *Management's* layout, work on another SIG newsletter, or work on your local STC chapter's newsletter. Alternatively, volunteer to develop a chapter brochure or other publication.

Are you looking for project management experience?

Volunteer at the chapter level to gain project management experience. Start with a small project to see if you like volunteering. If you do, try something bigger—like holding an office for a year. Becoming a board member will give you valuable experience working with others and managing projects. (Not to mention the networking!)

There are many ways for you to gain experience. If you find a way to increase your experience through STC involvement, you won't regret it.



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About the Management SIG

The Management SIG works to inform publication managers of trends and issues related to managing publications projects, educate them in practices that will result in high-quality technical materials, and provide a forum for the exchange of management information relevant to technical communication.

Management SIG activities include publishing a newsletter, *Management*, offering information to the Society's current and aspiring publication managers, providing a Listserv for email postings, and presenting conference sessions on management issues at Society, regional, and chapter levels.

Moderator Wanted

By Doreen Mannion

After several years of fun, I must resign my position as your volunteer management list moderator effective November 1, 1998.

It really is a fun position, and one that requires only about 6 hours a month. Unfortunately, between grad school, work, somewhat of a home life, and working with the local STC chapter, something has to give, and this is it.

I'm looking for someone to take over this responsibility. You'll have something I didn't: someone who has done it to help answer questions and resolve issues. Your main duty is to approve subscriptions and cancellations.

Please contact me at doreenm520@aol.com if you are interested, or telephone me at 1.703.317.8745 between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. EST.



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STC Special Interest Group (SIG) Enrollment

All STC members are eligible to register for as many SIGs as they choose. There is a \$5 administrative fee for each SIG. To register for a SIG, complete the sign-up form at http://www.stc-va.org/PDF_Files/sigform.pdf and mail it to the STC office.

New Webmaster

By Denise Roth

I am the new editor of the Management Web Site. I am trying to get up to speed on things, and am being (greatly) assisted by the former editor, Bill Albing. My main task right now is to compile all the questions and answers from emails and put these on the site for reference.

I am looking for ideas in how to improve the site, as well as things to add. Bill suggested we add excerpts or abstracts of all the STC

International Conference presentations about management issues. Thus, I am looking for anyone who might have these.

I am also looking for articles you have read that are relevant to the group. Abstracts and references to these can be added. Also, personal experiences on relevant topics are welcome.

Other than that, the forum is open and I look forward to hearing suggestions!



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