



Boston Broadside

The Boston Chapter Newsletter

September/October 2009

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President's Message



By Arun Jain

By the time you read this newsletter, many of you may have attended our September meeting on Accessibility and Usability. Expect to

see strong programs like this one for the rest of the year. Detailed descriptions will follow, but the types of programs that you will see include:

Monthly Program Meetings

At program meetings, we will cover educational topics tailored to your profession. Program meetings will be held at Hilton Garden Hotel in Burlington.

Workshops

During workshops, we will focus on in-depth information from a partial to a full day. These will usually be held at Mathworks.

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Why Judge in the Competitions?

By Bill Gruener

Now and then, I write an article that feels right. In the late fall of 1999, I wrote such an article which I reproduce here because the message is still the same: The STC Competitions are—in my mind—the most important effort exerted by the STC. I hope that you share this same belief with me and, more important, I hope you will volunteer your time and be a judge.

As I rekeyed the article (Oh yes, my Zip drive died and with it the only electronic copy of the article, but I have multiple copies of the rekeyed version), I noted that some names and affiliations changed (by 2009 almost all affiliations changed), and sadly, some respondents are no longer with us, but the values remain the same.

From the Archives of 1999

Saturday, November 6 and Saturday, November 13—both were beautiful fall days. Warm, sunny days great for raking leaves, coaching soccer teams, and hiking New Hampshire's mountains. Yet, 150 STC volunteers donated their time, forgoing the pleasures of a New England autumn day to participate in STC judging. Why?

The Boston Chapter of STC, as part of the international STC, holds three competitions yearly: Electronic Documentation (now called Online Communication), Technical Art, and Technical Publications. The Electronic Documentation (Online Communication) competitions were held on November 6, 1999 at Sun Microsystems, and the Technical Art and Technical Publications competitions were held at Avid Technology on November 13, 1999.

The return on time must be worth it.

The strongest motivation for participants is to get exposure to documentation from other sources. Unintentionally, we all end up in our own vacuums. The competitions give everyone an opportunity to see high quality work from other companies and to keep abreast of documentation trends. Scottie Farber puts it this way, "I learn new things every year that expand my skills and reshape my standards—from the books I read, from the other people on judging teams and from the dialogue that goes on in the second round of consensus judging."

Judges share the opportunity to see what works and what does not. Often entrants are constrained by operating systems, applications, and templates chosen for them by their organization. Viewing how others accomplish the same task using different tools is a mind-expanding experience. According to Kristine Claremont, the experience "provides real-time examples of how new applications and technologies are being used by designers in the technical communications field."

Peer interaction is another strong motivator. Respondents stated that the competitions are a great place to share ideas and learn new techniques. As John Minniti of Webhire observed, "As a manager of a team that likes to be on the cutting edge, judging gives me the opportunity to see what other technical communicators are doing. It [judging] helps me get a better idea about how much further we can push the envelope." Receiving feedback on one's own documentation is a plus—all entrants receive the comments about their entries regardless of whether they receive any award. Linda Harris of EMC perceives judging as "helping me to see what other people were doing. It also puts me in touch with other writers and gives me a feeling of what they think is good or bad documentation."

Why Judge, continued on page 2

SIGs (Special Interest Groups)

Held at Middlesex Community College in Bedford, MA, SIGs delve deeply into narrowly focused topics of interest.

Competitions

STC competitions provide inexpensive peer evaluations, with specific suggestions on how to improve your work. You can also volunteer to become a judge—see what others are doing!

Volunteering

Choose your opportunity to contribute, network, and build skills.

By now, you may also have seen our new Web site. A Web site is always a work in progress but, hopefully, you will find the new Web site easy to use and aesthetically pleasing. Many thanks to Ellen and Pam for putting this together. For suggestions and comments, please contact Ellen.

On another note, Society's financial situation remains critical. In brief, the economic downturn has hit Society's finances hard and they are experiencing record losses this year and perhaps future years as well. We are all working together to try to remedy the situation.

Feel free to contact me anytime at president@stcboston.org or (978) 852-7019.

Communicate in Five Steps

By Bill Pacino

A number of years ago, I wrote an article detailing all the things that a technical communicator did from start to finish. I detailed the process of planning, researching, interviewing, preparing, reviewing, and producing technical documentation in four major phases and 16 functional blocks.

Very simply, you, as the technical communicator, have to know where you are going before you take off. You need to know the total picture of the job you have been hired to do. You must plan the work, outline the changes, and anticipate the preparation of items that need more time to put together (the so-called "long lead items"). You need to research what has been done before (there is always a "before" in technical materials), and you must interview all parties involved in the project to which you have been assigned.

Five Steps, continued on page 3

Barbara Veneri of Waters Corporation states, "It gives us the chance to have 'experts' in technical writing (versus experts in the software, firmware, hardware, or [the] applications we write about) review and respond to our work, to see where our work fits in among the work of our peers." Jane Alaimo appreciates the consensus judging because "It was good to have my thoughts about documentation validated with others' agreement." Connie Chappell of National Graphics, Inc. responds, "I loved hearing their thoughts on each entry. Sometimes we agreed, but more often we broaden our views by discussing why we disagreed." The competitions help pull us out of the vacuums we crawl into (and still allow us to end sentences with prepositions).

With all these technical writers in one place, a natural by-product is the opportunity for participants to broaden their professional network. The late Carol A. Landers stated with conviction, "Network, Network, Network!" There is another by-product; friends get to meet friends, and we all get to make new friends.

Meeting with peers and being reviewed by peers encourages excellence. All of us stand a little straighter, try a little harder, when there's an audience. Participation indicates that STC folks care about the profession, and they see participating as a great way to contribute to the STC. John Garison of IDE participates because "As a judge...I could try to affect change from within."

Marguerite Krupp states, "Over several years of judging, organizing, and participating in STC competitions at both the local, regional and international levels, I think the competitions have had the effect of improving the overall quality of the documentation that participants produce. This is totally subjective, of course, but I have examples that demonstrate this progression."

Winning the recognition of one's peers also helps within their respective organizations. R&D and management colleagues have concrete affirmation that the tech doc department is a positive contributor to the community and organization. For those aspiring to an award, judging this year helps them improve today's documentation to win next year's award.

One respondent offers us a "think about." Sam Goldman, President of Techniscribe in Dedham, MA, had this to say, "Compliments for the selection of broad categories, although I think there is some overlap in software segments.... criticism of the forms which are entirely too long... many of the categories and subcategories are repetitious.... criticism of the vast number of awards... It's like the Grammys.... and now the award for the best recording done on a green CD by a four-person combo using electric guitars running on 28 volts...otherwise, much fun."

After summarizing all these worthy and appropriate reasons for participating, we can share with Susan Bullova, who "had a good time." Connie Chappell affirmed, adding, "I really enjoyed the whole experience. It was fun, worthwhile, and beneficial to our profession!"

See you next year?

Fall 2009

I've participated in judging every year since 1999, and the rewards remain the same: make new friends, renew contact with old ones, enjoy an opportunity to view how other technical writers solve problems, and gain insight into the cutting edge.

It's Time to Shine in the Annual STC-Boston Technical Communications Competitions!

By Cheryl Landes, STC Associate Fellow, Co-chair, STC-Boston Technical Art Competition, Senior Member, STC-Boston and Puget Sound chapters

You've spent all year slaving over a hot computer, mixing your best ingredients for those perfect manuals. When you serve your final products, you're proud of them. Your

Time to Shine, continued on page 3

Important interpersonal skills include the ability to listen, respond, and take action on others' words (not always follow your own agenda), plus the intelligence to sort through more information that can be used. The user of the books, CDs, and Web pages that you are preparing (the audience) needs only so much. You need to know what "only so much" is.



1) Know Your Audience

All technical communication is done for a particular reason. Usually, the purpose is to ease the communication of ideas, concepts, and steps of particular actions to the appropriate audience. The most effective way to communicate is to know your audience and write specifically for that audience. This first point is important, so let me repeat it. It is worth the time and effort to understand your audience as well as you know your subject.

When there is an inherent benefit to a person who follows your instructions, that is the reason why that person takes action. Make sure that your audience understands what the benefit is in changing a behavior or take action because of your instructions. Too many communicators trip themselves up into thinking, "I'm really smart and I know a lot of stuff. So I'm just going to say it and hope my audience will understand the value of it."

Create and shape your information by keeping the motivation of the audience in mind.

Writing for end-users is different from writing for executives is different from writing for technology experts. Communicate with these different audiences in the style and language that they expect. Otherwise, they will tune you out and your attempt at communication will fail.

2) Connect

Connect with people through stories. Seek out something in the background of your audience that you can refer to so your audience can connect with and understand your writing. Ask yourself, "How can I explain this to them using their frames of reference? What is a story or example I can use to create a connection?" Of course, finding out that reference will take some prep work.

customers and clients rave about your masterpieces, and it makes you feel good.

Now it's time to share your best work with your peers in the annual STC-Boston technical communications competitions. We're accepting entries in the following categories:

- **Technical Publications** (Deadline: September 21)
- **Online Communication** (Deadline: October 19)
- **Technical Art** (Deadline: November 5)

Maybe you're on the fence about entering or are nervous about the comments you'll receive. No worries! Our judges give thorough, constructive feedback for each piece you enter—well worth the entry fee.

If you're not convinced, attend the first chapter meeting of the season on Wednesday, September 16, when I'll share the story about how incorporating the judges' comments from my first entry in the Boston competitions in 2002 led to receiving Best of Show in the Chapter's technical publications category and an Award of Excellence at the international level four years later! I will even explain why I intentionally entered one piece that wasn't awardworthy in last year's competition and what happened after the judges forwarded their comments to us. And I will share my experiences about judging technical art in two chapters, Boston and Puget Sound, and at the international level. The rewards are enormous from the judging, which reminds me of a final point...

If you're interested in helping us as a judge this year, we need you! Applications are still being accepted for each category. To apply, go to the Judges page at the Boston Chapter's Web site: http://www.stcboston.org/competitions/judges_index.shtml, click on any "Register" link, and follow the instructions.



Complete details about entering and judging the competitions are located at <http://www.stcboston.org/competitions/index.shtml>.

Author's Bio

Cheryl Landes, an award-winning technical writer and STC Associate Fellow, is the owner of Tabby Cat

Communications in Seattle. She has more than 18 years of experience as a technical writer in several industries: computer software, marine transportation, manufacturing, and the trade press. She is the past president of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Society for Indexing (PNW/ASI) and is active in the Society for Technical Communication on the chapter (Boston and Puget

Sound) and international levels. She speaks frequently at STC and ASI meetings throughout the United States and Canada.

Former Microsoft Recruiter Dispenses Unconventional Tips for Finding a High-tech Job

By Cheryl Landes, STC Associate Fellow, Co-chair, STC-Boston Technical Art Competition, Senior Member, STC-Boston and Puget Sound chapters

As the economic downturn continues, many people who have experienced a layoff have started taking matters into their own hands. Instead of waiting on the sidelines for something to happen, they make something happen.

One example of an action-taker is John Polhill, a technical recruiter from Microsoft whose job was cut in the latest round of layoffs there. On August 21–23, he used funds from his severance package to sponsor *Get An Edge*, a free tech job boot camp for unemployed and displaced workers in the industry at the Seattle Airport Marriott.

The simplest way to find your audience's frame of reference is to ask questions. That is, find out their documentation problems and then devise ways for you to eliminate these problems. This is known as solutions selling. Your goal is to discover their problem and then make it go away (or solve it).

Another strategy might involve taking typical technical scenarios and asking: "How would you be impacted if this happened to you?"

3) Practice

Understand that writing that meets the needs of your audience does not come out of one draft.

Write, rewrite, and rewrite again. The earlier drafts will have mistakes and probably too much information. Rewrite to distill your information. Rewrite to make sure sequence and flow make sense. Your guiding principle is this: I am going to rewrite and rework this material until I get it right. However, realize that practice needs an audience. Cultivate reviewers who are willing to read the documentation more than once. Try to avoid giving them all 1,200 pages to read over and over. Focus on getting reviewers to read smaller blocks of information so you don't wear them out.

4) Deliver

If each of the five steps listed here were given equal weight, delivery is only 20 percent. Yet many people think delivery is 100 percent when they jump into a documentation effort without planning, thinking about the audience, looking for a connection, and practicing.

Detail exhaustively all the facets of the project before you start. If you do this, then you should have no surprises when it comes time to deliver the information through various media. This same type of detailing will ensure that the audience's needs and expectations are achieved as well.

5) Review and Follow Through

Don't take the approach of producing your documentation and then forgetting about it. A good product will be revised and improved (particularly if it makes money). Do the same with your documentation. Be open to the errors that others discover when using the material that you have prepared. Return to a

The boot camp's format was an informal discussion filled with unconventional wisdom on finding jobs in a challenging market. This wisdom originated from Polhill's experience as an agency recruiter and a Microsoft employee. The tips he shared are grouped by category below, in no particular order.

Finding Job Openings

Don't rely on searching by job title. Read the job descriptions carefully. Companies are changing job titles so that they can fill positions, because these are replacements of jobs they eliminated. Legally, companies cannot replace old positions for a certain amount of time once they were cut. As a workaround, they simply change the job title.

Job boards are becoming an unreliable source for finding openings. Filled or canceled positions remain posted for weeks or months afterward. Often fictitious openings are posted to help agencies increase the number of résumés in their databases.

When you find an opening on a job board, check the employer's Web site to verify the position is still open if it's a direct hire. If the opening is through an agency, call the agency directly to gather more information. Then submit your résumé directly to the recruiter you contacted. When you apply through the job board, your résumé will likely be stored in a centralized database and may never be reviewed.

When companies directly hiring have an option to sign up for job alerts on their Web sites, take advantage of it!

Résumés

Keep résumés to two pages maximum. Do not include an objective and the "references available upon request" line; both are wasted space. Do include a section summarizing your skills. Also, if your resume will be searched by keywords, create a separate box on a third page with the keywords from the job description so that recruiters will find your résumé. Recruiters use the keywords from the job description to search for suitable candidates.

Do not use a service that sends your résumé to multiple locations, such as Resume Rabbit. This decreases your value and can increase identity fraud.

Have a separate URL for your résumé. Include RSS feeds for the companies you are targeting with this online résumé. This shows that you are following the companies' activities. Also include the 10-K Report links for these companies. The Securities and Exchange Commission requires public companies to file these quarterly reports which provide a comprehensive summary of their performance. Search for these reports at <http://www.sec.gov/search/search.htm>. For tips on searching these reports, see <http://www.library.ilstu.edu/page/496>.

Recruiters

The biggest problem with working with recruiters through a placement agency is that they give employers too much information. The employer knows your salary range and your other job requirements. This knowledge dilutes your ability to receive a higher salary during the negotiations.

At the same time, you don't know how the recruiters submitted your resume. Typically, the recruiters will hide your contact information with their company's logos, addresses, and phone numbers. This prevents potential employers from contacting you directly and ensures the recruiter presenting your résumé will receive a commission if you accept an offer.

Sometimes recruiters will submit your résumé for multiple positions at the same company, which can eliminate you from consideration. In these cases, your résumé is flagged and destroyed.

Polhill suggests that when a recruiter asks for your desired salary, respond, "I will

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listening mode for suggestions or complaints users have. There is always another revision.

Be thinking of ways to spin off subsets of the material to meet different market needs. Recycling or repurposing information that is valid (has gone through user and developer review) is a cost-effective way to get this information in the hands of others who can use it.

William Pacino currently works as a technical writer at Guardium, Inc. in Waltham, MA. He is a senior member of the Boston and Northern New England STC chapters and lives in Chelmsford, MA. He can be reached at william.pacino@verizon.net.

Writing API Documentation

By Arun Jain

In today's world, delivering complete software solutions requires working with applications from other parties. Integrating software applications requires a clear understanding of APIs (application programming interface), requiring good API documentation. And as software companies develop applications on platforms provided by Google, Intuit, Sun, Salesforce.com, etc., good API documentation becomes extremely vital. For writers without technical backgrounds, API documentation is often technical and mysterious—a cause for instant stress.



We have written a white paper to demystify API documentation and to help writers get started. To learn more, download our free white paper: [ABCs of API Documentation](#). We hope you find this white paper useful.

Writing API, continued on page 6

Former Microsoft Recruiter, continued from page 4

consider any reasonable offer.” If the recruiter presses for a specific answer, continue repeating this statement. Don't give a number, because it will be difficult to negotiate later.

Recruiters are now using search engine optimization and LinkedIn to find candidates. “Treat a recruiter like a hiring manager,” Polhill said. “In most cases, the recruiter is the gatekeeper for the hiring manager.” Also ask the recruiter specific questions, such as:

- How long has this job been open?
- Is this a new position?
- How many people were sent on interviews so far?
- When I get an interview, how soon can I expect an offer?

“Recruiters have no obligations to candidates,” Polhill said. They're hired by employers to fill positions, so the employers are paying their wages. Their allegiance is to the employers.

Interviews

Don't schedule phone screens on Mondays or Fridays. Interviewers are overwhelmed on these two days. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays are the best days. Set aside only one of these days for screens to allow you to focus on other aspects of your job search and your life. Also, accepting more than one phone screen on the same day helps you more easily compare and contrast your performance.

Even if the company's dress code is business casual, always dress professionally for an interview.

When talking about your experience on a team during an interview, don't be vague. For example, don't say, “The team was great. Everyone worked well together, and we got the job done.” Instead, provide specific information on your role, other team members' roles, the budget, the challenges you faced, and how you resolved problems.

Show that you're an enabler. Companies are more interested in how you can solve their problems and increase their profits than in your technical skills.

Social Networking

Polhill highly recommends LinkedIn. He suggests posting a full profile there because recruiters now use this site to find candidates. It's also a great place to meet people at the companies you're targeting—even the hiring managers.

It's impossible to keep up with all of the social networking sites. The best strategy is to try to “at least be a collector.” Collectors gather information relevant to their interests and pass it along to others in their networks who are interested. Examples of collecting include using RSS feeds, voting for Web sites online, and adding tags to Web pages and photos.

Instead of following individuals on Twitter, Polhill suggests following groups. Groups are moderated, but individuals are not.

Accepting Offers

Never accept the first offer, regardless of your desperation. Think about yourself and your family's needs first. When the hiring manager gives you an offer, he or she wants you. There is room for negotiations.

Future Boot Camps

Polhill has already received requests to hold boot camps in other cities with high concentrations of tech jobs, including Boston. He hasn't made any commitments yet. “He says he's willing to take questions, and could potentially host more of his ‘boot camps’

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Writing API, continued from page 5

On a separate note, I am honored to have been elected President of the STC-Boston Chapter for the upcoming year. STC is the professional association for technical writers, and the Boston Chapter represents over 500 members.

July Crossover Meeting

By Richard Lippincott

On Tuesday, July 28, STC Boston's executive leadership and council held its annual "Crossover Meeting." This annual event is the first opportunity for the newly elected council members and officers to all meet in one place, as well as the final opportunity for the outgoing officers and council members to gather.

As is becoming a tradition, the crossover meeting was hosted by former Chapter President Denise Dunne. Weather cooperated for an outdoor buffet dinner gathering, and everyone ate well (including the mosquitoes).



(l-r): Arun Jain, Paul Carlotto, Jon Baker

Incoming Chapter President Arun Jain outlined some of his plans for the 2009–10 program year, as well as some of the financial challenges that face the Society.



(l-r): Rebecca Hopkins, Barbara Casalay, Sharon Popovsky, Cheryl Landes

Outgoing President Pamela Sarantos discussed the work she'll be doing to redesign the Chapter's Web site. Many of the attendees agreed it was a productive session that set down good groundwork for the upcoming program year.

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Former Microsoft Recruiter, continued from page 5

if there is interest, and the job market allows," Chris Daniels, a reporter for KING5 News in Seattle, wrote on August 22.

Based on my observations from attending this first boot camp and reading reports about the turnout, interest is high and will not fade soon.

Job Hunting Resources

Polhill recommended these resources during the *Get An Edge* tech job boot camp.

Jobfox

A free service that allows job seekers to conduct a mini-interview online, receive job matches based on their interview responses, and request introductions from employer matches: <http://www.jobfox.com/>

ZoomInfo

Search for information about companies and people for free: <http://www.zoominfo.com/>

Glassdoor

View company salaries, reviews, and interviews posted anonymously by employees at more than 28,000 companies—all for free. The only catch is that you can view details about only one company until you share information about your company: <http://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm>.

PayScale

A free service for evaluating salaries for job offers, current positions, and future openings: <http://www.payscale.com/>

WANTED Technologies

Tracks supply and demand ratios in the tech industry: <http://www.wantedtech.com/>

Joel on Software

Includes more than 1,000 articles about the software industry, along with job postings (primarily for software developers and testers) and discussion boards: <http://www.joelonsoftware.com/>

Wikipedia article about interviews

Defines an interview and describes common interview methods in job searches and research: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interview>

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Articulating Our Value

By Cheryl Landes, STC Associate Fellow, Co-chair, STC-Boston Technical Art Competition, Senior Member, STC-Boston and Puget Sound chapters

Business is all about the bottom line. Companies exist to make money and hire talented employees and consultants to help achieve that goal.

As job seekers or contractors promoting our skills and services, we can be so passionate about what we do for a living that we often overlook our results. We forget

Articulating, continued on page 7



(l-r): Bill Gruener, Ellen Lidington, Greg Bartlett, Kevin McCauley, Rebecca Hopkins



(l-r): Linda Fritz (pink shirt), Jon Baker (turned away from camera), Cindy Cookson (standing), Bill Gruener, Ellen Lidington, Greg Bartlett



(l-r): Taryn Light, Ed Marshall, Denise Dunne

The new council is ready to dive immediately into the work of running one of the largest and oldest chapters of the STC.

Save These Dates!

In October, STC-Boston is holding two employment programs:

- **Wednesday, October 21**
Monthly evening program
- **Saturday, October 24**
Workshop

Save both dates, and watch the STC-Boston Web site for more details.

Source: STC September News

about how we can affect a company's balance sheet.

How can we connect our energy and commitment to a company's bottom line? How do we tie our daily responsibilities to the bigger picture known as the company's mission? We do it by talking about the value we bring to an employer or a client, according to Lorraine Howell, founder and owner of Media Skills Training in Seattle and author of *Give Your Elevator Speech a Lift!*

"You can change your bottom line just by talking about yourself and your audience," Howell said at her workshop, "Articulating Your Value in the Workplace," sponsored by the Puget Sound Chapter of the American Society for Training and Development on August 18. "If you start paying more attention to your audience, you'll be able to understand how they behave."

What is the best way to talk about our audiences? Perfect our elevator speeches, Howell says.

Since we're inundated with thousands of messages every day, thanks to advertising, attention spans are short. An effective elevator speech can penetrate the clutter and deliver our messages, our value, to our intended audiences.

The elevator speech concept originated in our nation's capital. If someone wants to influence a Congressional member, he or she only has the same amount of time as an elevator ride—from 10 to 15 seconds.

"An elevator speech is not a data dump," Howell said. "It's more of a hook...a 'get-them-in-the-tent statement.' It must be a conversation." It must answer the question, "What can you do for me?"

During the workshop, Howell gave participants time to develop their own elevator speeches by answering these nine questions:

1) Who is your target audience, client, or customer?

When answering this question, don't think about the people you work with, Howell advised. Instead, think about "Who pays you? What are their characteristics?" The person who approves your paychecks has a different set of needs than your coworkers.

2) What do they care about? What is important to them?

What are your target audience's problems and issues? How do your services link to those problems and issues? Draw a straight line from your services to your audience's bottom line.

3) What results and benefits do you provide—WIIFT? (WIIFT = What's In It For Them?)

Most people fail to answer this question adequately, Howell said, because "it's hard for us to think like a salesperson." That's exactly what we need to do, however. We tend to talk about our processes, but we don't differentiate ourselves from other job candidates or competitors.

4) What are you selling? In other words, how do you want people to feel when they work with you?

Howell used car ads to illustrate this concept. "It's not about the machinery. It's about how you feel when you get behind the wheel," she said. For example, when consumers see a picture of a Volvo, they instantly think about safety. The Dodge brand is associated with families, while a BMW conveys wealth and status in society.

5) What spins your jets about what you do?

What are you passionate about? "Think about the last time you had a great day," Howell said. "There's a moment in your job when it's the best." When is that moment, and how does it feel?

Sign Up for Competition Judging

If you are looking for a great learning experience as well as a terrific opportunity to network with other professionals in your field, sign up for judging.

Judging is a great opportunity to see what your peers are doing in the field of technical communications. It is a chance to see the latest trends in technical communications and how companies in the area are implementing these trends.

Judging is also an opportunity to team up with other professionals to provide feedback and input. It is a team effort to help encourage quality in our profession.

To learn more and to register for Competition Judging, see the STC-Boston Web site.

Source: STC-Boston September News

About the Society for Technical Communication

Mission: *Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.*

For more information, visit us online at:

Society for Technical Communication

www.stc.org

STC-Boston Chapter

www.stcboston.org

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6) What do you do better than anyone else? In other words, what is your specialty?

“This is your opportunity to pat yourself on your back,” Howell said. This is when you can say, “Here’s what I’m good at, but not in a bragging way.”

7) What would your best clients or customers say about you?

If you don’t know, ask your clients, customers, bosses, and colleagues about this, Howell said. When she conducted her own informal surveys, she learned that they liked the way she prepared them for talking with the media. As a result, Howell’s elevator speech evolved into: “I get people ready for the spotlight.”

8) Give an example of one successful project.

Storytelling is the best method for describing a successful project. There are three elements to creating a good story:

- Describe the problem—What was the challenge?
- Describe the action—How was the problem solved?
- Describe the results—What was the outcome of the solution?

9) What do you want people to remember?

“What do you want their recommendation to be?” Howell asked. In her case, people tell her that she “makes them feel safe.” In other words, they feel comfortable talking to the media because of her coaching. She reassures them that they will be successful, and this boosts their confidence.

After the workshop, participants answered these questions, Howell asked us to share our answers with another person. The person would listen and provide advice on how to hone our responses into an elevator speech.

Then we reversed roles. After this exercise, she opened the floor for discussion of the experience.

Many of the participants found that creating their elevator speeches was challenging, especially if they specialize in more than one area. Howell suggested that in these cases, we should create several versions of elevator speeches, tailored toward our different audiences. We should also create another version to describe in general what we do. One of the best ways to do that, she said, is by brainstorming.

One of Howell’s clients, who struggled with her elevator speech, specializes in negotiating contracts between vendors and businesses. Finally, during a coaching session, she mentioned that clients praise her for her impartiality, which allows everyone to negotiate on the same level. Her elevator speech evolved into: “I Level the Playing Field.”

Another client, a massage therapist, is known as “The Body Detective.” She’s a sleuth on finding the muscles that are tense and in pain.

I couldn’t create my elevator speech during Howell’s workshop. I struggled because of my generalist slant, despite my technical orientation. After the meeting, inspiration came from reading recommendations on my LinkedIn site. One former coworker said, “I was and am in awe at Cheryl’s ability to take the complex and chaotic and make it understandable and usable. She has practically inhuman organizational skills—no matter what product change I threw at her, there it was... right where it should be in the manual.”

From there, my elevator speech was born: “I Turn Chaos into Clarity.”

¹*Give Your Elevator Speech a Lift!* was reviewed in the July issue of the *Broadside*, pages 5–6.

Cheryl Landes, an award-winning technical writer and STC Associate Fellow, is the

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The Broadside Staff

The *Boston Broadside* is published six times throughout the calendar year and would not be possible without the hard work of dedicated volunteers. Many thanks to the following people for their contributions:

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Thank you, everyone!

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Write for the Broadside

The *Boston Broadside* encourages Chapter members to share their skills, thoughts, and ideas with other professionals in the Chapter.

If you would like to write for an upcoming issue of the *Boston Broadside*, send email to:

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owner of *Tabby Cat Communications* in Seattle. She has more than 18 years of experience as a technical writer in several industries: computer software, marine transportation, manufacturing, and the trade press. She is the past president of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the American Society for Indexing (PNW/ASI) and is active in the Society for Technical Communication on the chapter (Boston and Puget Sound) and international levels. She speaks frequently at STC and ASI meetings throughout the United States and Canada.

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Source: STC-Boston September News

