

The CAPITAL LETTER



Society for Technical Communication
Sacramento Chapter Newsletter

June 2007

Winding Down, Heating Up

Hello readers. Blame it on the heat, restlessness after a long quiet, or what you will, but if you've been watching the messages fly on our Yahoo group this month, you'll see a bit of a storm over STC International's new funding proposal. The changes can potentially reduce chapter funding again, and the proposal contains some language that seems to be aimed at programs like our 'Friends of Sacramento STC' designation.

The STC International Board of Directors will be meeting in Berkeley on August 16-19 (see page 6). If you want to participate in a discussion on how we (and other chapters) should respond to the funding proposal, or make plans with other members to attend the meeting in August, be sure to attend this month's chapter meeting. Chuck Petch touches on this and other hot issues on page 3. Many thanks go to Chuck for his service to the chapter, as his term as President ends this month.



This month's meeting will be the last under present management. We'll be holding the "infamous unswearing in ceremony" at Coco's on Wednesday night, installing the 2007/2008 board. If for no other reason, come on down to say hello and goodbye. It's fairly likely that more than that will be said, though.

The STC Kenneth Gordon Scholarship is producing a 2007-08 technical communication competition, and the Berkeley chapter is sponsoring it. The Gordon competition fills the void left by the collapse of the Touchstone competition, and Richard Mateosian is seeking input on how to get Touchstone going again. See the story on page 4 for details.

In book reviews this month, we have *Process Improvement Essentials*, by James Persse. It's an excellent introduction to what process improvement is all about, and to the three most popular process frameworks. If you have an idea for a book review, send it to me.

There are quite a few training opportunities happening in the next few weeks, and there's a free half-day training by MadCap Software for one lucky member. See page 6 for a list of events.

Rumor has it that this month's meeting will be outstanding, with the new board in, the old board out, a mini revolt over chapter rebates, and more. Be sure to attend.

See you at the meeting!

Chris Masotti, Editor



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

About The Capital Letter

The Capital Letter is published ten times a year, September through June, by the Sacramento Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Subscriptions are available to nonmembers for \$10 per year. Advertising rates are \$30 per quarter page.

We welcome letters to the editor, articles, and information regarding meetings, workshops, and courses pertaining to technical communication. Please submit in MS Word or plain text format. Articles may be edited as necessary for content and length. The deadline for submission is the 1st of each month for the following month's issue. Send submissions to the Managing Editor, Chris Masotti, chritti@sbcglobal.net or mail to:

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About STC

The Society for Technical Communication is the world's largest professional organization devoted to the advancement of the theory and practice of technical communications. STC's more than 15,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, graphic designers, multimedia artists, photographers, videographers, printers, publishers, educators, students and others whose work involves making technical information understandable by those who use it.

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STC Mission Statement

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

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President's Letter

By Chuck Petch, Sacramento Chapter President

This month brings changes and new opportunities. The first transition is the ushering in of a new chapter council at this month's meeting. I extend heartfelt personal thanks to Robyn Adams, Barry Schoenborn, Jim Collins, Chris Masotti, Lynda Straus, and Paul Mooney. These folks gave of their valuable time to serve you and our profession here in Sacramento.

Now we turn to the new board and volunteers, some of whom look strangely like the old board and volunteers with the notable exceptions of Ken Umbach joining us as President/VP of Programs and Christine Allen joining us as Secretary-Treasurer. Other officers include Barry Schoenborn, VP Public Relations and unelected officers yet to be appointed but likely to include some of us from the old board. (Do I hear a song by The Who playing in the background?)

Among the other opportunities presented to us this year is a group of chapter leaders formed by the international organization to discuss chapter funding models. I have volunteered to participate. I wish I could say my motives are altruistic, for the good of the larger society and all that, but frankly I'm volunteering because I think the chapters are getting a raw deal.



As you may know, every year the funding for chapters diminishes as the headquarters keeps more. This year the chapters received only \$24 for the first 100 members; \$16 for the next 100 members and \$8 for the remaining members. That means the headquarters is keeping about 80-95 percent of dues and returning only 5-15 percent to chapters. That's an incredibly high overhead, even when you consider the fine journals and conferences the larger organization produces.

I have little insight into how the headquarters organization runs or why they may need to keep so much of the dues. Their funding model may be entirely justifiable, but let's just say I'm concerned enough by the lack of funding to chapters that I want to understand more fully why that model was established and how it might be improved. Being even more candid, I am a fan of local chapters and not so much of the international organization. I love meeting with you in person every month and talking about making a living as writers here in the greater Sacramento area, and I want to make sure our chapter and other chapters remain healthy so we can continue to meet without having to pay exorbitant meeting fees.

Speaking of improving health, the Touchstone Northern California publications competition is being revived by the Berkeley chapter. After several years with no competition or a small competition local to the Berkeley chapter, the full regional competition is being reinstated. If you want to volunteer to help, you can contact Richard Mateosian of the Berkeley chapter (xrmxrm@gmail.com). To enter the competition, watch for further announcements about entry dates and requirements.

Thanks to all of you for allowing me to serve as your chapter president this year. I wish Ken and the new local council the best of success, and I wish all of you a prosperous career in the upcoming STC new year.

Warm Regards,

Chuck Petch

Reviving Touchstone: 2007-2008 Technical Communication Competition

Chris Masotti

The STC Kenneth Gordon Scholarship is producing a 2007-08 technical communication competition. Richard Mateosian, Treasurer of the STC Gordon Scholarship and President of the Berkeley Chapter of STC, is leading the effort to revive the Touchstone Competition. He has put out a call to have all Northern California chapters be joint sponsors.

So far, the Berkeley Chapter has agreed to be a sponsor. "Ideally," Mateosian says, "we would like to have all Northern California chapters share the sponsorship."

The six Northern California chapters shared the Touchstone competition until 2000. Sponsorship was rotated, with a different chapter sponsoring each year. Because it was so difficult to keep the competition going (there hasn't been one for several years), Mateosian is proposing a new model—under which the Northern California chapters will revive the Touchstone name, and the sponsoring chapter will benefit financially.

Mateosian would like to see a greater incentive for chapters to sponsor the competition. "For the last two years the scholarship committee has given 15% of the competition surplus to the sponsoring chapter, with the remainder going to the scholarship fund." Under his proposal, the sponsoring chapter (or combination of chapters) would be compensated as follows:

15% of the first \$4000.00 of surplus

30% of the next \$4000.00 of surplus

75% of any additional surplus

The Berkeley chapter also sponsored the 2005 and 2006 STC Gordon Scholarship competitions. "Last year we produced a small competition, sending only two entries to the international competitions. One won Best of Show in the International Technical Art Competition, and the other won Distinguished (and very close to Best of Show) in the International Technical Publications Competition," says Mateosian. "We may have been small, but our entries did well, because we have a long history of high standards in our local competitions. I hope that we can put on a substantially larger competition this year."

He's seeking input on making the competition work for all six chapters again. "I welcome any comments on this proposal. After we have agreed on a concrete proposal, we should present it to the leadership councils of the chapters. I would like this to happen quickly, because we need to begin planning for this Fall's competition very soon."

To learn more about the competition, provide input, or volunteer your services, contact Richard at the address below.

If you are considering submitting an entry in this year's competition, now is a good time to start preparing. Prospective entrants and volunteers can contact Richard Mateosian by email: president@stc-berkeley.org

Book Reviews

Process Improvement Essentials

When you think about quality improvement and process improvement, what comes to mind? Cars? Phones? Japan? How about IT? James Persse, a veteran of the

Process Improvement field, has written a guide to process improvement for the Information Technology world. In *Process Improvement Essentials*, Persse offers his insight to those who know they need some quality process and want an overview of the 'big three' quality programs.

In the first part of the book, we are treated to a couple of process success stories—some well-known names, their pre-process deficiencies, and their post-process gains. And in case the reader is inclined to dismiss those success stories as out of reach for all but the Boeings and Raytheons of the world, Persse moves right along to make his case against what he calls the Six Common Myths that are behind people's resistance to process.

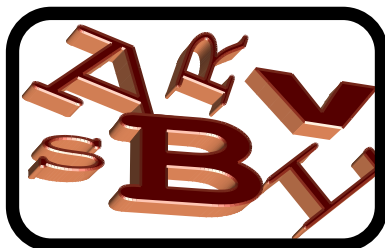
This resistance, he argues, usually results from either complete lack of exposure or exposure to poor examples. Throughout part one, he counters the myths, illustrates the benefits, and provides general guidelines for planning, getting started, recognizing success, and continuing the improvement process.

Persse offers his years of experience in the process improvement field to readers who want to take the first step. The ingredients in his success recipe include securing executive sponsorship (getting backing for the project from someone at the top), capitalizing on your strengths, and focusing on targeted improvements (start with a manageable scope—don't try to take on everything from the start). He also provides a lot of guidance for building the process team. Something worth noting for technical communicators is that the technical writer serves a key role on this team.

The second part of the book is an overview of the three best-known process frameworks: ISO 9001:2000, Six Sigma, and CMMI. The goal is to help readers get an idea about which (if any) of these three would be the best fit for their own needs. If you are looking for detailed instructions on implementing one of these frameworks, look elsewhere. What Persse does is explain some of the requirements, tools, and goals of each, highlighting some of the pros and cons as well.

For example, ISO 9001:2000 is a strictly regulated product of the International Organization for Standardization. To see it, you must buy it. It is intended to understand requirements, and establish processes to meet those requirements. CMMI, whose purpose (establishing processes for meeting requirements) is very much like that of ISO 9001:2000, is a compact, public-domain specification, freely available to anyone. Because of this, it's seen rapid worldwide growth, and helped to increase standardization. On the other hand, Six Sigma focuses on continual improvement of processes that are already in place. Six Sigma is not owned or regulated by anyone, and can be modified freely. Being more of an evaluation program, Six Sigma can be used in conjunction with ISO 9001:2000 or CMMI, measuring the results of the processes that they implement.

The demand for process frameworks like these is growing. Demand will probably continue to grow. The existence of a quality process is increasingly becoming a requirement for doing business with large companies. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act and other legislation will continue to increase the reporting requirements for even small publicly traded companies.



Persse makes a great case for process improvement, and does a fine job of presenting the options. If your organization is on the road to putting a process improvement program in place, you'll find *Process Improvement Essentials* a useful starting point.

<p>James R. Persse O'Reilly Media, 2006 ISBN: 0-596-10217-8 334 Pages \$44.99</p>
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Chris Masotti

Area Events

June 20, 2007

Live Webinar: Introducing Content Mapper for DITA

Information Mapping's Debbie Kenny, Vice President, and Cathy Nairne, Manager of Learning Solutions, will introduce the new Content Mapper for DITA software application and show you how this easy-to-use software tool lets anyone create well-structured DITA content in Microsoft Word without having to know anything about XML tags.

Information: <http://www.infomap.com>, or call 1-800-INFOMAP (463-6627) ext. 3350

June 27, 2007

Madcap Road Show- San Francisco

*Free Training for
One Lucky Sac STC
Member!*

This session will provide a brief overview of MadCap Software and the industry problems that we solve. This includes MadCap's philosophy for building our software and producing system architectures that stand the test of time. Why does MadCap Software do things the way that it does? There will also be a focus on standards compliance and the benefits that come with it.

Information:

<http://www.madcapsoftware.com/company/events.aspx#roadshow>

June 28, 2007

Using Video in Online Help with Stephanie Bryant

Technical communication doesn't have to end with text and pictures! Many users learn best through sound and video, and it's now more practical than ever to add both to your online help systems. This month, Stephanie Bryant teaches the nuts and bolts of embedding video files into an online help system, covering some core tools for filmed video and screencasting, file conversion, and how to embed your videos into an online help system using Framemaker and WebWorks ePublisher Pro.

Information: <http://www.stc-siliconvalley.org/>

July 9, 2007

Structured FrameMaker Training: Authoring

Topics include: setting up the work environment; Structure view; working with elements and attributes; validating a structured document.

Information: <http://www.microtype.com/TrainingStruct.html>

July 10-11, 2007

Structured FrameMaker Training: Developing EDDs & Other Tools

Topics include: document analysis; defining elements and formats; defining attributes; writing element definitions; handling unstructured legacy documents; generating and updating conversion tables; XML round-tripping.

Information: <http://www.microtype.com/TrainingStruct.html>

Area Events

July 11, 2007

Everything you ever wanted to know about Resumes and Portfolios

Andrew Davis will explain how to optimize your resume and make best use of your portfolio, covering in detail what works, why, and how to get the results you want.

This is the age of black-hole electronic job applications, keyword search tools, and anonymous recruiting generalists. Knowing what hiring managers want from you—let alone how to present your credentials and work samples to best effect—has never been more challenging. Andrew will help you parse the job description and accentuate aspects of your resume and portfolio accordingly. He will explain how to make hiring managers eager to speak with you.

Andrew will give a brief formal presentation, to leave time for a lively and candid Q&A.

Information: <http://www.stc-berkeley.org>

August 14-15, 2007

Minimalism: Creating Manuals People Can Use

Minimalist documents take time and effort to design, but once you have them in place, the savings are clear. Minimalist documents cost less to produce, are easier to maintain, and reduce requests for customer support. Minimalism is the key to getting the maximum return on your single-sourcing investment.

Information: <http://www.comtech-serv.com/workshops/index.shtml>

August 16-19, 2007

STC Board of Directors Meeting

The board will hold an open (to all members) meeting on Saturday, August 18, at the Double Tree hotel at the Berkeley Marina. A presentation and party will follow. Details to be announced.

Information: TBA

August 21-22, 2007

DITA: Getting Started

In this workshop, you learn that DITA is a standard for authoring topic-based technical information, that using DITA provides significant business advantages, and that you can get started immediately with the DITA Open Toolkit.

Information: <http://www.comtech-serv.com/workshops/dita.shtml>

Treasurer's Report

Robyn Adams

Members Only: The balance sheet and profit & loss statement are available in their entirety at our Yahoo Group (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Sac_STC).

Next STC Sacramento Meeting: Wednesday, June 20, 2007

The Infamous 'Unswearing In' Ceremony

Meet the new board, bid the old board farewell. The chapter term of office ends this month, and we install the new board.

Come down and meet the new Sacramento STC officers. Chat with your colleagues. Have some fun.

Free to STC Sacramento chapter members

Free to first-time visitors and Friends of STC, \$5 for non-members

Place: [Coco's Bakery and Restaurant, 7887 Madison Avenue, Citrus Heights](#)

Networking/No-host dinner: 6:00 pm, **Presentation:** 7:00 pm

Info: http://stcsacramento.org/03_Meetings.htm