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Society for Technical Communication



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An Opportunity for Thanks

Linda L. Oestreich

Washington D.C. has always been a place of excitement for me. A place where I get energized, feel patriotic, and become a wiser, more thoughtful person. Now, in its 42nd year, the STC Annual Conference is combining its energy and wonder with the excitement and controversy of our capital. How can we miss?

This year's program, in addition to the regular sessions recorded here, includes several featured presentations and program tours that offer rare insight to special topics and to several local technical communication businesses.

Coordinating so many ideas, visions, and lessons has been both an opportunity and a responsibility for those of us on the Program Committee. As Program Manager, I've learned new management skills; met and made friends of STC members I might never have known; and grown to new heights of awareness about the Society, about the members, and most importantly, about myself.

As a team, we were all aware of the responsibility we had to make this conference the best it could be. My role was team leader, paper pusher, and telephone talker. Each person on the program team worked in his or her own way to set up an invigorating, constructive, and professionally rewarding conference.

The Program Committee team has been my family for the past year. Each position was crucial to the outcome; each position was as important as the next; and each position helped me remain sane. As team leader, I want to thank each part of that team:

To Ed See, Deputy Program Manager, who came to this job with more STC conference-related experience than any other person I know, I give my Trusted Confidante Award. Without Ed's wise counsel, I would have turned to mush long ago.

To De Murr, Tools and Technology Stem Manager, who is a long-time friend and co-member of the Houston Chapter, I give my Local Hand-Holding Award. With her presence here in town, I knew she was always available for those emergencies when I needed *real* hand-holding.

To Debbie Baxley, Writing and Editing Stem Manager, who brought wonder and enthusiasm to the team, I give the Good Humor Award. No matter what occurred, Debbie responded with good humor and a willingness to please that encouraged me and always brought a smile to my face.

To Steve Cascone, Professional Development Stem Manager, who provided that often-needed voice of caution, I give the Voice of Reason Award. Steve's voice was often the one that stopped me from leaping before I looked, saving me on several occasions from my own over-zealous self.

To Cynthia Brock, Visual Communication Stem Manager, who had California floods to reckon with, I give the

Magician's Award. Cynthia, with a lot of heart and hard work, pulled several VC sessions out of thin air to enhance her stem and ensure it had the breadth and substance this special area of technical communication deserves.

To Carolyn Watt, Management Stem Manager, who provided the Canadian connection, I give the Comprehensive and Caring Award. Carolyn's attention to detail, and commitment to do the job excellently, reassured me that all would be well under her guidance.

To Tom Wall, Special Events Manager, who looks at life with a remarkable *joie de vivre*, I give the Don't Worry, Be Happy Award. Tom's coordination of the Special Events may have given me a few new gray hairs, but just as he promised, everything turned out fine.

And, to David Armbruster, Education, Training, and Research Stem Manager, who wanted to sample the conference side of the Society, I give the Dr. Is In Award. As a past Society president and an exemplary technical communicator and people-person, David was consistently available to help with special tasks and to make me laugh. I'll always be glad he said "Yes" to my request.

As usual, this conference wouldn't exist without the hard work and diligence of the STC Office Staff. They are an efficient, wonderful group of people who counseled us, helped us, taught us, and put up with us. To each, I give the Award of Patience, Tolerance, and Trust. They truly do support us!

A year from now, this *Proceedings* will be the only record of the 200-plus technical sessions and the 400-plus presenters who delivered them. As you look through it, remember to give each presenter high regard for the effort and follow-through it took to get from proposal to presentation.

Finally, the most important part of the program is you. As attendee and technical communication specialist, your decision to be part of this Annual Conference sets you apart and gives you an edge over other technical communicators. Your opportunity and resulting responsibility await. Make the most of them.

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Overcoming Dilemmas in Technical Communication

Robert G. Hurst, Brenda Jameson, Laurie Modrey, and Emily A. Sopensky

Experience and common sense are not easily conveyed in textbooks. Discussing the following real-life scenarios provides an opportunity to learn from experienced communicators without risking a job or a deadline. Each presenter will offer one scenario and possible solutions. The discussion will be open to participation from the audience.

Despite highly developed technical expertise, a strong command of the English language, and the tools to support the most complicated documentation project, experienced technical communicators frequently face obstacles that are not easily overcome. For example,

- You've heard of the China Syndrome, but now you're faced with the Prima Don Syndrome. You must document the work of a wannabe hacker who chooses to defy all standards, guidelines, and rules of grammar in composing his communiqués. That's all right except that he thinks his way is the *only* way.
- The PR coordinator promises the editor of an industry magazine a feature article on your company's next generation of products. The article will provide valuable exposure for your company. The marketing guys want to talk about applications and the price/performance advantages. The technical folks want to emphasize design and technology issues. Two days before the deadline, PR asks you to "pull this article together," because the guys can't agree on what to write.
- As one of several managers in a documentation department, you begin to realize that your supervisor and one of your writers are having an affair. You are caught in the middle. The writer, who has always been somewhat difficult to manage, is now trying to undermine you at every turn. Decisions are made between the two of them without you. Upper management seems blind to the blindsiding.
- Almost 90% of the staff is highly mobile and/or impermanent. Headquarters sends its technical expertise to this branch office to troubleshoot new development issues. The remainder of the staff must attend trade shows and important conferences. Getting input and signoff from them for your documentation is a logistics nightmare.

These scenarios cause consternation even for senior communicators. Creativity, an understanding of organizational and human behavior combined with proven technical skills provide the basis for overcoming such dilemmas

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Emily Sopensky is a communication design consultant with over 22 years of experience working with large multinational firms as well as startups and government agencies. Her degrees in business administration include an MBA from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Modrey and Sopensky have teamed on several other presentations and papers, including "Survival Skills for Communicators" published in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, January 1995.

Brenda Jameson provides writing services to the scientists and engineers at Micron Technology, Inc. As a result of her efforts, the company increased its editorial coverage from 2 published technical articles in 1988 to 52 in 1994. She received an Excellence award in Trade/News Articles in the 1994 STC international competition for "The 64-Megabit DRAM Challenge" published in *Semiconductor International*. Before joining Micron 11 years ago, Ms. Jameson was an industrial engineer in the automotive industry.

Robert Hurst is a technical communications consultant with broad-based experience, including managing, writing, editing, and training for Tandy Corporation and other Dallas firms. Currently, he is a member of the 1994-95 STC Nominating Committee. Long active in STC, he has held many posts, including President, Lone Star Chapter. Several of his products have won awards in STC competitions.

Rules of the Game—Contract Consulting and Negotiating Skills

Cynthia C. Currie, James T. Currie, Laurie Modrey, and Emily A. Sopensky

A panel of experts will discuss how negotiating with vendors, business partners, peers, or employees can turn differences to mutual gain. Whether the technical communicators finds professional fulfillment and financial success from permanent or contract employment, as an employee or as a manager, the panel will offer suggestions, rules of thumb, and examples of how to optimize success in the work environment. The perspectives offered will be from the viewpoints of the consultant, the contractor, and the organization. Two papers, "Successful Contract Consulting" and "Negotiating Rules for Technical Communicators" provide background for this panel.

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