



Management

Newsletter of the Management Special Interest Group

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society for technical communication

Spring 2000

Management SIG Progressions Provide Knowledge and Change Opportunities at 47th Annual Conference

By Judith Herr

Progression - "small group exchanges consisting of rounds of five-minute presentations followed by fifteen-minute discussions" From the Preliminary Program, 47th Annual Conference, STC.

Progression - "the act of progressing; sequence; movement; progress; catenation; advancement; improvement" From the Internet Dictionary.

At the 47th Annual STC Conference in Orlando this year, the Management SIG is sponsoring two Progressions - "Managing Projects" and "Managing People." Management SIG members Brenda Huettner, Sherri Smith, and Judith Herr will moderate the two sessions scheduled for Tuesday, May 23 from 8:30 to 10:00 am (People) and 11:00 am to 12:00 noon (Projects).

Looking back at the enthusiastic response of progression attendees at previous conferences, Brenda commented, "Progressions are becoming more and more popular because of the information and insight gained from them. Excite-

ment among attendees for this form of presentation is growing. I think we will have a crowd this year - we've got a wide range of current topics to choose from and the chosen presenters are excellent."

This year, progression subjects for Managing Projects include managing project expectations, applying a database-driven methodology, managing migration to CDs (in 22 languages), and conducting post-mortems. Always a hot topic, working with international teams, will be put on the table for discussion as well. In all, leaders at ten tables will lead discussions simultaneously. Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in three of the discussions of their choice.

For Managing People/Departments, subjects to be examined include transitioning from writer to manager, interviewing and hiring strategies, tactics for increasing visibility for technical communicators, managing up and assertiveness, and managing a distributed organization. Two

members of the Special Needs Committee will host tables where the discussion will focus on meeting the needs of technical communicators with physical limitations.

Like the Projects Progression, Managing People will have 10 tables. Attendees will be able to choose any two topics in the one-hour session.

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Managing the Management Stem

by Joan Francuz, Management and Professional Development Stem Manager

It all started with two boxes on my front porch with a return postmark from the STC office. That's when I first realized how big, *really big*, the Management stem at this year's conference was going to be. I think this says a lot about the maturing skill set of our members, and the fact that those of us who have been in the business for many years have moved into more responsible positions, and want to share what we have learned with our colleagues.

Being a stem manager is really an exercise in ad hoc project management and I like to think that this experience reinforced some rules I already knew.

From previous experience as a stem manager, I knew that the end result has to be one Post-it note listing the name of the session and the proposal number. Don't ask. It's just one of those STC head office requirements!

Management Deadlines

Fall Issue:

September 15th

Winter Issue:

December 15th

Spring Issue:

March 15th

Summer Issue:

June 15th

So I created a spreadsheet with columns for the information I needed to track, with the intent of doing a mail merge at the end. Rule number one: Know what you need to deliver.

Stem managers read every proposal, and I like to have two or three other people review each one as well. So I had to contact people, send proposals, explain

Orientating, and Reviewing New Employees." And so it went. Rule number three: Get creative.

Then I flew to Orlando with the results of the mail merge on sheets of labels, stuck on the aforementioned Post-it notes. I don't want to sound like a commercial for 3M, but the entire conference is planned using Post-it notes. Each stem manager

"Being a stem manager is really an exercise in ad hoc project management and I like to think that this experience reinforced some rules I already knew."

what needed to be done, follow up, collect results, and thank the reviewers. Rule number two: As a manager, you need people, so be nice to them.

Then the real work began. Most of the 100+ proposals were good. They really were. But a three-day conference has only ten time slots, and even with six sessions in each slot, that's only 60 sessions. Some choices were easy. The big names in our industry will always draw people just because of who they are. So they get left alone. It's everyone else we have to deal with. (This is when I offer my blanket apology to everyone I may have offended by combining their proposal with someone else. I'm sorry.) For example, several people with proposals dealing with new employees were combined under the title "Hiring,

walks up to a grid on the wall with their sessions and assigns them a spot. Then we spend the rest of the day rearranging them.

There must be a better way to do this, I thought. But that led to Rule Number Four: Sometimes you just have to go with the flow. No matter how silly it sounds.

In the end, we got it all sorted out. Speakers who were presenting at more than one session (you know who you are) were evenly distributed across the three days, we went for one last walk in the humid Florida air, then left for the airport, convinced that this really is going to be a great conference, especially for those of us interested in management.

*Joan Francuz, Senior Member
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How the Management Listserv Helped Me

By CG*

It was late 1999 on a year 2000 project. Rumors and speculation had been circulating for months. Where was the new business we had expected? How long could the branch continue with so few consultants on billable projects?

Then came the news: 11 would be laid off the next day, including 2 from my documentation group. Although I was directed not to discuss the matter with anyone, I felt I had to talk to someone for advice on how to face those people. But who? Not expecting much of a response because of the short notice, I sent a plea for help to the Management Listserv around 4 p.m.

To my amazement, I had half a dozen responses within an hour and many more waiting for me the next morning. I had definitely struck a chord with the group. Some had gone through the experience more than once: "I've done this more times than I like," wrote one. The heartfelt outpouring of support and sympathy was overwhelming.

The most helpful advice I got was to keep everything to a minimum. I leaked the message before the official delivery because I couldn't lie to these people and tell them I didn't know the pur-

Others encouraged me to schedule something fun for myself that weekend.

The messages were helpful with the next phase, too. "No matter

"If you haven't taken advantage of the listserv, I encourage you to do so. You'll likely find, as I did, an enormous amount of expert knowledge and thoughtful support."

pose of the meeting they were suddenly called to. But I kept to the basics and avoided trying to make it better by providing too much information. Also I gave them space to digest and react to the news, as suggested.

The most unexpected response from my invisible support group was the sympathy they offered to me. As one manager wrote, "Letting people go is the ugliest part of our job." "Good luck," said another. "It's tough. You won't sleep well for a couple nights."

how well prepared we think we are to deal with a layoff, there is a grieving process that we must go through," read another. They offered advice on how to deal with and reorganize the survivors, including myself.

If you haven't taken advantage of the listserv, I encourage you to do so. You'll likely find, as I did, an enormous amount of expert knowledge and thoughtful support.

**The author has requested anonymity to protect the privacy of the individuals and the company involved.*

To subscribe to the Management SIG listserv, go to the listserv website at:

<http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stcmgmtpic-l>

Enter your email address and password.

To remove your name from the Management SIG listserv, send a blank email to

leave-stcmgmtpic-l-15156J@lists.stc.org

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

BOOK REVIEW

Editor's Note: This column will review books relevant to technical communication managers. If you know of books you'd like to see reviewed, or would like to write a review yourself, please contact this newsletter editor, Brenda Huettner, at bphuettner@aol.com

Peopleware: Productive Projects and Teams, 2nd Edition

by Tom DeMarco and Timothy Lister; Dorset House Publishing Co., 1999

When I picked up *Peopleware*, I had a difficult time putting it down. DeMarco and Lister have put together a captivating book full of interesting and sometimes humorous stories related to managing teams and projects.

Wouldn't a chapter title like "Make A Cheeseburger, Sell A Cheeseburger" (chapter 2) keep you reading? This particular chapter points out that knowledge-based employees are sometimes treated like employees that work in fast food franchises because our management philosophy is shaped by a production environment.

DeMarco and Lister dispel a lot of common management myths. For example, I always thought that overtime was a necessary evil. Not so, says DeMarco and Lister.

They make it clear that allowing employees to put in constant overtime can lead to burnout and high staff turnover. I've also always heard that "everyone's replaceable." DeMarco and Lister point out that in a knowledge-based environment, management should not look at its workers as "interchangeable parts."

They also address such issues as "teamicide" (or what ensures that a team does not form successfully), the importance of having a good office environment, and the value that employees place on quality.

This second edition has eight new chapters. If you read the first edition (published in 1987), I recommend that you read the new chapters. DeMarco and Lister revisit some old information (like teamicide revisited) and include new topics, such as "is competition in the workplace healthy" (not really), and "how you can make change in the workplace a success" (it's possible as long as you realize there will be chaos).

I hope you enjoy *Peopleware* as much as I did.

*Reviewed by Brenda Chapman
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It's Time for Annual Conference!

by Deirdre Murr, SIG Manager

One of my favorite times in the STC calendar is getting the Preliminary Program for the Annual Conference. I lose an entire evening when it arrives. I get home, quickly feed the four-leggeds, order pizza for Gary and me, and settle into my favorite chair for a thorough perusal.

My first task is to find the presentations that I am doing. As I notice the topics scheduled in that same time slot, my exclamations can be heard all over the house. "Oh, no! I am going to miss _____!" I think the program committee knows my personal preferences and deliberately schedules the most intriguing, best presentations when I am committed elsewhere. (As I have been on the program committee, I know this to be a blatant falsehood, but it makes me feel better to have someone to blame.)

I then start reviewing the options in each of my available time slots. I rarely find a timeslot where I don't have choices. From my two or three picks, I'll prioritize. "If this one is full when I get there, I'll do this!" By the end of the evening, I have a very good map of my days at conference.

As you can tell by this scenario, I enjoy going to conference. In fact, I have attend every conference since 1985. Each year is different. Not just because we are in a different city and hotel. Each conference has had its own color and flavor because of who attends and who presents. Attending at

Annual Conference is my commitment to myself to continue my education as a technical communicator and manager.

I never fail to learn something new. The "something new" may not come from a presentation, but from the person sitting next to me at a networking lunch. I get my treats at Annual Conference. It is a treat to talk to those of you I only see and talk to once a year; it is a treat to meet those of you with whom I have had only email or telephone conversations; and it is a treat to meet new people who are as interested and enthralled with our profession as we are.

Orlando will be a wonderful conference. As I had to be in Florida in February (do remember I work for Disney), I got a sneak preview of the conference site. There are lots of rooms and everything seems to be well laid out. (I can say this with impunity as the Walt Disney World Dolphin Hotel and Conference Center are not Disney properties. We did help design their exteriors, and I'll leave it up to you to decide whether you like them.)

This year's program is wonderful. If you want to freshen up your writing and editing skills, the selection looks great. New tools and technologies seem to be well represented. There are even post-conference workshops. And, of course, the presentations on management are stellar! I am going to feast!

My emphasis this year in this series of articles has been educating us - the managers of departments. I do hope that you take my suggestions to heart. Because we have such back breaking schedules, we tend to forget that we need to be students, too. If you haven't already, take the time to review the Preliminary Program. Take a close, hard look at the budget. See if you can't scrape out a portion to fund a trip to this year's conference for you. I hope to see you there.

*De Murr, Associate Fellow
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SIG News

by Brenda Huettner

As you can tell from the other articles in this issue, many SIG members have been working hard for the SIG and for the conference all year long. Now is the time for you to do your part - volunteer to help the SIG next year! Many positions will be assigned at the SIG business meeting in Orlando (12:15 - 1:15 on Wednesday, for those of you who can make it). If you won't be at the conference, contact any member of the SIG Leadership team to volunteer or make suggestions (see page 4 of this newsletter). The more input we get from you, the better the SIG will be able to serve all of us.

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STC Management SIG - Twin Cities Chapter

by Peter Heikes, Chapter Management SIG Manager

Beginnings

The Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul) chapter of the Management SIG was formed during the fall of 1994; in fact, it was "begging" to get started even before the new SIG was approved by the STC Board that year. As the chapter SIG founder, I spoke with many people within STC as I discovered that the Society's Board was considering approving its proposal as a newly formed SIG (they were called PICs then).

I started with our Region 6 director-sponsor (Joyce Woods), and even chatted extensively with someone named Liz Babcock. I learned that Liz, who was the STC President at that time and was speaking at the regional conference in the Quad Cities of IA/IL, needed a ride to visit her daughter in a Twin Cities suburb.

Being resourceful (and wanting a captive audience), I offered to give her a ride... a 3.5 hour ride! I'm certainly NOT suggesting that I was in any way responsible for the Management SIG being approved by the STC Board that year, but I certainly learned a lot about STC and the industry of technical communications (as a first-year member, and as someone who'd been in the field for over 15 years at the time)!

Membership/Meetings

Our membership started with 19 members. During that first year we met monthly between January and June at someone's office/con-

ference room near downtown Minneapolis because of its central location in the metro area. Attendance at the monthly meetings usually averaged between 6 and 10 members, as many of our members were the "silent" type who wanted to be kept informed, but could not attend the meetings.

The next year, attendance began to fade until we quit meeting for the remainder of the year and into

about managing technical communications organizations through a recent book they read, a video they saw, or a conference/class/seminar they attended.

Topics

Our topics for the current year's meetings were/are: Information Design (Nov.), Configuration Management and Revision Tracking Systems (Jan.), Management

“Our membership started with 19 members. During that first year we met monthly between January and June at someone's office/conference room near downtown Minneapolis...”

the next. Membership for this year is at 25; a small number for a chapter whose membership is 700+. This past fall we initiated the meetings again, but have scheduled our meetings just prior to the regular chapter meetings, on the same night and at the same location.

Though our chapter meets every month between September and June, our SIG is only planning to meet four times this year. BTW, our meetings are open to all STC members - being a manager/supervisor is a plus, but not required. Attendance at the November meeting was 14; our January meeting only brought in 8 attendees; and our March meeting had 6 attendees. Our final meeting for this STC year is on May 9, where we will be having various members share what they learned

vs. Leadership (Mar.), and "Book" Reviews (May).

Other topics we have covered in the past included: Managing Virtual Office Employees, Project Management, Cost Estimating and Tracking, Paper vs. Online, Conducting Performance Reviews, and Interviewing and Hiring.

Other Activities

In addition to the four meetings described above, our SIG is also participating in some other chapter-level activities. Every February, our chapter holds a one-day FutureTense Conference, and this year our SIG sponsored a management progression at the conference with six different topics: Project Management,

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Interviewing & Hiring, Managing Remote Writers, Capability Maturity Model, Configuration Management with Revision Tracking, and Using Vendors for Translation Services.

The March chapter meeting showcased the active SIGs at the local level (there are four), and student activities/projects/research in the Twin Cities area. We each were given "Five Minutes of Fame" to share with the membership what we were about/up to; I shared our mission, our goals, then mapped the topics we've covered to the goals for the year, and finished with almost two minutes to spare!

Some of our members also make guest appearances at different classes of the University of Minnesota's Technical Communications undergraduate and graduate programs, upon the request of the instructors. These appearances have been occurring for several years.

Open Invitation

By attending conferences, participating in listservs on the web (such as the one for our SIG), and developing a worldwide network of peers, I learned long ago that my problems at work in the field of technical communication are also your problems.

But, it is still good to hear others relay their stories of that employee who was always late for work (until, of course, you intervened), that customer who was hard to satisfy, that hardware or software glitch that just wouldn't go away, and that project from

doom! And, meeting at the annual conference shouldn't be the only time we interact face to face!

Therefore, we would gladly welcome speaking offers by other STC managers around the world who may be coming to the Mall of America for a shopping spree (and want to write their trip off!), or coming to the Twin Cities area for some other reason.

In fact, our SIG has an operating budget, and we might be able to help defray your travel expenses. If you hurry, I am still the chapter's Treasurer also - at least until June - and, with enough lead time, we might even be able to work out a speaking engagement at one of our chapter meetings! Feel free to contact me at peter_heikes@yahoo.com!

*Peter Heikes, Senior Member
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Management Progressions *continued*

The presentation format allows attendees to choose topics they are really interested in and want to discuss during the session. Progressions give participants the opportunity to focus, test assumptions, and gain from interchange with experienced and new communicators evolving into management roles. Most collect at least one "ah ha" from the experience.

Participants literally move from table to table, reforming a new group for each discussion. In contrast to passively sitting in a large darkened room, taking notes, and absorbing information from slides, progressions are designed to facilitate exchanges, serendipitous discovery, and personal "progress." Debate or challenge of preconceived opinions may occur. As Ghandi said, "Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress."

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

Conference Highlights

Note: all times and topics are subject to change. Check your Final Program for last-minute updates.

SUNDAY, MAY 21

1:30 - 3:00

Business Meeting for Society-level SIG Managers and Advisory Committee Members

SUNDAY, MAY 21

7 - 9 pm.

Welcome Reception, Northern Hemisphere Ballroom

MONDAY, MAY 22

12:15 - 2:00

Networking Luncheon - New this year, organized by "stream". Try the Management stream, or Managing Projects, or Managing Careers.

TUESDAY, MAY 23

8:30 - 10:00

MG5B Managing People Progression

TUESDAY, MAY 23

11:00 - 12 noon

MG 6A Managing Projects Progression

TUESDAY, MAY 23

12:14 - 2:00

SIG Networking Luncheon

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24

12:15 - 1:00

Management SIG Annual Business Meeting

SUNDAY, MAY 21 through

TUESDAY, MAY 23

various hours

Exposition - Be sure to stop by the vendor's booths to see the latest offerings in services and technology. Compare vendors who may have similar products, and you might just win something in one of the many drawings they have!



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