



SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

# Forward

The Newsletter of the UK Chapter of the STC

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## President's message



*Our Chapter President, Liz Hale, writes:*

Well, would you believe it? It's March already and suddenly everyone is talking about summer holidays, cutting lawns and whether last year's barbecue can be re-used, or if a new one will have to be purchased before Home-

base ends whatever is its cur-

rent sale!  
Of course for many STC UK members, summer holidays may be out of the question this year. If you don't have a job and money regularly coming in, then there are more pressing expenses to consider than relaxation and travel. Funny isn't it how when you are working hard, you probably have the money to spare but no time to take a holiday? Then when you are not working (and have more spare time than you know what to do with) you cannot bring yourself to spend your savings on a

vacation, for fear that it may be a long time before the next secure job comes your way.

I have been astonished of late at the number of people I talk to who either have been, or are under threat of being, made redundant. It may be a coincidence, but is now six months since September 11th 2001 and the predictions of the analysts seem to have been correct (for once). It does seem that it has taken those six months for the rest of the world to suffer the knock-on effects of the economic downturn within the USA. Last autumn was terrible for the technical authoring community in the USA (I know because many of my STC colleagues lost their jobs during that period) and now it seems it's our turn to be affected.

Still, if it's any consolation to members who are not working right now, we definitely are not alone - and if we work together as STC members, we can do much more for ourselves as a group than any of us could do as individuals! *(continued on page 3)*

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*Forward is the official newsletter of the UK Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).*

*It is published six times each year: January, March, May, July, September and November.*

*Please send articles, letters, comments, and other items for inclusion in the newsletter to the editors by the beginning of a publication month.*

# Conduct a Post-Mortem

Saul Carliner, STC Fellow and past international president, recently spoke at **Online Learning Europe** in London, and felt badly that he was not able to meet with the chapter during his visit. In compensation, Saul kindly sent this article specially for *Forward*.



Because people learn best by experience, one of the most significant activities you can conduct after completing a project is identifying the lessons learned on this project that you will carry forward to future projects. One of the most effective methods of identifying these lessons is a

special meeting of the project team called the post-mortem.

A post-mortem is a meeting of all members of the project team at the end of the project with the purpose of identifying:

- what went well and should be repeated on future projects
- what did not go well and how to avoid these situations on future projects

In addition, the post-mortem should provide time for everyone on the project team to thank one another for their contributions. Often during the course of a project, project team members become so comfortable working with one another that they do not thank them for their contributions or acknowledge exceptional work. As a result, team members might not realize that their contributions are appreciated by their colleagues. The post-mortem provides a formal opportunity for team members to offer one another such recognition.

Here are tips for conducting a post-mortem:

1. Send a meeting notice to team members at least 2 weeks in advance. Invite all team members to participate.
2. Prepare and distribute an agenda before the meeting. A typical agenda for a post-mortem:
  - Is no longer than 90 minutes, 60 if possible.
  - Contains separate items for:
    - What went right (at the end of a project, team members are often so focused on what went wrong that they want to understand what went right).
    - What to improve on future projects (do not use the post-mortem as a “blaming” session, instead, use the post-mortem as an opportunity to identify problems and suggest solutions to them)
    - Acknowledgements and thank yous

3. At the meeting, create a positive, productive environment by doing the following:
  - Identify a recorder. The recorder should prepare minutes, which will be distributed after the meeting.
  - Set the right tone for the meeting by:
    - Emphasizing the positive
    - Providing each team member with an opportunity to speak.

For example, when asking “What went right” and “What to improve on future projects,” rather than asking people to simply provide suggestions, go around the meeting table and ask each person to provide at least one suggestion before opening the question up to the floor for feedback

- Avoid passing judgment on comments.

Different team members, because of their role or because of their personalities, have different experiences with a project. Some team members might have a positive experience, others may not. Only by hearing how each team member perceived the project can the entire project team better understand their interactions with one another.

- Close with some sort of celebration. For example, you might provide a cake that says “Congratulations” or a small gift for each team member.

4. Publish the minutes of the post-mortem within 2 business days.
5. For those suggestions that require changes to your organization's policies and procedures, provide a follow-up memo to team members within 1 month of the meeting to tell them whether or not the policy and procedures will actually be changed.

Post-mortem meetings provide valuable closure to projects, letting participants emotionally separate from one project so they can move onto the next.

Therefore, post-mortem meetings are beneficial whether or not members of the team will work together on their next project.

*Boston-based Saul Carliner is a popular speaker and author on information design, e-learning, and related management issues, his books include *Techniques for Technical Communicators*, *An Overview of Online Learning*, and the upcoming *Designing e-Learning*.*

# Officers

The following members are officers of the UK Chapter of the STC for 2001-2002

## UK Chapter President

Liz Hale

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## First Vice President

Vacancy

## Second Vice President

Vacancy

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### Membership

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### STC Web site

<http://www.stc.org>

### UK Chapter Web site

<http://www.stc-europe.org/uk/>

### UK Chapter Discussion List

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stc\\_uk\\_discuss/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stc_uk_discuss/)

# UK Chapter Job Bank

Recently, I volunteered to help expand the UK Chapter job bank. My most important goal is to make this a valuable site for both the STC members and the potential employers/recruiters. I want people to think of it first when looking for or trying to hire for a job. So, how do you achieve that? Well, every author knows the answer - ask your audience!

So here I am, asking your advice on the first stage of my plan. I am in the process of putting together a comprehensive list of technical communication skills. What is it that makes us desirable job candidates and what do we look for in the way of requirements when considering a new job? The idea is to be able to match jobs and candidates based on these skills.

So far, I have categorized some skill areas with specifics underneath. With only my professional experience to draw on, the list is rather limited (and currently designed to get me and me alone the perfect job). This is where you come in. Have a look at the list on [www.bakerwherry.co.uk/stc/skillset](http://www.bakerwherry.co.uk/stc/skillset) and inundate me with skills and categories I've missed at [brianawherry@hotmail.com](mailto:brianawherry@hotmail.com). I look forward to hearing from you all!

Briana Wherry

STC UK Chapter Job Bank Coordinator

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## President's Message (cont.)

As you can find out from her article (on this page), Briana Wherry has recently been busy improving the STC UK Chapter's Jobs page on our web site. She has also designed a new Job Bank database for use by members who are looking for work, which will be showcased at our next UK Chapter Meeting on Thursday 11th April.

Please do come along to this meeting especially if you are currently "between jobs" yourself. We have invited three leading UK Recruitment Specialists along, who will be pleased to talk to you individually about your own job needs and aspirations. And if nothing else, it really does help to talk to other people who are in the same boat as you. (You can often pick up valuable leads just by talking to others and finding out "what's out there at the moment, and where".)

Planned dates for other STC UK Chapter events this year are:

- Thursday, 11th April - Recruitment evening, central London (venue to be confirmed)
- Saturday 8th June - One-day Conference and Chapter AGM
- Saturday, November 23rd - Competition Awards Dinner, central London.

Be sure to write these dates in your diaries now - I hope to see you at all of them!

Liz Hale

[l.hale@kudos-idd.com](mailto:l.hale@kudos-idd.com)

# STC 50th Anniversary Committee Seeks Your Memories

When STC members from across the world gather, a favorite activity is sharing stories about the memorable times we've had - the great session at the Annual Conference that changed our lives, perhaps a mentor in the Society who helped with our careers, or the technical communication "firsts" and transitions we shared.

During such a story fest, we also laugh about the fun times and the difficult times that turned out to be fun - the Publications Competition conducted during a hurricane in Tampa, for example.

In preparation for our May 2003 celebration of STC's 50th Anniversary, the 50th Anniversary Committee wants such stories from you. We need humorous and inspirational anecdotes that we can collect in an STC archive, and we want to publish some of your most sparkling or inspirational stories in a brochure to be distributed to all members.

Whether you're a Society leader or a chapter member, a member of many years' duration or one who recently joined, a technical communication specialist or a novice, a U.S. member or one located in another country, we hope you will participate.

Your involvement is easy. Whenever you think of a story you'd like to include, send an e-mail or snail mail to Liz Babcock ([lizbab@iwvisp.com](mailto:lizbab@iwvisp.com) or 401 N. Warner, Ridgecrest, CA 93555). Liz is the committee member who has volunteered to serve as the initial collection point for your stories.

Those stories will be most useful to us if they are succinct (250 words or less on any given topic) and entertaining. We would love to receive several stories from you, with each story to the point and on a single topic.

Here are some questions we hope will inspire you:

- What amusing or inspirational story can you tell us about how you joined the profession? How did you overcome obstacles that our members will find educational or amusing?
- What career and/or Society highlight can you share with us? (We will construct a technical communication timeline, so your stories in this area could be especially helpful.)
- What's your favorite STC memory?
- What mentor or role model inspired you in your career or in the Society? What makes that person memorable? What did he/she do to help you?
- What experiences, humorous or inspiring, have you had with our changing technology - typewriters to computers, red pencils to redlining?
- What can you tell us about a chapter or regional event or accomplishment that changed you, your chapter, or the Society?

This list of questions is intended to rekindle your memories, not to restrict your flow of ideas.

Please communicate with Liz Babcock, 401 N. Warner, Ridgecrest, CA 93555 or [lizbab@iwvisp.com](mailto:lizbab@iwvisp.com), or with other members of the committee, as follows: Georgina Cantoni, committee chair, [gcantoni@techcomm-solutions.com](mailto:gcantoni@techcomm-solutions.com); Ken Cook, [kenc@kencook.com](mailto:kenc@kencook.com); Marguerite Krupp, [mkrupp@cisco.com](mailto:mkrupp@cisco.com); Bill Leavitt, [skibill@aol.com](mailto:skibill@aol.com); Ernie Mazzatenta, [Jande@a-o.com](mailto:Jande@a-o.com); and Bill Stolgitis, [bill@stc.org](mailto:bill@stc.org). We look forward to your messages!

STC 50th Anniversary Committee

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## Membership News



### Mick Robinson, Chapter Membership Officer, reports:

Only a few new members this time as the new year is off to a quiet start.

None the less the welcome is as warm as usual to:

- Alan Fisk of London
- Jason Reid of Oxford
- Noel Reid of Belfast

Congratulations to Susan Wood, who has achieved Senior Member status in the STC.

Unfortunately the area covered by this chapter has shrunk dramatically as Carol Briam has moved from South Africa to France. Now we only cover from Scotland to Portugal, instead of the tip of Africa.

Finally a reminder to those who haven't renewed that membership needs to be renewed by the end of March.

# STC Region 2 Leadership Workshop

*The UK Chapter was represented at a recent meeting of Region 2 Chapter delegates held in the Netherlands by Tina Hoffman, our program manager. This is Tina's report:*

On 1 January 2002, STC's UK chapter - along with all the other European chapters and Israel - became part of STC's Region 2. Region 2 now comprises 17 chapters, 10 in Europe and Israel, the rest in Mid-Atlantic USA. Joining Region 2 also meant a new Director-Sponsor, Chris Benz from the Carolina chapter. Chris decided to come to Europe to meet representatives from all the new chapters in his region, to share ideas and concerns, discuss closer co-operation, and generally get to know each other.

The meeting was held on the weekend of 9th-10th March in the De Grote Beer youth hostel (that's Ursa Major to you and me) in a beautiful woodland setting in Apeldoorn, about an hour's drive from Amsterdam. A big thank you to the Netherlands chapter for finding such an excellent venue and being the perfect hosts throughout the weekend.

Friday night saw the unofficial start of the workshop with a number of delegates meeting for an evening meal at the Hotel Apeldoorn where most of us were staying for the weekend. After having exchanged emails on an almost daily basis for the last three months it was nice to be able to put faces to the names we had become so familiar with in our inboxes. Conversation was lively, covering different aspects of communication. Most of us agreed that Van Gogh's paintings so many of us had admired earlier that day in Amsterdam were a superior example of communication without so much as a single word!

The workshop officially began on Saturday morning with a presentation by Chris Benz and a short introduction by all participants. This was followed by a quick brainstorming session to discover the most popular topics for workshop. The list of topics put forward in our preparatory email discussions was as varied as the background of the participants but a few favourites soon emerged:

- Working together
- Attracting and retaining members and motivating volunteers
- Joint chapter and regional conferences

Other discussion points included:

- STC scholarships, awards, and grants
- STC competition
- What should the STC do for Europe?
- What should Europe do for the STC?

All of this was expertly moderated by Cecily Spiers (France chapter) and Brian Martin (Transalpine chapter) who kept a close eye on his watch.

The session on attracting and retaining members started with a presentation by Luc Bouquet, President of the Belgium chapter. Luc described how they used a brainstorming session to come up with a list of ideas to encourage people to join, ranging from incentives in the form of book tokens for members who bring in new people to babysitting arrangements to enable members with children to attend meetings. Luc had some very interesting ideas, which had definitely worked for the Belgian chapter.

This was followed by Annette Reilly, Treasurer and Past President of the Washington D.C. chapter. Annette described how the chapter ensures that volunteers are motivated, stay motivated and are supported all the way to avoid burnout.

The final session of the morning was devoted to membership barriers. Some of the concerns listed were:

- Cost
- Lack of recognition
- Language and cultural barriers
- Lack of time

These issues were taken up again and discussed in more detail after a hearty Dutch lunch and a quick stroll in the woods to help clear the mind.

The two most important cost issues were dollar prices (i.e. varying membership dues due to different exchange rates) and the overseas postage surcharge (universally rejected by the European chapters, Chris will raise the issue again in the States).

Lack of recognition of both the STC and technical communication as a profession makes it more difficult to recruit new members.

Language and cultural barriers was the most interesting and hotly debated point. It became clear that the different chapters have tackled these issues in very different ways. While some chapters have solved their "language problem" by allowing speakers at conferences to choose their preferred language, others have opted for English as the official language (an absolute must for the Transalpine chapter with its several member countries). In some instances language was not seen as a barrier, indeed some members had joined to improve their English (and international career prospects). It was interesting to learn that some chapters had a very large number of American 'expats' whereas others consisted mainly of 'natives'. As the representative from the UK chapter I could not really contribute very much to the language question although some of you might argue that language was the main barrier between the US and the UK! And once we start with cultural differences....

We agreed that this was a "problem" to be recognised not to be solved. Instead, let's harness this energy and

# Leadership Workshop (cont.)

make the most of the opportunities and challenges presented by such a diverse and multilingual, multicultural group. This is why the new set-up of Region 2 (mix of all the European and several US chapters) is so important. It offers closer co-operation between the European chapters while at the same time maintaining the strong link with the US. We are very much part of the STC as a whole, with a European flavour.

This seamlessly led into the discussion about the relationship between the STC and Europe. We came to the conclusion that the European chapters are growing, starting to mature but still need some help and guidance from the US, allowing us to profit from nearly 50 years experience and impressive resources. This is what the STC can do for us. We can bring a European perspective to the table, open the door for the American chapters - in Region 2 and the whole of the STC - and introduce them to a different way of doing things.

We then moved on to some areas with very real possibilities for co-operation within Europe, such as competitions (sharing judges, encouraging members to submit work to other chapters if category not judged in their chapter) to shared lecture and job banks. We ended up discussing the more ambitious plan of a joint conference. A committee was set up and a date (Autumn 2003) suggested. We will keep you posted.

The rest of the day was set aside for the web discussion. After a quick look at the history of the STC-Europe web site Jang presented his vision for the future. A web site serving technical communicators in Europe and beyond... Just to clarify, there is of course the Region 2 web site and the web sites of individual chapters, happily co-existing with the STC-Europe web site,

all different pieces of the puzzle. Of particular interest were the dynamic pages, such as events listings, job bank, speaker bank etc. Jang's new template is aimed at pages that allow users to post events, jobs etc. in simple text format. Formatting is being taken care of by the template to ensure a consistent interface. The webmaster validates and activates these pages and the events/jobs etc. and the system automatically sorts events/jobs and deletes them upon expiry. Jang will "tidy up" the design over the coming weeks and the new European web site should go live in Summer.

All this talking left us thirsty and hungry at the end of the day so we descended on El Popo, Apeldoorn's most colourful restaurant. After a few Mexican beers and interesting cocktails our spirits had been restored and we spent a lively few hours exchanging stories... and waiting for the food. When it turned up, it was plentiful, delicious and very reasonably priced.

What have we agreed on? Where do we go from here?

On Sunday morning - after a refreshing walk from the hotel to the youth hostel - it was time to review Saturday's findings, set down what we want to take away from the meeting, write down action points and volunteer fellow board members not present at the meeting for various positions on the committees (only joking). More on this later...

All in all, it was a very informative, rewarding and productive meeting. It was good to see so many STC members from all over Europe, Israel and the US. The discussion was heated but never unprofessional. Old friendships were renewed, new ones forged. With all the chapters in Region 2 working together, the opportunities are ours to create.

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## UK Chapter AGM and One-day Conference

The UK Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) invites you to attend its Annual General Meeting and one-day conference on Saturday June 8, 2002 in London.

The conference will provide an opportunity for the exchange of information and ideas, as well as a meeting place for technical authors from all over the UK. We do hope that you can all come and participate in a lively dialog discussing the challenges and opportunities in technical communication in an uncertain economic future.

Further information regarding the agenda, registration, and venue details will be posted in the next couple of weeks. For more information about the conference, please contact Tina Hoffman at [thoffman@path-trace.com](mailto:thoffman@path-trace.com).

Be sure to write the date in your diary. And mention the conference to other technical communicators you know. The greater the attendance, the greater the participation, the greater the value.

## Make a note in your diaries...

The STC's 49th Annual Conference will be held from 5th to 8th May 2002, at the Opryland Hotel, Nashville Tennessee, in the United States.

The conference Preliminary Program will be sent out with the February 2002 issue of Intercom. The Program contains information about conference activities and technical sessions, as well as registration forms and materials to help plan your trip to Nashville.

Much of this information will be placed on the Society Web site at [www.stc.org/conferences.html](http://www.stc.org/conferences.html).

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# STC Board Report

*This report was kindly provided by the Region 2 Director-Sponsor, Chris Benz. You can reach Chris by e-mail at [cjbenz@unforgettable.com](mailto:cjbenz@unforgettable.com)*

The Society's board of directors held their third meeting for the 2001-2002 program year 25-26 January, 2002, in Las Vegas, Nevada. The board considered many initiatives and approved or recognized these actions:

### Chapters

- Formation of the new Central Pennsylvania chapter was approved by interim action on January 22, 2002, given a \$350 startup grant, and assigned to Region 4.
- The Clarkson University student chapter (Region 1) and the Tri-Cities chapter (Region 7) were dissolved because of continued inactivity and regardless of the attempts to revitalize them.

### Grants and Loans

- A Special Opportunities Grant of US\$7,580 was approved for Dan Jones and Dan Voss to conduct a study entitled "Marketing Technical Communication to High School Audiences: Creating a Tutorial for Teachers and Promoting a Writing Contest for Students." When the study is complete, a report will be published in Technical Communication.
- A loan of US\$3,000 was approved for the Oklahoma chapter to host the Region 5 Conference, scheduled for 4-6 October, 2002, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

### New Award Program

A new Society-level award program was approved to recognize Special Interest Group (SIG) members for their outstanding work and dedication. This new program will be known as the Distinguished SIG Service

Award (DSSA). The first awards will be selected by the board of directors and awarded this coming May at the Annual Conference in Nashville.

### Teaching Fellowship

The first Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals, in the amount of US\$4,000, was approved for Stewart Whittemore. The goal of the STC teaching fellowship program is to promote positive academic and industry connections, and to make it possible for practitioners to help in the education and training of future technical communicators.

### Standards Organizations

The board of directors strongly supports a greater role for STC in standards organizations such as ISO and W3C. As a result, they approved membership and will support delegate participation in the US Technical Advisory Group, an organization that plays a supportive advisory role for the creation of ISO standards. They also approved delegate participation in the W3C, of which STC is already a member.

### Several Chapters Change Names

It was announced that several chapters have officially changed their names since the September 2002 board meeting:

- the Central New Jersey chapter (Region 2) is now the New Jersey chapter,
- the Sweden chapter (Region 2) is now the Nordic chapter, and
- the South Carolina chapter (Region 3) is now the South Carolina Midlands chapter.

### Next Meeting

The next STC board of directors meeting will be held 3-4 May in Nashville, Tennessee, adjacent to the Annual Conference.

## Tribal Wisdom and Business Practice

The following piece has been doing the rounds on the Internet recently. Although its authorship is unknown, we thought it might give our Chapter members something to think about, and we hope it will raise a smile!

The tribal wisdom of the Dakota Indians, passed on from one generation to the next, says that when you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount. However, in modern business, because of the heavy investment factors to be taken into consideration, often other strategies have to be tried with dead horses, including the following:

1. Buying a stronger whip.
2. Changing riders.
3. Threatening the horse with termination.

4. Appointing a committee to study the horse.
5. Arranging to visit other sites to see how they ride dead horses.
6. Lowering the standards so that dead horses can be included.
7. Reclassifying the dead horse as living-impaired.
8. Change the form so that it reads: "This horse is not dead."
9. Hire outside contractors to ride the dead horse.
10. Harness several dead horses together for increased speed.
11. Donate the dead horse to a recognized charity, thereby deducting its full original cost.
12. Providing additional funding to increase the horse's performance.
13. Do a time management study to see if lighter riders would improve productivity.
14. Declare that a dead horse has lower overhead and therefore performs better.
15. Promote the dead horse to a supervisory position.

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