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Avoiding Clichés Like the Plague

David Carlson and Victoria Yuki present a lighthearted discussion of the importance of—and the keys to—clarity in writing. As Raytheon engineers who are involved in missile design and production, their primary products are the communication of data, information, and knowledge to those who need it as opposed to pieces of hardware. Clarity is essential; ambiguity and verbal weakness can be fatal.

Refresh your memory and your writing with a dose of guidelines that will lead you to more effective communication. Vicky and Dave will cram many topics into approximately an hour, including getting off to a good start, introductions and abstracts that grab the reader, styles that help the reader, changing passive voice to active, building credibility, acronymphomania, adverb abuse, creative spelling, use of non-words, suggestions for clear writing, and more. This entertaining presentation will also include questions, answers, and maybe even a pop quiz!

Save the Date: Thursday, April 8

Where: Tucson Courtyard by Marriott, 201 S. Williams Blvd. (in the Williams Centre near Broadway and Craycroft).

Registration and networking: 5:30 to 6 p.m.

Dinner: 6 to 7 p.m.

Program: 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Menu: Chicken enchiladas, hard and soft beef tacos, refried beans, Spanish rice, and fresh toppings. Served with assorted soft drinks, iced tea, bottled water and dessert.

Pricing:

- **Program only:** free to members, \$5 for nonmembers.
- **Program plus dinner:** \$15 for members, \$20 for nonmembers.
- Never attended a Southern Arizona Chapter meeting? Use the **\$5 Off Coupon** on the bottom of page 3!

RSVP: Send an e-mail message to Helen Marty (hmarty@cox.net) by 4 p.m. Monday, April 5 indicating if you want program with dinner or program only. No-shows will be billed. Walk-ins are always welcome, but we cannot guarantee a meal. ■

**Mission statement for
STC's Southern
Arizona Chapter:**

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

Clip and Save:

Chapter Program Schedule

Southern Arizona Chapter – 2003/2004

September 11:

Network and Nibble

October 9:

Trends in Technical Communication Panel Discussion *

November 13:

Getting User Input During Development, Not After

December 11:

Holiday Party and Silent Auction

January 23:

National STC Board Meeting

February 12:

Whine and Cheese

March 11:

Intuit's Knowledge Management Implementation

April 8:

Avoid Clichés Like the Plague: A Lighthearted Safari through the Jungle of the English Language – ***Dave Carlson and Victoria Yuki***

May 20:

Recognition party and awards

June through August:

Summer sabbatical

Unless otherwise noted, programs are held on the second Thursday of each month at the Courtyard by Marriott, 201 S. Williams Blvd. (in the Williams Centre near Broadway and Craycroft, in Tucson, Arizona). Program schedule is subject to change without notice; for up-to-date meeting information, visit www.stc-saz.org.

* Handouts for this meeting available at www.stc-saz.org/resources.html. ■



Review: Last Month's Program

Kitty Aughey, Program Manager

Intuit's Knowledge Management Team Content Manager **Sara James** spoke to us at the March meeting. She told us that with two releases a year and more than ten different versions of QuickBooks, the need for process improvement was critical.

Sara talked about the application of Six Sigma methodologies to measure, analyze, and improve Intuit's processes. These changes improved productivity and customer satisfaction and led to additional initiatives in content management.

One new initiative involves using the customized software FatWire. Although this initiative is still in the planning phases, Sara explained some of the improvements it will bring. They sound very promising and we hope for a follow-up report next year.

The meeting resulted in 13 evaluations (out of 20 attendees), with an overall score of 3.8 out of a possible 4. Comments from attendees include:

- Excellent presentation – very informative.
- Look forward to a follow-up presentation.
- The progress Intuit has made in content development and management is amazing and impressive!
- Sara is an excellent speaker – lively, humorous, and very knowledgeable!
- Enjoyed the active question and answer session.
- Looking forward to more information on FatWire. ■



Don't belong to the STC yet? Want to just check out our chapter? Clip this coupon to save \$5.

STC, Southern Arizona Chapter

Nonmember \$5 Off Coupon

Save \$5 at Your First Meeting

We encourage nonmembers to attend a chapter program to learn about the STC and the Southern Arizona Chapter. Bring this completed coupon to the first chapter program you attend, and you'll save \$5 off the cost of admission.

Name (please print): _____

E-mail address: _____

Date of program: _____



Letter from Linda

Linda Oestreich, Region 5 Director-Sponsor

The past few days have seen a flurry of activity on the STC Presidents' ListServ regarding who pays for what to support chapter members who go to the STC Annual Conference. Tieline for March 2002 addressed that issue in the article "Appropriate Use of Chapter Funds." I've received a few e-mail messages from chapter presidents here in Region 5 to get my opinion on this situation, and so spawned this month's topic!

Ed Rutkowski, from the STC Office, responded to the ListServ with some quotes from that Tieline article. I repeat some of Ed's comments here:

"As with all questions regarding Society expenses, this one raises the issue of whether the return on the chapter's investment primarily benefits the Society, or whether it primarily benefits an individual. Please note that Article 4 of STC's Articles of Incorporation states that 'none of [STC's] net earnings shall be distributed to or enure to the benefit of any private...individual.'

"As explained in the article, chapters may subsidize a chapter president's travel to Leadership Day at the annual conference 'because the training obtained at Leadership Day would benefit the chapter. Many technical sessions at the conference also focus on chapter leadership duties, so funding conference registration for a chapter leader who attended these sessions would also be acceptable.

"However, simply funding a valuable volunteer's travel to the annual conference (without his or her attending Leadership Day or a number of STC-related sessions at the conference) would NOT be acceptable, since information learned at the conference would primarily benefit the individual."

The money in your treasuries belongs to the membership, not to the administrative council, not to the president, not to the treasurer, but to the members.

So what does this mean? It means that if a chapter and its administrative council believe that subsidizing costs for a member to attend the conference will benefit the chapter and the Society, by all means, do it. It also means that a chapter should not just pay for a member to attend the conference as a "gift," with no strings attached.

If the member you send returns with information, leadership skills, and added connection to the STC community he or she belongs to, and that benefit is returned to the chapter in a more experienced and better informed volunteer, then it is NOT enurement, but a wise distribution of funds for the good of all. And remember, if you choose to support a member who attends the conference, please do not reimburse expenses such as food and drink. To meet the STC policy, chapters may only subsidize or reimburse transportation, lodging, and registration fees.

As an administrative council, make wise decisions. You know your membership. You know those who will return and share their experiences and lessons learned to the community. And by so doing, the rules are followed. Subsidizing an incoming or current president, subsidizing someone who is receiving an honor, subsidizing someone who has been of long-time service...all these cases are valid IF those people return to the chapter and provide value to the membership.

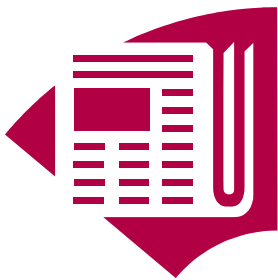
...cont'd

The money in your treasuries belongs to the membership, not to the administrative council, not to the president, not to the treasurer, but to the members. Insist that you receive receipts for funds expended. Pay for something that is recordable...the conference fee itself, perhaps. Some of the presidents who responded to the ListServ noted that they require chapter leaders who go to share a room or to do other things that will limit the expenses to the chapter.

Not every chapter will be able to afford the same level of subsidy. Don't put your treasury in jeopardy, but if you have the budget, use it. Don't hoard your funds. As that Tieline article also says, "weigh the benefit to the individual against the benefit to the chapter in the context of your chapter's financial robustness."

In this time of unemployment and severely reduced employer support, I believe that the chapters who can help should help. And certainly not a small thing, this particular year will be an important one for your leaders to be there.

Transformation will be spoken about at Leadership Day, in the halls, in the sessions, and at the lunches. The more your leaders know about it, the better they will be able to question it, understand it, help define it, and support it. So, reach into your treasuries and offer that support. But do it with wisdom. Only support those who will, in return, support your members. ■



WANTED: Members!

Kitty Aughey, Vice President

Throughout the year, we make it easy for people to join STC. At every meeting we have STC brochures and registration forms. We encourage nonmembers to attend our meetings at a first-time reduced rate and we add interested parties to our mailing list.

Starting in March of this year, we made STC's new brochure *Discover the Benefits* available at all meetings. This brochure is used to attract prospective members and replaces the formerly-used *About STC* and *Ten Reasons to Join STC* brochures. It is current, relevant and just plain terrific!

Member recruitment is an integral part of our Community Outreach program. Whenever our members work with other technology and communications in town, we provide STC brochures and have application forms available. This year we brought these materials to meetings of local chapters of the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), the Tucson Computer Society, the National Speaker Association, Tech Oasis (a networking group), as well as the YWCA Women's Leadership Conference and the PowerPoint Conference. We've also worked with the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the American Management Association (AMA), the Advertising Federation (AdFed), and American Women in Radio & Television (AWRT) through our efforts at the "Big C" Communications project. These efforts generate first-time attendees to our STC meetings.

On June 1, 2003 we had 70 members, the same number that we had on February 29, 2004. Even in these difficult financial times, with many writers out of work, we are maintaining our membership!

If you know of—or are—an interested person or potential member, please contact Judy McCabe at caribe966@aol.com. ■



Workshops and Seminars

Adobe Acrobat Advanced Topics Workshop

Mark Taylor presents a content-packed, hands-on workshop where you will learn advanced techniques to create and modify PDF documents using Adobe Acrobat 6.0. The focus is to allow you to organize and share your documents in a technical environment, as well as implement electronic document review workflows.

For this workshop, the Southern Arizona Chapter has joined with the Southern Arizona Institute of Advanced Technology (SAIAT), who will handle the registration and provide the instructor, facilities, and breakfast. For more information about SAIAT, including a description of the class and instructor profiles, please visit www.saiat.org.

This workshop will be advertised to the Tucson business community and is limited to 16 enrollees, so reserve your spot early!

- **When:** Saturday, April 24. Registration and continental breakfast starts at 8 a.m.; workshop runs from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm.
- **Where:** 3000 E. Valencia, Suite 190 (south side of Valencia between Country Club Rd. and Tucson Blvd.).
- **Cost:** \$50, includes continental breakfast.
- **RSVP:** Call (520) 573-7399 ext. 102 (Monday through Friday); fax (520) 573-7644 (anytime); or send an e-mail message to registration@saiat.org.

Crisis Communications Seminar

Discover crisis communications expert **Dr. Joe Trahan's** step-by-step approach for communicating effectively in crisis situations. Learn how to develop communications strategies, fine-tune messages, and create innovative ways to deal with the media.

Dr. Trahan has received high praise nationally for his media training, public relations courses, and Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) professional development seminars.

- **When:** Tuesday, April 20 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Includes continental breakfast and lunch.
- **Where:** Sheraton Tucson Hotel, 5151 E. Grant Rd.
- **Cost:** \$55 if check is postmarked by April 13 to the address below, or \$65 at the door. Continental breakfast and lunch is included in the price.
- **RSVP:** Mail check (postmarked by April 13) to:
Stephen Reidy, APR
7267 E. Caminito Feliz
Tucson, AZ 85710
- **Questions?** Please call Steve at (520) 794-5019. ■



STC Announcements

STC Receives Diana Award

STC has been chosen as the 2004 recipient of the prestigious Diana Award, which is given by the Association for Computing Machinery Special Interest Group on Computer Documentation (ACM SIGDOC). The ACM SIGDOC gives an annual Diana Award to an organization that has made an outstanding lifetime contribution to the field of user documentation.

Please visit www.acm.org/sigdoc/awards.html for more details. ■

Chapter Announcements

Community Service: Spring Food Drive

There are more than 200,000 hungry people in Tucson. The Community Food Bank needs our support to help provide food to needy individuals, including the working poor and senior citizens.

Chapter member **Sarah Harris** suggested that we have a food drive at one of our meetings. Her idea was so good that we're expanding it—the Chapter will be collecting canned food for the Tucson Community Food Bank at all events and meetings this spring!

We'll collect food donations from the March planning meeting through the annual half-day planning meeting in June. You can bring canned food to any chapter activity, monthly program, or planning meeting. We'll take care of getting all donations to the Community Food Bank. The most pressing need is for the items needed every day to fill Emergency Food Boxes, especially boxed breakfast cereals, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, and canned tuna, canned vegetables and tomato products, and canned soup.

Please note that the Food Bank cannot accept the following donations: rusty or unlabeled cans, homemade items or non-commercially canned or packaged items, alcoholic beverages, mixes, or sodas, open or used items, or items more than 18 months past their expiration date. For safety reasons, no glass.

Vote! Vote! Vote!

The ballots for the 2004–2005 officers have been mailed to all Chapter members that were active as of February 29, 2004. The ballots must be postmarked or received by the Election Committee **no later than April 19**. Election results will be announced in the May issue of *The Border Line*.

Chapter Member to Publish Third Book

Last year, Chapter member **Leslie Dupont** published her second book *Writing keystones: Essays and Research*, which followed her first book *Writing Cornerstones: Paragraphs in Context*. She is currently working on her third publication, entitled *Writing Touchstones: Sentence-Level Expression*, to be published in 2005.

Leslie has been teaching writing and humanities since 1989. A former high school dropout, she eventually earned a B.A. and an M.A. in Humanities from Arizona State University and graduated with a Ph.D. in English from the University of Arizona.

Leslie also enjoys teaching people of all ages and watching them grow as writers. She has been working with the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth since 1997, and continues to teach at the University of Arizona.

Annual Planning Meeting for 2004/2005

Our annual planning meeting for the upcoming year will be held on Saturday, June 5, from 8:30 am to 12:30 p.m in Room 3 of the Morris K. Udall Park Regional Center Building (7200 E. Tanque Verde). The Center Building and park are very close to each other on the south side of East Tanque Verde. Turn into the park and then take the immediate driveway to the Regional Center Building.

We need you and we want to meet *your* needs as well! Please bring your thoughts, concerns, and suggestions for our Chapter. Remember, we have the entire summer to bring your ideas and plans to fruition. This is your opportunity to help chart our Chapter's future course!

Please send an e-mail message to Kitty Aughey at kaughey@cox.net if you are able to attend. Oh, and we will be providing a big breakfast!

And Finally...

The last Planning Committee meeting for 2003/2004 will be held at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, April 27 at the Barnes and Noble Cafe (Broadway and Rosemont). For more information, please contact Pat Markey at pat.markey@prodigy.net. ■



Odds `n Ends

Technical Writer Makes "Hot Jobs" List

The April issue of *Reader's Digest* has an article about the current job market beginning on page 116 – and one of the 15 "hot" jobs listed is Technical Writer! Please take the time to read the *Reader's Digest* article. It's a great benefit to our profession to be included in this popular and highly visible publication.

And the Winner is...

Technical Standards, a Southern California documentation staffing and projects company, has announced the winning entry in its fourth annual **Worst Manual Contest**. This year's \$100 prize went to **Rhonda Bracey** of Western Australia for her submission of a two-page Safety Section in an air-conditioning unit's User's Guide. Here are few excerpts from the Guide:

- "Please do not put the one embarrassed because it gets wet under the air conditioner."
- "To apply the cold wind to the body for a longtime and so as to not exist about cooling too much."
- "Do not blow the wind to animals and plants directly. It occasionally causes a bad influence for animals and platns to be exerted."

To view the top entries and more information about Technical Standards' fourth annual Worst Manual Contest, please visit www.tecstandards.com.

While We're on the Subject

We couldn't finish this newsletter without sharing this excerpt from a customer service representative's e-mail reply to a satisfied customer:

"Thank you for the kind words, I assure you that your feedback will be forwarded to the appropriate department. We at [company] strive to give you the best customer experience and it is heartning to know that we have been unsuccessful." ■

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About the Newsletter

The Border Line is the official publication of the Southern Arizona chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC-SAZ). Issues are published monthly from September to May. The design and layout of this newsletter are copyright STC, 2004.

Submissions

We welcome contributions, book and product reviews, letters, and articles that are relevant to the field of technical communication. The submission deadline for the next newsletter is **Friday, April 30**. Your text may be edited to conform to style guidelines and space restrictions of the newsletter.

Send submissions by e-mail (Word file or RTF) to the **Editor**. Include your name and telephone number. By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and you permit other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Unless otherwise noted, authors retain copyright.

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Distribution

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About the STC

Our Mission...Designing the future of technical communication

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the world's largest professional association for anyone whose job involves communicating technical information. Contact the STC at 901 N. Stuart St., Ste. 904, Arlington, VA 22203-1822. Phone: (703) 522-4114; Web: www.stc.org

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Past Presidents

of the Southern Arizona Chapter

1998/1999: Dirk Arnold

1999/2000: Debra Crawford

2000/2001: Barbara Fraps

2001/2002: Brenda Huettner

2002/2003: Helen Marty