Byline

Team Conflict is Natural

By Suzanna Laurent, Fellow, Oklahoma Chapter

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell says, "Good leaders sometimes make people unhappy." Good leadership involves a responsibility to the welfare of the group. If you make choices based on popularity, you will avoid making tough decisions. You might even avoid confrontation and, as a result, deserving people may not be rewarded for their accomplishments. Sometimes leaders have to draw a line in the sand and take a stand.

Truths About Conflict

Leaders must deal promptly with conflict in a group and accept the responsibility for providing resolution. To handle conflict successfully, we must consider several important factors:

Conflict is natural. Although most people like to avoid it, conflict is a natural result when people with diverse personalities work together. There will always be times when members of a group disagree. But, by working together, people learn that any vibrant, successful group experiences conflict, disagreement, and promotion of disparate ideas.

Conflict is resolved through openness. Since conflict is considered natural in a group, it

should be managed in a natural way - through open discussion. Open discussion helps resolve issues before they create even greater problems.

Conflict occurs over issues, not over personalities. People may become parties to conflict, but people are not its cause. Team members must learn that the issues—and perceptions of those issues—are the cause.

Conflict allows us to search for alternatives. Don't spend valuable time trying to place blame. Instead, discuss what you would prefer as an alternative. An effective discussion about resolving the conflict focuses on what is being said right now—in this setting—not the past.

Conflict is a group issue. Disagreements between individuals in a group become issues for the entire group to deal with, because they can affect the work of the entire team. Team members, therefore, don't always have to resolve differences on their own. The whole team pitches in to help.

Responding to Criticism

One of the most common impediments to communicating freely in a group is the defensive behavior of people whose ideas and

suggestions are being evaluated and, perhaps, criticized. Self-protective responses are common among people whose ideas are challenged. You can train yourself to deal constructively with resistance and disagreement. Try the following suggestions to help you deal with opposition to your ideas:

Relax. Sit back in your chair and keep your facial expression attentive. Don't frown or shake your head. When you look relaxed—even though you may not be inside—you look confident and invite people to discuss your idea openly.

Listen. Maintain eye contact to show that you value what is being said. Remain seated and lean back in your chair. Don't interrupt while others are talking unless it is quite clear that they have misconstrued your idea.

Accept. You don't have to agree with whatever criticism is leveled at your idea, but you'd better accept that the people leveling it take their criticism seriously. You want to be careful not to say anything that could be construed as ridicule. If you blurt out, "That's ridiculous," the fight may be on. Be aware of what you may be communicating through posture, facial expression, and other nonverbal cues. When you have an expression on your face that could be interpreted as "What nonsense," you are not influencing people in your favor.

Make it a group issue. If you refrain from defending your idea, you may be pleasantly surprised to hear someone else take up the defense instead. That person may have more credibility and influence than you in this situation because he or she is nonpartisan. But if no one else responds immediately, just sit quietly. You don't always have to speak up just because other members want to address you on the idea, unless they ask you questions that only you can answer. When you receive comments that are too narrowly focused, you can make the discussion a group issue by saying, "I've heard extensively how Jane and Howard feel about my idea, but I'd find it valuable to hear how others look at it too."

Answer. If the group discussion still leaves something missing or to be desired, you may want to respond to some of the disagreement. When you do, address the group, not your critic. Remember, you've made it a group issue now. Don't take it back.

Use Your Team

The chief advantage of using your team to resolve conflict and make decisions is that you bring different resources together to interact and develop more options. There is no question that the synergy in an effective team produces more than the sum of its parts. Ω

STC Membership at a Glance

As of June, 2008:

Total members: 16,657

Members residing in the U.S.: 13,931

Members residing in Canada: 1,589

Members residing elsewhere: 1137

Total communities*: 155Ω

*Includes 104 professional chapters, 30 student chapters, and 21 SIGs. Ω

STC Chicago Membership at a Glance

As of June, 2008:

Total Members: 383

Associate Fellows: 9

Fellows: 8

Senior Members: 218

Members: 134

Student Members: 13Ω

President's Message - A View From the Summit

By Linda Jansak

In Chicago, I often find myself scrambling to find enough time to attend meetings, client sessions, and networking opportunities. Like many of you, I typically travel across wide expanses of territory—also known as "Chicagoland"—during the course of a single day. One of the reasons I enjoy attending the Technical Communication Summit is that nearly 200 educational sessions take place under a single roof and STC event planners do all of the scheduling before I step foot in the host city. While I didn't have time to attend all of the sessions on my list this year, I thoroughly enjoyed the sessions I attended, and I learned a lot.

Each year, the conference features at least one panel discussion on how to foster successful collaboration when working in virtual teams. This year, I found at least half a dozen sessions on this topic. The sessions I attended featured well-known experts like Geoffrey Hart, Andrea Ames, Scott Abel, Tom Johnson, Lisa Pappas and many other industry leaders who shared stories about what works and what doesn't when virtual teams operate across geographies, cultures, and levels of expertise.

As always, I am drawn to discussions that contemplate the future of technical communications. This year, I was in luck, as sessions on emerging technologies were plentiful and drew large and enthusiastic crowds. Adobe's AIR (Adobe Integrated Runtime) technology generated quite a bit of interest among die-hard Adobe enthusiasts. Nicola Martinez's presentation on "Second Life" introduced attendees to new strategies for community-building and collaboration in virtual and immersive environments. Plenty of sessions were dedicated to new product demonstrations. Quite a few presentations focused on the implications of disruptive technologies, user-generated content, and recent research in the cognitive and behavioral sciences.

Our very own Betsy Maaks and Chris Hester facilitated a workshop on creativity and technical writing. As anyone who attended the session will tell you, technical communicators are an imaginative group. STC would do well to have more workshops of this kind in the future as the topics of creativity and innovation are now mainstays in business management and entrepreneurial circles. Workshops of this sort will go a long way in helping technical writers and other communicators to promote themselves and their creative skills to advantage.

On Leadership Day, STC Secretary Char James-Tanny announced the debut of STC's Twitter group. Twitter is best understood as a new technology designed to allow users to broadcast instant messages to an entire network. These messages, or "tweets," as they are sometimes called, are short bursts of information, usually consisting of fewer than 140 characters. Tweets typically relay information about a concurrent event or happening. A small but enthusiastic group of Summit attendees used Twitter to great effect, actively posting comments and reporting on sessions from the floor of the convention center. You'll find more information about STC's Twitter group at our blog, where you'll also find news and commentary from STC Chicago members who attended the Summit.

The STC Honors Banquet was particularly sweet for STC Chicago this year. As you probably know by now, STC Chicago received the Community of Distinction

Upcoming Events

Thursday, June 26 CIC SIG Meeting: Researching and Estimating Projects

Building on our previous meeting about finding projects, the next CIC SIG meeting will discuss researching and estimating a project. Keeping with our goal to build sense of "coopetition" where independent consultants cooperate to better compete, this meeting will be in a discussion format, guided by SIG managers.

When: 6:00 p.m. registration. 6:15 Dinner. 7:00 Program. 8:30 Close

Where: DePaul University Rolling Meadows Campus, Meadows Corporate Center, 2550 W. Golf Road Second Floor, Rolling Meadows, Illinois, 60008, 847-437-9522

Register: Advance registration ends Tuesday, June 24, at 7:00 p.m. After then, you must register at the door.Ω

For Directions: Contact Eric Schieler at 847-987-1331 or email cicsig@stc-chicago.org.Ω

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award at this year's honors reception. My thanks go out to all who supported our community this year. Without the efforts of our tireless volunteers, we would not have received this special honor from the Society. To learn more about this year's winning initiatives, see our Community Achievement Award application located in the "Administrative Documents" section of our Web site.

Yes, the Summit was wholly enjoyable this year. What I valued most, however, was the time spent networking with others. The opportunity to meet with STC colleagues from near and far is priceless. If you didn't get a chance to attend this year's Summit, consider attending next year in Atlanta. And be sure to mark your calendars for 2012, when the Summit will be held in Rosemont, Illinois. Ω

STC Chicago Member Profile - Paul Lockwood

STC Member	STC Member - Senior Member
Member Since	If I remember correctly, 1990.
Job Title	Sr. Information Development Consultant
STC Affiliation	Technical Editing SIG and STC Chicago.
Years of Experience	18
Tech Comm Philosophy	In the phrase "technical communication," the second word is the most crucial. If a deliverable is "technical," but not easily understood by the user, there is no communication.
Favorite STC Moment	Every time I visit a different city for an STC conference, I know I'll learn something I didn't know before, meet interesting people from other parts of the world, and enjoy some entertainment or famous attraction that I wouldn't otherwise experience. I'd have a tough time choosing between being extensively quoted in a tech comm textbook *Technical Communication: Strategies for College and the Workplace* by Dan Jones and Karen Lane and singing a couple of songs in the Monday Night Open Jam at one of the conferences I attended.
Favorite Work Moment	Whenever I can help a co-worker, whether through editing, brainstorming, or just using some piece of trivial knowledge I can recall or research about a software application.
Working on Now	A number of internal technical writing/editing projects, a home sale/condo purchase/move, and scheduling interviews with people who want to direct a fall production for the community theater group in which I serve as president.
Favorite Movie	"Singin' in the Rain" would certainly be near the top; a fun film with great songs, talented singers/dancers, and an amusing Hollywood-based plot featuring a main character with the same last name as mine!
Favorite Music	My iPod is filled with everything from Kenny Loggins to John Williams movie scores to Weird Al Yankovic to Olivia Newton John, but my favorite type of music is smooth jazz (Dave Koz, Peter White, Paul Taylor, and many more)...although a close second would, of course, have to be the music performed by our company's "Holiday Chorus."
Favorite Book	I really can't pick just one, but suffice it to say, I get more than my money's worth from our Woodstock library, as I am constantly requesting a lot of new mystery, biography, and humor books (as well as CDs and DVDs).
Favorite Technical Communicators	I learn from everyone and,—whether they consider themselves gurus or not—my technical communication co-workers, first in Orlando and now in Chicago, have been the best mentors I could have hoped for.
Where I'd Like to be 10 Years From Now	Still living in Woodstock, pursuing chances to sing and/or act on stage in my off-hours, while I use my writing/editing skills during the day at a workplace where I'm appreciated for my work skills and even for my sense of humor.

STC Chicago and CISPI Sponsoring the Chicago e-Learning & Technology Showcase August 20

STC Chicago and CISPI (Chicago-International Society for Performance Improvement) are sponsoring the Chicago e-Learning & Technology Showcase from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesday, August 20, at Roosevelt University's Downtown Campus (Gage Building), 18 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago.

Anyone who wants to hear and see e-learning in all its shapes and forms should attend this event. You will be able to network with instructional designers, instructional developers, technical writers, trainers, training managers, content managers, and media developers just like yourself to learn the newest and best.

The Showcase focuses on the topics of synchronous virtual presentation programs and supporting software, such as webinars, online seminars, virtual classroom, blended learning, and online business simulations. But you can also expect to find presenters demonstrating their work on these topics and more:

- Authoring tools (LMS, LMCS)
- Custom synchronous development companies and resellers
- Asynchronous developers
- Knowledge management companies (learning portals)

You can pre-register at www.cispi.com at $25 for members (of either STC Chicago or CISPI) or $50 for non-members. The registration deadline is August 13. To be a presenter or for additional program details, contact Mike Tillmans at 630-584-0134 or EyeDee@aol.com. Ω

Thursdays @ STC Chicago Update

Join us on the first Thursday of each month for our informal discussion and networking series, Thursdays @ STC Chicago, where practicing technical communicators discuss innovative trends in the field, present their latest projects, and network with colleagues over lunch.

July Meeting Update: We'll meet one week later this month (July 10), due to the Fourth of July holiday. Locations and contacts are very likely to be the same as for June (see below), check back soon for the latest information.

Western Location
Dupage Inn at 11:30 am - 1:00 pm
2410 Ogden Ave.
Downers Grove, IL 60515
(630) 963-2565

Northern Location
Noodles & Company at 11:30 am - 1:00 pm
900 Milwaukee Ave.
Lincolnshire, IL 60069-3845
(847) 793-0514

Northwestern Location
Pompei at 11:30 am - 1:00 pm
1261 East Higgins Road (back room)
Schaumburg, IL 60173
(847) 619-5001

City Location
Potbelly at 11:30 am - 1:00 pm (New Location!)
545 W. Madison
Chicago, IL 60661
312-559-0000Ω

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STC Chicago Chapter Leaders 2008

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Newsletter for STC Chicago Members
P.O. Box 1745
Palatine, IL 60078-1745