

Devil Mountain Views



Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC
March/April 2004

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Helping Make Projects Work—Common-Sense Practices

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Documentation Management for Dummies

Do you have a document management strategy? If not, don't miss this article as **David Dick** and **Kathy Bine** provide pointers on creating an effective document management strategy.



Well Planned Is Half Done

Hate to make plans? **Vesa Purho** encourages us to take time to plan for any project as it will save time in the long run.



Ask Elaine: Double Trouble

Elaine Parrish helps you avoid using the wrong word when ~~you~~ you're in a hurry.



First Impressions: Resume Tips

Get your foot in the interview door with helpful tips on publishing your resume from **Dara Golden**.



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Helping Make Projects Work— Common-Sense Practices



by [Jon Rude](#)

Jon Rude is Director, Program Management Office for Saillant Consulting Group, Denver, Colorado. Jon has been managing software development projects for 15 years in a variety of industries.

Project management, like technical communication, is a distinct professional discipline that requires years of experience to master. On the other hand, the average project team can improve its effectiveness without any knowledge of the formal tools that professional project managers use. That's because the essence of a successful project is based on common sense. If you manage projects, make sure your team follows these few basic disciplines. If you're a member of a project team, focusing on these keys can help drive your project to a successful conclusion.

Scope Management: “Requirements, Requirements, and Requirements”

It is said that the three keys to success in real estate are “location, location, and location.” It can also be said that the three keys to success on a project are “requirements, requirements, and requirements.” There are very few problems on projects that don't somehow originate from requirement errors. Requirements are the basis for estimates, schedules, budgets, and quality. If the project's requirements are not well defined and understood, are not accurately recorded, or (shockingly common) don't even exist in written form, odds are high that the project will falter in some serious ways.

As a project manager or as a team member, do whatever you can to discover, document, and manage the requirements that will define your work on the project. If no one else has done so, write the requirements down and keep them up to date. You will quickly make friends. Managing requirements is a challenge, but steadfastness on this point will avoid serious pitfalls down the road.

Time Management: Estimates— Say What You Really Think

Developing or agreeing to unrealistic estimates in the belief that it helps the team is *Cardinal Sin #1: Heroic Estimating*. If you're ever fortunate enough to have a really good idea about how long it takes to do something, don't compromise in order to please the team or the boss.



It can be exceedingly hard to stand up for realistic estimates. Management usually doesn't want to hear them, let alone accept them. This is a source of great conflict for every project team. Still, for project health and personal sanity, it is critical for every project team member to say what they really think. Preparing and understanding realistic estimates early on can help a project team make important decisions about scope, schedule, and resources.

If you are managing others on a project, always look for signs of overoptimistic thinking. Keep exploring with your team until everyone is comfortable with the projections. If you are a project team member, do yourself and your team a favor by keeping your estimates realistic and not heroic.

Communications Management: Bad News Does Not Improve With Age

A close relative of Heroic Estimating is *Cardinal Sin #2: Heroic Silence*. If Heroic Estimating is the crime, Heroic Silence is the cover-up. Attempting to work harder to make up for a bad estimate is risky at best. I'm sure the following dialogue is familiar to anyone who's ever been on a project team.

Project meeting, two weeks before deadline—Heroic Estimating

Project Manager: "We have to ship in two weeks. How's the framstat development coming along?"

Team Member: (Says) "Two weeks is fine; not a problem." (Thinks) "Gonna be really tough, but I can get it done."

Project meeting, one week before deadline—Heroic Silence

Project Manager: "How's the framstat development going?"

Team Member: (Says) "Looks good." (Thinks) "I'm in deep trouble. But, if I work 120 straight hours, abandon my family, and eat out of the vending machines, I can get it done."

Release day review meeting—The Crisis

Project Manager: "Did you check the framstat into production?"

Team Member: "I need a little more time."

Project Manager: "How much more time?"

Team Member: "One week...I'm having problems at home...stop pushing me!"

As a project manager, make sure you look for the usually obvious signs of a team member who is overextended, stressed out, and just plain miserable. As a project team member, when you know a task cannot be completed on time for any reason, let the right person know immediately. There is nothing worse than to announce a schedule slip on delivery day.

There is not a reasonable manager in the world (no accounting for unreasonable ones) who wouldn't prefer an honest dialogue about a problem or concern while there is still time left in the project schedule to do something about it. With enough lead time, it's possible that the problem could be fixed by adding another resource, by reducing scope, or by extending the schedule.

Making Projects Successful

There are many other fundamentals that project teams can use to help manage their efforts, but if everyone on a project team focuses on requirements, realistic estimates, and timely communications, the

chances for project success improve dramatically.

Resources

Following are references that address team-level project success in some different ways. Although these books are typically found in the software development section of the bookstore, they contain useful information for any type of technical professional interested in projects.

[*Journey of the Software Professional—A Sociology of Software Development*](#), by Luke Hohmann. This is a very unusual book. It's not a cover-to-cover read, but is packed with novel ways of looking at how technical teams and processes work. Extensive bibliography.

[*Software Project Survival Guide*](#), by Steve McConnell. This well-known book is still a good source for practical project tips. Good emphasis on the checklist—an underutilized tool.

[*Exploring Requirements—Quality Before Design*](#), by Gause & Weinberg. One of the best books on understanding requirements early in project development. Not software-specific.



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Documentation Management for Dummies

by [David Dick](#) and [Kathy Bine](#)

David Dick is a Technical Writer for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) in LaHulpe, Belgium.

Kathy Bine documents software solutions for ICF Consulting in Fairfax, VA. She is a member of the Washington, DC chapter of STC.

This article is reprinted from the July/August 2003 issue of [The Nor'easter](#), Northern New England Chapter.

The typical project consists of proposals, plans, meeting minutes, customer requirements, functional requirements, use cases, test plans, design specifications, overall design document, user guides, system administrator guides, installation guides, and training manuals. It may include press releases, marketing brochures, service descriptions, and release letters. The documents are updated several times throughout the project's life cycle. In the absence of a documentation management policy, there is no consistent and proven approach to ensure quality.

Controlling documents does not mean creating bureaucracy. It means regulating the development, approval, issue, change, distribution, maintenance, use, storage, security, and disposal of documents.

The goal of documentation management is to ensure:

- Documents fulfill a useful purpose.
- Resources are not wasted on distribution of non-essential information.
- Only valid information is published.
- Information is kept up-to-date. Information is in a form that can be used by relevant people.
- Classified information is restricted to the people who have a need to use it.
- Information is retained that could help investigate a problem, improve opportunities, or deflect potential litigation.

So how to get your document management under control? Begin by defining your strategy, create a process that fits your strategy and put it to use. The following sections describe some of the most important points to consider.

Defining a Documentation Management Strategy

A documentation management strategy should be supported by a procedure that defines the documentation development process, which includes:

- Planning new documents, funding, authorization, establishing need, and so on.
- Preparation of documents, who prepares them, how they are drafted, conventions for test, diagrams, forms, and so on.
- Standards for the format and content of documents, forms, and diagrams.
- Documentation identification conventions.
- Issue notation, draft issues, post approval issues.
- Dating conventions, date of issue, date of approval or date of distribution.
- Document review: who reviews them and evidence that is retained.

- Document approval: who approves them and how approval is donated.
- Document proving prior use.
- Printing and publication, who does it and who checks it.
- Distribution of documents, who decides, who does it, who checks it.
- Use of documents, limitations, unauthorized copying and marking.
- Revision of issued comments, requirements for revision, who approves the requests, who implements the change.
- Denoting changes, revision marks, reissues, sidelining, and underlining.
- Amending copies of issued documents, amendment instructions, and amendment status.
- Indexing documents, keeping them current, and periodic review.
- Document security, unauthorized changes, copying, disposal, computer viruses, fire, and theft.
- Document filing, masters, copies, and drafts.

Many of these processes can be automated by a documentation management tool. Only tasks that need to be performed by staff will need to be defined in your procedure.

Creating a Documentation Review Board

The documentation review board consists of the following members:

- *Reviewers* are subject matter experts who judge the accuracy of the document and see that it satisfies the intended purpose.
- *Authors* are the persons who create the document.
- *Approvers* are the persons who approve the publication of the document.

To avoid extensive lists of reviewers, the Authors and Approvers may select a representative from each area that is responsible for consolidating their team's comments. The nominated reviewer may distribute the document within their team, but they remain responsible for filtering and consolidating feedback before passing it to the author.

Conducting a Documentation Review

The Author sends the document and a document review form to the review board. To avoid a meeting, distribute the document (via the document management server) to the review board and provide a standard comment sheet on which to add comments and suggestions. In this approach, comments are easily consolidated and given to the Author and Approver for review and response.

When Is It Necessary?

The document review ensures that the appropriate people check information for correctness and that their comments are addressed.

Reviews are conducted when:

- Taking remedial action to correct an error in the document and/or product.
- Taking corrective action to prevent an error from occurring.
- Taking preventive action to prevent occurrence of an error.
- Updating or clarifying information.
- Validating a document for use (e.g., selecting documents for use in connection with a project, product, contract, or other application).

Benefits of Identifying Changes

- Reviewers and Approvers easily identify what has changed and expedite the approval process.
- Auditors can easily identify what has changed and focus on the new provisions.
- Change initiators can easily identify what has changed and verify whether their proposed changes were used as intended.

Methods for Identifying Changes

- Sidelining, underlining, boldfacing, or similar technique.
- A change record within the document (at front or back) denoting the nature of the change.
- Appending the change details to the initiating change request.

Considerations

- Staff should be told the reason for the change. Employ some means of ensuring that where changes to documents require a change in practice, adequate instruction is provided.
- Changes are not complete until everyone whose work is affected by them both understands them and is prepared to implement them when necessary.
- When evaluating the change, you should assess the impact of the requested change on other areas and initiate the corresponding changes to related documents.

Whenever a document is revised, its status changes to signify that it is not identical to the original. Date, letter, number, or combination of issue and revision can identify the status.

Every change to a document should be reflected in a version number. Version 1 may denote the original version. Subsequent changes can be identified as Version 2 or Version 1.1 depending on the extent of the changes. The filename should contain the revision in its title (e.g., <product name><type of document><version>. You will want to create standards for file naming conventions of product names, document types, and versions.

Define a Policy for Approving Documents

Approval means that designated authorities have agreed on the content of the document before making the document available for use. The goal is to ensure that a panel of Reviewers has evaluated the documents. Informing and consulting the Reviewers is not only a courtesy, but also ensures that they are aware of decisions taken, why, and the opportunity to reply. The following table shows the roles and responsibilities of the approval process.

	Author	Reviewer	Approver
Writes the document	Responsible	Informed	Informed
Selects reviewers and approvers	Responsible	Informed	Consulted
Ensures the document is in an accessible area of DMS	Responsible	Informed	Informed
Sends an e-mail to reviewers (and approver) with a link to the document in the DMS (but not attaching the document). Provides a reasonable deadline for feedback and how comments can be returned.	Responsible	Informed	Informed
Responds to comments in the next version of the document, and informs reviewers of any comments that will not be addressed.	Responsible	Informed	Consulted
Approves the document and	Informed	Informed	Responsible

provides evidence of approval.			
Uploads approved version of the document in DMS (add version or check-in if multiple writers possible), with the review records and the approval record.	Responsible	Informed	Informed

When the document is approved:

- the Approver sends an e-mail to the Author.
- the Author changes the status of the document from Draft to Approved.
- the Author sends the approved document, comments, and responses to the review board, and archives it in the appropriate directory of the documentation management server.
- a copy of the e-mail from the Approver is filed by the Author in the Quality Records directory.

Ensure that Documentation Is Available

Documentation should be archived on a documentation management server which users have access to. User access rights that reflect security considerations should be set up on a per user basis.

Summary

A defined procedure saves time and effort, and improves quality. It means regulating the development, approval, issue, change, distribution, maintenance, use, storage, security, and disposal of documents to ensure quality. Follow these guidelines to improve your organization's documentation management process, and you'll wonder how you ever got anything done correctly before now.

References

- Hoyle, David, (2001), *ISO 9000 Quality Systems Handbook* (fourth edition), BH
- ISO 9001:2000, Quality Systems—Model for quality assurance in design, development, production, installation and servicing.



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Well Planned Is Half-Done

by [Vesa Purho](#)
Development Manager, Nokia

This article has been renamed and reprinted from the January issue of the Center for Information–Development Management (CIDM) [e-newsletter](#).

The holiday seasons are already over when you read this article but I still want to give you a gift for Christmas. When the times are tough and we have fewer and fewer resources for doing our work, it is easy to neglect planning and dive in immediately doing “real work.” So my gift to you all is having time to plan.

In Finland, we have a proverb “well planned is half done.” What people often fail to see is that planning is part of the work, not something extra that hardly takes any time. And if the planning is considered part of the work, “well planned is half done” means also that planning should take a considerable amount of time in the total work. Because it is just a proverb, planning might not actually take half of the time, in fact, it might take a lot more than half.

A Plan in Hand Sometimes planning may sound unnecessary because the activities seem so small that an official plan seems like overkill. However, my advice is that unless you are the only person doing the work and the work is really small, you create some kind of a plan. It does not have to be an elaborate one but it should contain the goal of the activity (and as I noted in my last article, setting a clear goal is very important), subtasks for getting to the goal, and the persons participating in the tasks.

If the project is any bigger, you should include work estimations and more detailed timetables. Thinking about the subtasks usually reveals things you have not thought about initially. Putting the persons and timetables in place serves as a reality check so that you don’t end up in a situation where the deadline is impossible right from the beginning. The plans should naturally be communicated to people who are taking part in the activity.

The Gift of Time It is actually not in my power to give you time to plan. I hope at least that you take the time to plan yourself. Just writing down some notes about the activities on your notepad will probably reveal some insights that make you see that a more detailed plan is in order. It is so easy to create action plans that state the action in one sentence and have a deadline and the responsible person. Then you assume that the action happens. However, what typically happens is that when the deadline approaches, the responsible person starts calling meetings with people whose time has not been reserved for the actions. These people might not be able to participate or, if they can participate, most of the meeting time is spent explaining what the action is about and discussing whether it should be done at all. The result is typically less than optimal.

My New Year’s resolution is to... Well, they aren’t kept anyway so better not to promise anything. I just wish you all a happy, planning-oriented New Year.

This article is the personal opinion of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinion or practice of Nokia.

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Ask Elaine: Double Trouble



by [Elaine Parrish](#)
 DMV Copyeditor

If you have an editing question you'd like to see addressed in a future column, please submit it to [Ask Elaine](#).

Here's a fantasy scenario for you:

 **BOSS:** *I've got a writing assignment for you. I want you to research, describe, and explain in detail all of the complex processes involved in mastering the ABC Software.*

YOU: *OK, boss, you got it! When is this project due?*

BOSS: *Oh, don't worry about that. Take as much time as you need.*

Reality check: As every writer knows, there is no such thing as a project where you can "take as much time as you need." If a writer had that luxury, he or she could no doubt come up with a spectacular masterpiece: concise, perfectly written, and error-free. Those of us who live in the real world, however, must deal with time constraints. You wish you had time to carefully research, write, test, rewrite, edit, test, rewrite, edit—and so on, until you have a faultless final product. But you have a deadline (often a nearly impossible one), so you must compromise by capturing words on the screen as quickly as possible.

Confusing Doubles

As a seasoned writer, you've probably become very good at writing in a hurry. As a result, you may sometimes run into "double trouble"—using the wrong word of a pair that many writers get mixed up. (Of course I meant to write "pair" in that last sentence—see what I mean?)

It doesn't help that certain words are often incorrectly used in popular media. Does the grocery store advertise bargains "everyday"? Have you ever seen a print ad for a product that "let's" you enjoy more leisure time? Does your home security system promise you "piece" of mind? Seeing a word used the wrong way over and over again can lead you to believe it's actually correct.

Types of Usage

For some of these doubles, correct usage depends upon the part of speech being used. Many words take one form when used as a noun or adjective, and another form when used as a verb or adverb. For example, you can drive a *pick-up* [adjective] truck to *pick up* [verb] a pizza on the way home. You wear your *everyday* [adjective] clothes to go to the gym *every day* [adverb].

Other doubles (and some triples) consist of entirely different words used as the same part of speech. Even though they just happen to sound very much alike, they are spelled differently and have entirely different meanings. For example, to *proceed* means to go forward; to *precede* means to go before. To *ensure* means to make certain; to *insure* means to protect against loss; and to *assure* means to give someone confidence. To *affect* is to influence; to *effect* means to bring about (to further complicate matters, the noun form of *effect* means a result or impression).


Many confusing doubles are words that don't even sound alike. *Bring* indicates motion toward the speaker, while *take* indicates motion away from the speaker: You can take my book to work with you if you promise to bring it back to me tomorrow.

Keep a List

How can we do a better job of keeping troublesome doubles straight? If you don't have time to hunt for words in your dictionary or your style manual, try starting your own personal list. As writers, each one of us has a unique set of words that we always seem to confuse. You're probably aware of many of your own troublesome words. Ask your editor to suggest others. Keep your list near your computer to refer to when proofreading your work, and add to it regularly. Every writer's list will be different, but here's one example:

Word	Usage
a lot	a large number (always two words, never <i>alot</i>)
affect	verb: to influence
assure	to give someone confidence (takes an object that refers to a person)
bring	indicates motion toward the speaker
effect	noun: result or impression; verb: to bring about
e.g.	for example
ensure	to make certain (usually followed by "that")
every day	adverb
everyday	adjective
farther	actual distance
further	figurative distance, to a greater degree or extent
i.e.	that is
imply	to suggest
infer	to assume or conclude
insure	to protect against loss
let's	let us
lets	third person singular form of <i>to let</i>
pick up	verb

pick-up	noun or adjective
precede	to go before
proceed	to go forward
take	indicates motion away from the speaker

I hope this technique works for you as it has for me. Happy list making! 

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First Impressions: Resume Tips

by [Dara Golden](#)
DMV Contributing Editor

Dara Golden is the former Interim Editor of [Connection](#), the Silicon Valley Chapter's newsletter.

Many people regard resumes as a necessary evil. However, a resume's primary purpose is to get you an interview. Managers form a first impression of a person by looking at their resume. Even if your resume shows that you meet all the job-specific qualifications, you still may not be interviewed if your resume is uninspiring. While this article cannot promise a dream job, it provides tips for making your resume better.

The Basics As a writer, it might help to think of your resume as a user document:

- Is it easy to read?
No spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors
- Is it easy to navigate?
Easy-to-read font, good layout, logical flow from one item to the next, including headers to new sections
- Is the information accurate and complete?
Besides contact information, this includes noting contract positions and changed company names (such as "Red Hat, formerly Cygnus")

A Checklist

If the basics have been met, you're part of the way there. The following tips will improve your resume:

Include a specific objective

Many writers have diverse skills and it is important to let a hiring manager know what you would like to do and what you can bring to the job.

Vague: "A technical writing job."

Specific: "A technical writing job where I can use my database and web design skills."

Write in complete sentences

Since you are a writer, your resume must demonstrate that you can write. This does not mean never using bullets; they are fine, especially when lists are necessary.

Example: Responsible for creating new user documentation with input from Marketing and Engineering.

Better: Working with the Marketing and Engineering departments, I created new user documentation.

✓ **Quantify**

Numbers help readers quantify things. Whenever possible, use numbers or percents, such as document amounts, time spent/saved, or revenue generated.

Example: In one week, I created 12 online “How to” documents. They reduced support calls by 13% in the first week.

✓ **Include cover letter information in your resume**

It was recently reported that 33% of all managers either never receive or never read cover letters. If you have important information in your cover letter, also include it in your resume.

✓ **Include other writing-related items**

An “Other” section in your resume can serve as a catch-all for other writing-related items, such as being an STC member, writing tutorials for new knitters, or editing your church newsletter.

✓ **Fill time gaps**

If there is a gap of six months between jobs on your resume, note what you were doing. Large time gaps are noticed by employers and may prevent you from being interviewed.

With many people looking for jobs, your resume must stand out positively from other resumes. Using these tips will help you get noticed by hiring managers.



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Editor's Message



by [Becky Rude](#)
Acting Managing Editor

Hello Readers!

In the movie *Life and Death*, Woody Allen says, "Eighty percent of success is showing up." This statement may have been true for technical communicators during the dot-com boom when jobs were plentiful, but it's no longer enough to just show up and expect that you'll be successful in your career. Putting in that extra twenty percent can give you the edge you need to stay ahead of the pack.

The discussions we're having at chapter meetings, at the Society level, and in various online communities are causing us to examine our roles as technical communicators. We're finding that we need to be more proactive about learning skills outside of technical communication and to expand our roles in the organizations in which we work. At the last chapter meeting where we had a panel discussion on trends in technical communication, I was particularly struck by a comment from **Marie Highby** who said that an active mind and continual learning are the most important skills to have to prepare for the future of technical communication.

This issue of DMV strives to offer you information about areas that many of us are interested in learning about: project management, document management, and time-saving tips. It's my hope that this issue will give you a few basics on these skills so that you can continue to grow in your profession and be more than someone who just shows up.


In This Issue

Jon Rude writes about aspects of project management that can be applied to any project, including technical communication projects. And yes, he's my husband, in case you were wondering. At Jon's going-away party with a previous employer, he kept introducing me to technical writers. I'd never seen so many technical writers in one place outside of STC! I'm guessing that because he listens to me talk about what it's like to be a technical communicator, he is able to understand the difficulties we face and to advocate for those issues in projects he manages.

Vesa Purho encourages us to take time to plan for any project as it will save time in the long run. **David Dick** and **Kathy Bine** give us pointers on creating a document management strategy. **Elaine Parrish** has a great time-saving idea of keeping a personal list of "doubles," which are words that you easily confuse when in a hurry (they're versus their). And finally, to help us stay ready for job hunting, **Dara Golden** provides some helpful tips on polishing your resume.

St. Patrick's Day Contest—You Can Win!



Now for some fun! In this issue we've hidden a number of shamrocks  among the articles. To enter the contest, count the number of shamrocks (including the one in this article) and [email](#) me your answer. The correct entries will be placed into a pool and one winner will be drawn for a \$20 gift certificate from Amazon.com. **Send your answers by Friday, March 26, 2004.**

Have fun shamrock hunting and have a happy St. Patrick's Day!

Becky 

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President's Message: A Different Career Path and STC



by [Susan Harlan](#)
 EBSTC President

Last month, I encouraged everyone to renew his or her membership in STC. Realizing that lots of changes have taken place in the last year, I know that some people wonder if STC can really offer them what they need in a new career direction. Well, this month I want to write about the benefits of STC membership when your career direction has changed.

New Directions

This is a coming-out party, if you will, for me. I have to admit that I no longer have the title of Technical Writer. Actually, I gave that up last fall when I took a contract with PG&E as an Instructional Designer, a title I had been seeking for a long time. However, as things tend to happen in life, this contract came the week after I signed up for my first class in gerontology at San Francisco State University (SFSU).

Why gerontology? Well, because I've had only short-term contracts with so much time off the past three years, I became involved in volunteer activities. My volunteer activities went from writing a web page on senior programs to writing a grant for volunteers, to working in the coordinator's role once that grant was funded. An introduction to a professor of gerontology at SFSU really opened the door. After all, I didn't complete that online master's degree in technical writing that Texas Tech offered. In fact, I never got around to applying for it, and the life-long goal of getting a master's degree was still out there. So, why not? With good fortune and a supportive PG&E manager, I was able to start with one class during the day last semester.

When we had a lecture on "Gero-Technology," this gerontology class really seemed to close the loop. After all, here we were, listening to a speaker talk about the need for changing web sites, fonts, computers, etc. for older adults who have special needs.

This semester brought lots of changes. I chose to go to school full-time and not continue the contract with PG&E. It was not an easy decision to make, but it fits me at this time, and I am very, very happy about what I'm doing.

Always a Writer

Is there no tech writing in my life now? I wrote a training manual using Information Mapping last month; I'll write user procedures this week, a flyer, press releases for my internship position at a retirement agency, and a grant request for an agency that will include some work for me as project director or training consultant.

The list of writing assignments seems to be never-ending. I say "writing" instead of "technical writing" because the topics I'm writing about are not technical in the scientific sense. Lots of technical writers today are doing other types of writing while keeping the technical writer title. What's the

difference? Well, yes, the student pay rate is not quite the same, but the professional rates for a geriatric case manager, for example, are higher than most tech writer jobs I've known about.

The Value of STC

I'm not suggesting that you jump ship with technical writing. The skills you have learned in technical writing can be used with non-technical companies. And the East Bay Chapter of STC will welcome you and continue to offer networking and useful information. I'm telling you my story here, as one who has been a technical writer and is now following a different path, but still sees the merit of membership in STC.

Best Regards,

Susan 

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Chapter Activities: Meeting Location Update



by [Hillary Russak](#)
 EBSTC V.P. of Arrangements

Mission The mission of the East Bay Chapter is to provide a forum for members to network, build professional skills, and stay current in the field of technical communication.


Meeting Location Update You may recall that our chapter has been seeking a less expensive location than Crow Canyon Country Club (CCCC) for our monthly program meetings. This article updates you on our progress.

We had a few suggestions from our online contest; however, none of the suggested locations met our requirements, so we continue to meet at CCCC for now (and we've developed a new appreciation of CCCC's flexibility, cost, and other fine offerings).

In general, we need a quiet, private room located in the San Ramon/Pleasanton area and suitable for socializing, eating, and hosting presentations. The room must seat at least 30 for dinner with coffee, tea, and dessert for about \$16 to \$20 per person (this is the amount most people said they would prefer to pay in our member survey). If you have suggestions, please [contact me](#).

This table presents the options we investigated and the results:

Option	Result and Details
Tony Roma's, Danville	Many negative comments about this place, although it was submitted by two people who love it
Brass Door, San Ramon	Conference room holds only 20; dinner/drinks are a la carte from the menu (cost is \$8 to \$25+)
Max's, San Ramon	Must have 25 minimum guaranteed attendees; cost is \$29 per person
Mudd's, San Ramon	Lovely looking web site, but cost is \$35 per person
PG&E, San Ramon	Cost is \$29 to \$37 and requires a minimum guarantee of 25 people. (Does not allow room rental and bringing in catered food.)
Marriott, San Ramon	Cost is \$26.95 to \$32.95 per person, plus a room rate of \$175 (if we guarantee 15 meals; if we guarantee more meals, the room rate could go down); meeting would have to start at 6:00 or

	6:30 (instead of 5:30). Pros: Can contract for individual meetings, good location, bar service
Marriott Courtyard, San Ramon	Does not offer meal service
Hilton Hotel, Pleasanton	Cost is about \$20 if we guarantee 20 meals; rises to \$29.95 otherwise; must sign a contract for 10 meetings. Pros: Can start meetings at 5:30, good location, bar service
University of San Francisco, San Ramon	Rent classrooms during the daytime only
O'Kane's Irish Pub and Grill, San Ramon	Late entry; not fully investigated yet. Much more casual, noisy atmosphere than CCCC. No projection screen. 

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Chapter Meeting Information

Upcoming Meetings

Attending meetings is a great way to learn new things and connect with technical writers around the East Bay.

East Bay programs are usually held at Crow Canyon Country Club in San Ramon. For details on meeting location and reservations, see the [meetings page](#) on the chapter web site.

Date	Speaker	Topic
April 1	Clark N. Quinn, Ph.D. Director of User Experience at Knowledge Anywhere	<i>Usability Issues</i> Clark joined Knowledge Anywhere as a key learning consultant in 2002. Clark has been leading educational system design for over 20 years, working with business, education, government, and the not-for-profit sectors to develop innovative applications that meet real needs. Clark is a recognized scholar in the field with an extensive publication and presentation record, and has held positions at the University of New South Wales, the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center, and San Diego State University's Center for research in Mathematics and Science Education. Clark earned a Ph.D. in Cognitive Psychology from the University of California, San Diego, after working for DesignWare, a visionary educational software company. He has been responsible for the design of award-winning online content, educational computer games, and websites.
May 6	Linda Urban, UC Berkeley Extension	<i>Information Architecture</i> Linda is an award-winning technical writer, help author, and instructor. She has more than 20 years of experience in designing and developing technical information, including online help, user guides, reference information, and training. She also works with writers and teams to improve the quality of their documentation, focusing on both usefulness and usability. <i>Among the courses that she teaches at UC Berkeley Extension are Information Architecture, Usability, and Online Documentation.</i> 

Meeting Report: February 2004



by [Becky Rude](#)
 EBSTC President-Elect

EBSTC kicked off 2004 with a lively panel discussion of trends in technical communication. This topic was the number one choice when members voted last fall for program topics, and the large turnout proved that many of us are interested in this subject.

As usual, door prizes were also distributed at this meeting.

Panel Discussion **Beau Cain**, an instructor at San Jose State University, a technical communication consultant, and a member of the Silicon Valley Chapter, moderated the panel. Following is a list of our esteemed panelists:

Panelist	Profession	Chapter
Susan Becker	Technical Writer and Online Help Developer	President of the San Francisco Chapter
Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer	Technical Writer	President of the North Bay Chapter
Marie Highby	Technical Communication Certificate Program Coordinator, San Jose State University Professional Development Center	Silicon Valley Chapter
Eunice Malley	Independent Technical Writer and Writing Instructor	Berkeley Chapter
Gwaltney Mountford	Technical Communicator	East Bay Chapter



Panelists from left to right: **Susan Becker, Marie Highby, Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer, Eunice Malley, Gwaltney Mountford, and Beau Cain.**

The BIG Questions

The panel set out to answer the three questions listed below. They provided excellent insight into all of these questions and provoked interesting comments from the audience. This article summarizes the discussion.

Will our profession ever again support the huge number of professionals seeking work locally?

The panel and audience seemed to agree that the answer to this question is “no.” **Highby** pointed out that it was so easy to get a job during the dot-com boom that many unqualified people were getting technical communication jobs, which inflated the number of employed professionals. She believes that we will return to normal numbers of employed and qualified professionals.



Are there any industries that promise any semblance of job security for technical communication professionals?

The general consensus on this question is that the only remaining industries that will provide job security in the future are those that require government clearance, as these types of jobs cannot be outsourced to other countries. There was discussion as to whether industries requiring customer confidentiality, such as banking and medical record storage, will also provide some semblance of security for U.S. technical communicators because the information must be kept secure.

Which old skills will definitely serve us in the near and long term, and what new ones must we acquire in order to succeed?

The majority of the discussion was around this topic and the panelists came up with some creative answers.

Malley

- Learn to be flexible in the type of jobs you’re willing to take.
- Learn to market yourself and the skills you can bring to a job.
- Have a second career in an area that interests you where you can use your writing ability as a secondary skill.

Dlugy-Hegwer

- Develop specialized skills that will give you an edge and separate you from everyone else. In other words, find a niche and then look for those opportunities.

Mountford

- Core technical communication skills will always be needed.
- We should look to librarians and learn from their skills in problem analysis and organizing and categorizing information. These skills are becoming essential, as we are an information-focused society with more information available every day.

Becky Rude, President-Elect, and **Beau Cain**, panel moderator, hamming it up.

Highby

- Have an active mind and strive to learn new things constantly.
- Learn how to think in business terms as both a CEO and a customer.
- Learn how to prioritize quality as it relates to company priorities because we rarely have time to complete the perfect piece of writing.
- Broaden our idea of writing and volunteer to write reports and other documents, tasks that colleagues are more than willing to give up.

Becker

- Learn to organize our email as well as the other information we're deluged with. Becker asked a provocative question: How many emails are currently in your inbox? Most of us responded that we've got dozens, if not more. No one is teaching this skill!
- Play with up-and-coming technology, whatever that may be. Ten years ago those technical communicators who started playing with the Internet were forward-looking and able to stay employed.

Door Prizes



[SEVEN Networks](#) generously donated this month's door prizes. Winners from left to right are **Jeanie Egbert**, **Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer**, and a luck prize winner whose name we do not know! If you know this person, please [let me know](#).



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Society News

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- [Elections](#)
- [Region 8 Elections](#)
- [STC 51st Annual Conference](#)
- [Region 8 Conference](#)

Society's Mission Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

Elections Society elections are in full swing and there are three Bay Area people (**Andrea Ames**, **Beau Cain**, and **Lori Fisher**) running for office!

Remember that you must pay your dues by *February 27, 2004*, to be eligible to vote.

If you chose to receive election materials via email (you can choose this option on your dues renewal form or new membership application), you'll receive voting instructions and other information in March. If you did not select this option, you'll receive these materials by first-class mail. *The election closes April 15.*

To see the slate of candidates and their statements, go to the Society [election page](#).

Region 8 Election Don't forget to vote for a Region 8 Director-Sponsor. This year, **Beau Cain**, Silicon Valley Chapter, and **Alison Reynolds**, New Zealand Chapter, are running for this office. Each candidate has provided a personal statement for you to read:

[Beau Cain Personal Statement](#)

[Alison Reynolds Personal Statement](#)

STC 51st Annual Conference: Navigating the Future of Technical Communication



 Each year, the STC conference attracts the world's largest gathering of technical communicators, providing unique educational and networking opportunities. At STC's 51st Annual Conference, you'll learn new tools and techniques, share ideas, network with peers, and preview the latest software and services from dozens of vendors.

What: STC Annual Conference

Where: Baltimore, MD

When: May 9–12, 2004

Registration: Register [online](#)

Cost: Members registering by April 23 pay \$495. See the conference web site for other rates.

More Info: See the [conference web site](#)

Region 8 Conference: Charting a Bold Course

In light of post dot-bomb realities, conference director **Eric Butow** says, "Difficult times demand bold action and the ability to reinvent ourselves and our profession. We have chosen the conference theme in hopes of giving attendees the information and the tools they will need."

Conference planners say this will be one of the most ambitious conferences to date. The conference hopes to draw approximately 300 attendees from Region 8 and adjoining regions. Region 8 includes California, Nevada, Hawaii, Australia, and New Zealand.

In addition to several dozen presentations and seminars, the three-day conference will include a leadership retreat, a pavilion trade show, a job fair, a bookstore, computer terminals where attendees can check their email and surf the Web, hands-on computer tutorials, and a keynote speaker for each day.

Incoming STC President, **Andrea Ames**, will be one of the keynote speakers. A full list of keynote speakers will be posted on the conference web site as soon as it becomes available.

Volunteers Needed

To make it all happen, additional volunteers are needed. Eric reports, "We have a great team in place made up of STC leaders from throughout the region. But they will need help to make this the best conference it can possibly be."

To encourage volunteers and lower any financial barriers to attending, the conference is offering deep discounts to volunteers. Those interested should contact [Anne Mehaffey](#).

What: Region 8 Conference

Where: University of California, Davis

When: July 25–27, 2004

Registration: Members registering by May 15 will receive a discount. See the [conference web site](#) as details become available.

More Info: See the [conference web site](#)



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Book Review: The Deadline



by [Richard Mateosian](#)
 Senior Member, Berkeley Chapter

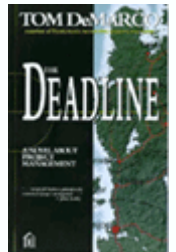
[The Deadline: A Novel about Project Management](#) by Tom DeMarco (Dorset House, New York NY, 1997, 320pp, ISBN 0-932633-39-0, \$24.95)


In 1964 I knew assembly language for the IBM 650, and I had recently learned Fortran II. I sat down with the IBM COBOL manuals to see what that language was all about. It took me very little time to decide that it was not a language I wanted to program in. I don't regret this decision, but it shut me out of the world in which Tom DeMarco was later to flourish.

Fifteen years and many languages later, I wound up (briefly) advising a large California bank, and the book that bridged the gap between my way of thinking and theirs was Tom DeMarco's *Structured Analysis and System Specification* (Prentice Hall, 1979). I still remember how exciting it was to use DeMarco's methods to produce diagrams that represented the elements of the bank's proposed application.

In 1979, DeMarco was insightful. Today he is wise. Then he was concerned with how software modules work together. Today he focuses on how people work together. His book is fiction, but it teaches many real lessons about project management and team building.

Here is the essence of the plot. Mr. Tompkins, a middle-aged middle manager, is laid off from a thinly disguised AT&T, kidnapped by a beautiful and resourceful industrial spy, and spirited away to Moravia, a post-Communist third world country somewhere on the Adriatic coast. A thinly disguised Bill Gates has acquired this country secretly in a stock swap and has decided to help it dominate the shrink-wrap software business by producing knockoffs of Quicken, PhotoShop, Quark XPress, PageMill, Painter, and Lotus Notes, and giving them away.



 Tompkins takes the job of managing this development. Because Moravia has far more programmers than required to develop these six products, Tompkins sets up three parallel projects for each product, turning the whole operation into a project management laboratory. He gets carte blanche from Bill, and everything seems to be going smoothly.


Just as Tompkins is beginning to feel complacent, Bill returns to the States to work on his house, leaving the sinister bean counter Allair Belok in charge. Belok embodies every stupid, unscrupulous, bullying executive you've ever worked for. Sadly, his tactics seem true to life.

They certainly rang a few bells for me. Tompkins must face arbitrarily shortened schedules, merging of his parallel projects, and forced overtime. On top of this, he must contend with the well-meaning purveyors of process improvement, whom Belok sics on him with even more unreasonable goals.

Tompkins is not alone in his struggles, however. Belinda Binda, the world's greatest project manager, burnt out and now a bag lady, agrees to help Tompkins staff his projects. So does ex-General Markov, former head of software development for the Moravian army. Lahksa, the beautiful resourceful spy, runs around the world sending Tompkins consultants for brief visits. The reclusive Aristotle Keneros, Moravia's first programmer, helps to divert the process improvement folks, and teaches Tompkins the importance of debugging the decomposition and interfaces during the design phase.

That's it for the plot. DeMarco's chapters are little vignettes of project management. A problem arises, a consultant shows up to help solve the problem, and Tompkins adds a few aphorisms to his journal. According to DeMarco, most of these aphorisms come from his own journal and represent lessons he learned the hard way.

Here are a few of the aphorisms that I especially like:

- Four Essentials of Good Management 
 - Get the right people.
 - Match them to the right jobs.
 - Keep them motivated.
 - Help their teams to jell and stay jelled.(All the rest is administrivia.)
- There are infinitely many ways to lose a day . . . but not even one way to get one back.
- People under pressure don't think any faster.
- It's not what you don't know that kills you . . . it's what you know that isn't so.

I've discussed the more general aspects of DeMarco's book here, but parts of it get pretty technical—though rarely enough to bog down the story.

DeMarco believes in metrics and modeling as project management tools, and several of his vignettes show surprising ways to use those tools.

At the end of the book, Tompkins gives away his journal, saying "I can never imagine opening it again. I don't need to. I carry those hundred and one principles everywhere I go. They're carved into my hide." The book is a crash course in project management and team building. If you do any sort of technical development, you should read it and absorb it.

This review originally appeared in slightly different form in the May/June 2000 issue of [IEEE Micro](#).

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About Devil Mountain Views

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

For more information about STC, go to the [Society web page](#).

DMV Basics The East Bay Chapter newsletter is named after a local landmark, Mount Diablo, in Northern California. With a few exceptions, all distances in California are measured from that point, called the Mount Diablo Meridian. The East Bay Chapter serves the cities along the 680 corridor and the east/west part of 580. City-wise it's Vallejo to Pleasanton, Tracy to Oakland and Fremont. We have members from each of those places.

PUBLICATION POLICY

We are always interested in sharing technical communication trends and information with our readers. For details, contact the Interim Managing Editor, [Becky Rude](#).

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

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ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Sep/Oct 2003 issue – Aug 2, 2003

Nov/Dec 2003 issue – Oct 2, 2003

Jan/Feb 2004 issue – Dec 2, 2003

Mar/Apr 2004 issue – Feb 2, 2004

May/Jun 2004 issue – Apr 2, 2004

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Format: Ads must be in either GIF or JPG format.

Dimensions & Rates: The following rates are valid for one month on the EBSTC web site or one issue of the newsletter.

336 X 280 = \$150

468 X 60 = \$120

160 X 155 = \$80
120 X 60 = \$50

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Payment: Payment must be received by the [East Bay Chapter treasurer](#) before the ad is run. Payment can be made by check.

Inquiries: If you have questions or want to start your ad, please contact [Becky Rude](#).

MAILING ADDRESS

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DMV History

Note: We will update this section as our chapter archives are updated. If you were a Managing Editor during a time frame that is missing from the history, please [let us know](#).

Year	Notes
2003–2004	Acting Managing Editor: Becky Rude Guest Managing Editor: Gwaltney Mountford
2002–2003	Managing Editor: Ashwini Tharval Best of Show, Most Improved, Distinguished Technical Communication awards in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2001–2002	Managing Editors: Ashwini Tharval and Becky Rude. The newsletter is launched online in Web format. Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1999–2001	Managing Editor: Teresa Washburn Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1997–1999	Managing Editor: Kelly Walker Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1996–1997	Managing Editor: Melody Brumis Newsletter name changed to <i>Devil Mountain Views</i> . Susan Moxley won the contest held to rename the newsletter. In July 1996, a spoof issue called <i>East Bay Flame</i> is published.
1995–1996	Managing Editor: Bruce Robinson An offshoot, the <i>Twig</i> , is published by President Gwaltney Mountford to supplement the <i>East Bay Log</i> .
1994	Newsletter name changed to <i>East Bay Log</i> .
1962	The <i>Pacifica News</i> was published in the fall in the year the <i>Pacifica</i> chapter was founded. (The chapter was renamed to <i>East Bay</i> in 1982 under President T.R. Girill.) 

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