

## President's Message:

By "Doc" Morris

We know from last month's CopyBoard that the message, not the medium, is your prime consideration. Realizing that any complete communication (technical or otherwise) is the transmittal of an idea, in its entirety and unchanged, from one mind to another, the next move is to organize your message so it does not become a random collection of words that easily could lead to misinterpretation.

First, determine why you are writing (e.g. to inform, or to instruct), etc. Then to whom you are directing your message, and what are that receiver's reading comprehension level, and subject matter datum. Next, limit the specific scope you intend to cover. Now put yourself into the reader's shoes to decide what that reader needs and wants to know from you. Then go out and get the answers to those questions.

Collect and inventory the source material your investigation yielded. Organize that inventory into a logical sequency to be responsive to the charge. Just like that you have an outline that literally built itself. Your next step is to write a first-rough draft.

- Good luck!

## Don't Miss Kodak's Kathleen Aughey, Featured Speaker Monday, Nov. 15!

We are delighted to welcome to Syracuse STC Region 1 Director-Sponsor **Kathleen Aughey**, Manager, Digital Publication & Product Services, GCSS at Eastman Kodak, who will visit as our featured speaker at our **Monday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, 7 p.m.** meeting at Betts Library. **Don't miss it!**

She will discuss "Trends in Technical Communication - my personal experiences"—and if anyone in Central New York lives and breathes Technical Communication, it's Kathleen! A Kodak Technical Writer, Supervisor and Manager for 14 years, she began her Kodak career by winning the Kepner student writing award which included a 10-week internship at Kodak. After graduation, she was quickly hired as a Senior Technical Editor (contract), writing copy product hardware and software user documentation. By 1988 Kathleen went "full time" as a Senior Technical Writer, and in 1990 she became Supervisor, Technical Publications, SISD/DSC and grew her department from 3 to 9 writers plus two print technologists. In 1995 she was named Manager of Digital Publications and Product Services, handling the newly-combined writing, printing and product groups in support of all KODAK business lines, with a staff of 40. Kathleen's department has since become a KODAK Center of Excellence for technical user publications, print-on-demand, and software product creation.

Kathleen is a Senior STC member, an STC Associate Fellow, serves on the STC Board of Directors as Director-Sponsor of Region 1, has served the Rochester Chapter in various positions from Membership Chairman to two-term President; serves as Judge for student and technical communication competitions, and served at the STC international level as Manager of The Chapter Handbook for five years.

"It will be a very informal discussion — hopefully it will generate lots of questions," says Kathleen, who has witnessed firsthand the tremendous technological changes that have so transformed our profession in the last decade and a half.

"We have witnessed changes in our tools (from yellow ruled paper to SGML/XML online), says Kathleen. "We've seen Technical Communicators gain respect in the corporate environment, advancing from "scribes" to "professionals." The Internet has become our standard delivery method, no longer to be feared. HELP, multimedia, and video authoring have become part of our toolkits. The WEB is now part of our turf, and programming is no longer exclusively for engineers: as information designers, we need to understand and utilize programming skills. These are exciting times - and I'm proud to be part of this new future!" ■

## SUNY IT Student Chapter Open House

— All STC Members Invited —

SUNY Institute of Technology (IT) students are considering forming a student branch within CNY STC and are planning to host a "Chapter Meeting"/Presentation Forum on Saturday, December 4 at SUNY IT campus. This is open to all CNY STC members and students.

SUNY IT student leader Terri Granger, who is a member of CNY STC, plans to invite other faculty and students from area colleges with technical communication programs, as well as speakers from the communication fields to take part in the forum.

SUNY Utica/Rome Technical Communication seniors will give 10 minute presentations on relevant subject matter: such as new media, globalization, web design, and other topics.

Students will have an opportunity to network with STC communication professionals. A reception will follow the presentation forum and refreshments will be provided from 10AM-2PM. We urge all members to mark this date and email their interest in participating to Terri at: [granget@SUNYIT.edu](mailto:granget@SUNYIT.edu). ■

## COPYboard

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**COPYBoard** is the official monthly newsletter of the Central New York Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, and is published eight times per year, September through June.

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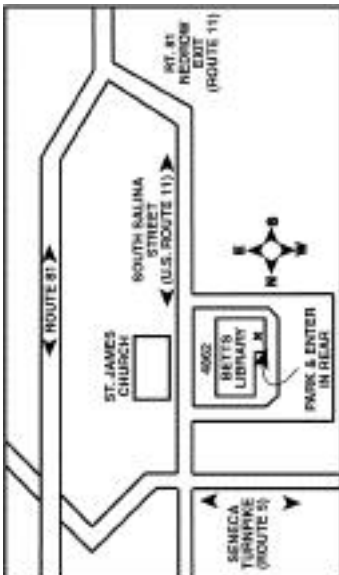
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All STC members are encouraged to submit letters, articles and job leads to **COPYBoard**. Deadline: the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month prior to publication. Email to Newsletter Editor or send a 3.5" PC or Mac disk to:  
STC, PO Box 152  
Syracuse NY 13215

All CNY STC meetings are free and take place at Betts Branch Library, 4862 South Salina Street, (U.S. Rt 11) Syracuse, from 7p.m. to 8:55 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month. The entrance to the library is in the rear, where there is also free parking. Betts is just south of Seneca Turnpike (see below). Library phone (for directions): 315-435-1940.



## Congratulations to New Senior Member:

Amy M. Dewey has attained five years of membership in STC which makes her a Senior Member. Amy will receive a certificate in recognition of this milestone.  
*Congratulations, Amy!*

## DON'T FORGET!

**THIS MONTH IS OUR LAST MEETING OF THE MILLENIUM!  
WE WILL MEET AGAIN NEXT CENTURY, IN JANUARY, 2000  
(DATE AND TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED)**

## Why Volunteer?

(Reprinted with permission from Suzanna Laurent, Director-Sponsor, STC Region 5)

I'm a firm believer that what you get out of anything is in direct proportion to what you put into it. You learn new skills and discover hidden talents by participating in STC chapter activities. I do stress the word "participating" though, because "just being a member" does not produce the same results.

I found a new career that I really enjoy because of my involvement in another organization. After I volunteered to do the chapter newsletter, I started winning awards for it. SO, when I finally started college, I studied writing. I earned a degree in technical writing already knowing that I not only enjoyed the work, but that I was good at it too. These were a couple of great benefits I received from participating in activities.

One of the greatest challenges in STC chapters is getting members involved in chapter activities! Do you ever wonder why people hesitate to get involved when they have so much to gain from it? Let's review some of their reasons and my responses to them.

**No one asked me to do it.** Have you asked them to do the job? Take the time to sit down with them to explain the benefits they can receive from doing the job, show them what needs to be done, and then ask them to do it. A phone call often works, but it is much more powerful to ask in person!

**I don't have enough time.** In today's world there is so much to do that people choose what helps them meet their needs best! By participating in chapter activities, they learn to juggle multiple projects and sharpen interpersonal skills, which in turn allows them to accomplish even more. Now, that's a win-win situation!

**I need to improve my job skills, not spend time volunteering.** Most skills learned working on chapter projects can be used on the job. Those skills include time management, problem solving, working with others, marketing, public speaking, teamwork, project management, delegating, and assertiveness. To find out how members want to improve, ask them questions like "Why did you join STC? What do you expect to receive from your STC membership? What can you do on the job? What skills or traits would you like to improve?" The answers can be used to match people to projects.

**Networking doesn't help me on the job.** Networking can be defined in many ways. Each time I have changed jobs, the lead came through an STC friend. Networking can mean getting job leads or asking for help with a software program or building a successful consulting business.

**I don't know how to do it.** Do you have plenty of 'how-to' information available? Is there an experienced mentor standing by to answer questions? Have you empowered them to do the job and allowed for some creativity? Sometimes all you need to do is make sure they have the resources to do the work.

I hope this article gives you some ideas about why you ought to become involved in Chapter activities and meetings!

An architect, an artist and an engineer were discussing whether it was better to spend time with a spouse or a lover. The architect said he enjoyed time with his wife, building a solid foundation for an enduring relationship. The artist said she enjoyed time with her lover, because of the secret passion and mystery it generated. The engineer said, "I recommend both. If you have a spouse and a lover, they will each assume you are spending time with the other, and you can go to the plant and get some work done."

# Richard Inch: 6 Steps to Technical Documentation Success

*At last month's Chapter Meeting, Richard Inch discussed 6 steps he has taken to standardize technical documentation at Leybold Inficon:*

Leybold needed someone to write a software manual, and I was brought in as a consultant. Working in my cubicle for a year, I realized that I was being tolerated by the engineering staff in my group, but it was clear that rest of the company's engineers really didn't like technical writers. They had had a lot of past problems with on-staff technical writers who had not met deadlines yet didn't appear busy, didn't seem to do a whole lot and were constantly hounding the engineering staff for information. Leybold had finally eliminated their in-house tech writers and, for 14 years, their engineers had become accustomed to doing their own technical publications.

## **Step One - Building Relationships**

I spent that entire first year working on building relationships. I made friends. I went to lunch with people. I plugged myself into their community as best as I could. My Marketing Communication Manager observed that I was winning some people's trust and asked if I would like to manage all technical communications, acting as the company's sole technical documentation person and designing a system from the ground up which would help their engineer-authors and ensure that no product would ever be late to market because of lack of a user guide. I accepted this daunting challenge.

Initially, the situation was not good. Without a Technical Communication Manager to lead them, the engineers had descended into writing documentation using every writing tool imaginable - Starwriter, WordPerfect, and almost every version of Microsoft Word ever released. It was incredible! Also, there was no network at Leybold. My previous Syracuse employer had a very high tech shop: I was used to working in Interleaf on a SUN 4 system running over a full UNIX network. Leybold had seen the work I had done on that system, told me they liked my work and that this was exactly what they wanted. They then sat me down at a 386 PC with 8 megs of ram and a 9-pin dot matrix printer, located in a

room that was essentially a closet with a desk, chairs, coat racks and other junk. This was my new office! While Leybold's publications looked pretty good at the time, there were no review systems in place, no organized methodologies for producing technical documentation. Engineers did their own writing, put it on floppies, and carried it to a graphics person in the Marketing area who ran it through Pagemaker or Express, or whatever she felt like using at the time, to give it a corporate standard look, then sent the files to the printer for output to paper. The graphic artist was not a technical publications person; she never read or edited anything. The resulting manuals were hard to maintain because since each was done with a different program, you couldn't easily identify specific chapters.

A positive was that the engineers were accustomed to working as teams, and the product managers were used to writing articles for magazines. They were good writers and understood structured writing, but some were overconfident. As soon as I got a decent computer, and Leybold installed a computer network, I began working over the network with people on projects. I took the approach that we already had 220 good writers on staff; my job was to put a methodology and a set of tools in place to help them be good writers.

## **Step Two - Finding the Right Tools**

At this critical point, the company happened to decide upon the adoption of Microsoft Word as a corporate standard word processor. This was a stroke of luck in that without any influence from me, it forced them to abandon their old tools and settle on a single standard tool. While everyone was still grumbling about the changeover, I grabbed the opportunity to do lunches with them, pushing the use of templates and structured documentation.

During this period, I gave Word the very best shot any human could be expected to give a software program, but it didn't work! Word is an

illusionary program: When you first use it, you become excited by its possibilities, but a few weeks down the line, all the fancy features only get in your way, and beyond that, the features don't hold. Graphics start moving and links shift each time you close and reopen the document.

## **Step Three - Setting Standards**

I tracked my time and discovered I was losing 8 hours a week playing with Word. I brought this to my manager's attention, and we ended up bringing Framemaker in-house. Today, we're an all-Framemaker company. All technical publications are done in Framemaker, assembled over our network.

I began to establish content, style and graphics standards. The first thing I would do is build a road map in the form of a Table of Contents. This arduous stage is indispensable if you're going to produce effective documentation and not waste time.

Once we have a living-document Table of Contents, I use it to identify the primary tech writer, the engineering project manager, the marketing product manager and the quality assurance engineer. With their help, I then identify all the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) responsible for each Table of Contents topic, and call the first team meeting.

Next, we map out three formal reviews for the project (fewer, if the project is very simple). Work begins, and to manage the timely submission of materials, I employ a work-in-progress directory on our network. I give team members read/write access to their files.

## **Step Four - Getting Engineering to Budget Time for Documentation**

A key step which really marked a turning point for me was when I was able to establish a procedure saying that "...the engineering project manager will include time for user guide preparation as a separate line item in each individual's project development schedule."

It took a tough fight to make this happen! The Project Managers did not want to commit any of their engineers' time to technical documentation! It took meetings with

my boss plus the two division Presidents and the most powerful individual in the entire company—the Chief Financial Officer—to make this happen.

My argument went as follows: “You have been doing technical documentation anyway, for 14 years. Have you just been pulling it out of thin air? Have you been losing time? Have you been cheating on your time schedules? Are you forecasting correctly?” Then the people above us picked up the ball: “How *have* you been accounting for your time? Exactly where have you been charging this time? It’s obvious that you’ve been charging your time wrong.”

So, I said, “Let’s allocate things properly.” Very soon the engineering managers realized that this could be advantageous: if writing was charged against the manual budget, more time would be freed up for project design.

#### **Step Five - Becoming an all-PDF Shop**

Another key step came when we decided to make the changeover to PDF-based documentation. We had

previously spent a lot of money developing one razzle-dazzle online program that users could click through, with lots of interactive links. But when we asked our customers, they said they didn’t want that kind of interaction.

At that time, I had just gotten Acrobat and a clean room manual project came in. I knew in my heart we would end up with a PDF-based manual for this product because it’s enormously costly and difficult to make a paper manual you can take into a clean room: it takes special paper, binders, ink and wrappers. I saw PDF as a way to get manuals into the clean room, saving lots of printing costs and making customers happy.

The PDF manual was given to a customer, who promptly demanded that all future manuals come to him in PDF format only.

This has worked out so well that now we post PDFs of all our manuals on our intranet. Field service and customers alike can instantly be on the ‘same page’ and everyone loves them. We are now in the process of

converting all our engineering documents to PDF.

The system we follow is simple. Everything is written in Framemaker. We convert Framemaker document to PDF files - some for online viewing, others for sending to our printer (because we print exclusively from PDF now, too.) We also automatically generate online help systems for our software manuals directly from Framemaker, by porting our Framemaker files through Omni Systems’ MIF-to-RTF converter and then feeding the RTF directly into the WinHelp compiler.

#### **Step Six - Backups**

A final key step was for me to start relying on our Information Systems for all backups. With all our publications up on the network, I can now dare to let our IS people handle backups. Our fiber-optic network is so fast, they can do this easily. Also, we keep a second set of all our PDF files offsite, at our printer’s location, for added security. ■

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