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Stay tuned

Great things are in the planning stages for the upcoming year. Watch the chapter Web site and the newsletter for announcements.

Answer the call

The "call" you've been waiting for is here. The Call for Proposals for the 2007 Technical Communication Summit -- STC's 54th Annual Conference -- is online at www.stc.org/cfp.

The Chapter President's Report

In the May 22, 2006, issue of *Information Week*, Jody Davids, the Executive VP and CIO of Cardinal Health, was spotlighted in the *Tech Portal*.

The article, which was the synthesis of a previous article in *Optimize*, focused on how an IT professional could streamline processes to provide better customer service.

Part of the article highlighted Cardinal's path to establishing its common service delivery model. The 13 steps provided:

1. Create a catalog of services.
2. Resolve any internal issues and conflicts.
3. Maintain critical systems availability.
4. Define service expectations for each catalog item.
5. Design business processes to deliver services.
6. Realign the organization to deliver on expectations.
7. Communicate plans to IT and customers.
8. Train staff and deploy the delivery model.
9. Measure and manage daily performance.
10. Report performance monthly to businesses receiving services.
11. Add and delete offerings as the business transforms.
12. Deploy operational excellence black belts for continuous process improvement.
13. Fulfill service requests well and on time.

In short, Cardinal created a process that the entire technology team used to overhaul their practices and create a more customer-focused service delivery model.

This article really made me think. In many ways, technical communicators are always in a service delivery role. Even the lone writer has to produce a product and deliver it on time, on or under budget. Most often, technical communicators are forced into roles on teams where their ability to manage expectations, create solutions, and mediate disputes are often as worthwhile as any ability to write or make technical documentation.

As we begin planning for our 2006-2007 STC year, I hope that the STC leadership can begin overhauling processes to create a more member-focused organization. After last year's survey results were tallied, the disparate interests of this



Sandee Wagner
Oklahoma Chapter President

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geographically far-flung group were truly enumerated. The challenge for the program committee members will be to provide something for everyone.

I hope that we can count on the enthusiastic efforts of all members to help spread the word about upcoming programs, publicize the workshops where possible, and disseminate information about STC and its value to professional careers.

I'm hoping to take a lesson from Cardinal Health. I expect we will have to think a little differently and try a little harder, but the end result will be a much stronger organization.

Sandee

The Editor's Mark

By Fred Stowell

July 4, 2006

It is almost 10 p.m. in Tulsa on July 4th. I can hear the fireworks exploding in a display at Southern Hills Country Club just a few miles to the north of me. The sounds remind me of other Independence Days over the past 60 years of my life.

Those years have seen times of peace and times of war. They have been happy times watching our sons grow up and scary times when one was in Iraq. They have been the stereotypical times lying on a blanket watching the display and eating watermelon. And they have been less than typical, like this year with my wife in Seoul and me in Tulsa. Fortunately, by the time this is in print, she will be home with me.

As you may have guessed from my age, I am a dinosaur, at least when it comes to technical writing, I am. I have little to do with the electronic media, although that is changing. The vast majority of what I do is writing and editing material that will be reproduced

in bound, hardcopy manuals. I do not use XML, only MSWord. I have never made a web page although I have visited my share of them. When I attend the national STC conferences, I feel out of place because the sessions that I like to attend are few and growing fewer.

So, to make up for my lack of knowledge in the electronic arts, I like to write...things less technical. Like this little dissertation on a Fourth of July spent alone, just a little worried about my wife in Asia. Sometimes I just have to ramble and create something that may only make me feel good.

I hope that you have had a wonderful Independence Day with your family and friends and that you have had the opportunity to reflect on the benefits that the original Fourth of July provided to you.

Fred

The new world of STC

By Cindy Currie, STC Fellow and Region 1 Director

It's a brand new STC year! Our new President, Paula Berger, has chosen the slogan "The New World of STC" for this year. And a new world it is!

We have a brand **new Executive Director!** She is Susan Allen Burton. Susan accepted the position just days before our annual conference earlier this month and was able to be in Las Vegas. She was introduced to attendees during the conference opening program on Monday, May 8. She is dynamic and engaging, with a wealth of association management experience. Susan is the new "face of STC" we've been hoping to find! She will officially join STC by early August. Visit www.stc.org.

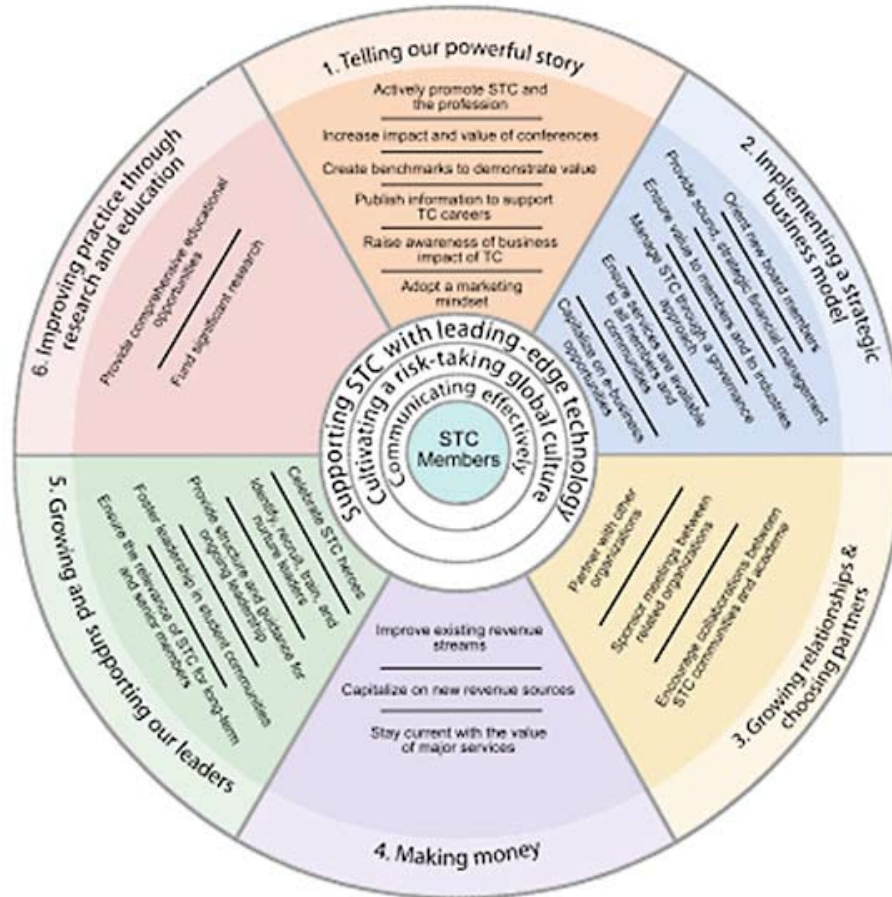
[org/membership/initiatives01.asp](http://www.stc.org/membership/initiatives01.asp) for more information.

The new **Board of Directors** is now in place, effective Monday, May 8, 2006, during the annual business meeting, held at the annual conference. The board is smaller and includes: President, First Vice President (1VP), Second Vice President (2VP), Secretary, Treasurer, Immediate Past President (IPP), and eight Directors: six Regional Directors (Regions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) and two Directors At Large. Visit www.stc.org/about/board01.asp for details on who's who.

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The Executive Director and **the STC Office Management team** (Maurice Martin, Merrick Bechini, and Peg Cottrell) all regularly attend board meetings to ensure tight alignment between the board (that sets strategy) and the office (that executes strategy). The Office Management team has a wealth of experience to add to the mix, so we're all happy to have working so closely with us. We're all the better for it.

STC has a new Interim Strategic Plan for the 2006-07 year. This newly updated plan is available at www.stc.org/PDF_Files/StrategicPlan.pdf. I highly encourage you to read it to fully understand where STC is going. (And going there, we are!) The graphic below shows our strategic priorities for this year and the specific strategies associated with them. You will see this graphic a lot! Get to know it!



Your community strategic plan should reflect the priorities and strategies in the Society document. A good exercise will be to review your plan against the Society plan to ensure you're in alignment and working to help fulfill this year's STC goals.

All major initiatives have an overseer at the Board level (I'm overseeing Communications with new Director At Large, Jeff Staples), and an STC office liaison (Maurice Martin for Communications) to ensure that there is a firm link between the board and the committees and how strategy is being driven through to execution and desired outcomes.

Visit www.stc.org/ppt/orgChart0506.ppt to view a presentation that shows how STC is organized this year and who's leading each committee. It's a very different model from previous years.

STC is now well positioned to meet our strategic goals for the year. We have a great team in place and a great plan to execute, so I'm excited to get to work on this year's priorities.



Chapter Treasurer's Report

By Barbara Adams, Oklahoma
Chapter Treasurer

Expenses		Income	
May			
May Statewide Meeting			
Speaker gift	\$66.10		
Newsletter award gifts	\$16.00		
July			
		Beginning Checkbook Balance:	\$1,903.66
		Beginning Savings Balance:	\$5.00
August			
Lunch Meeting (Stillwater):			
Lunch and room	\$150.00	Meeting admissions	\$96.00
Lunch meeting (Tulsa):			
Handouts	\$4.69		
Check order	\$11.69		
September			
Tulsa Statewide Workshop:			
Price Media Group	\$450.00	Meeting admissions	\$345.00
Lunch	\$59.80		
October			
Administrative expenses		Society rebate	\$660.00
Postage	\$4.42		
November			
Transfer from checking to CD	\$1,000.00		
OK City Statewide Workshop:			
Lunch and snacks	\$306.42	Meeting admission	\$500.00
Prizes	32.95		
December			
Murder Mystery Dinner Party:			
Ranch House (food/room)	\$535.12	Admissions/photos	\$960.00
Decorations	39.82		
Host Fee	200.00		
Invitations/postage	41.99		

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Chapter Treasurer's Report

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Expenses		Income	
January 2006			
Administrative Postage			
Return competition entries	\$43.89		
Website update and repair	\$100.00		
Stillwater Statewide Workshop			
Lunch and snacks	\$122.17	Meeting admissions	\$200.00
February 2006			
Lunch Meeting (Stillwater)	\$150.00	Meeting admissions	\$66.00
March 2006			
Tulsa Statewide Workshop			
Lunch	\$89.78	Meeting Admissions	\$225.00
April 2006			
Election ballots and postage	\$41.25	Publications Competitions Income (from Southern Arizona Chapter)	\$180.00
May 2006			
STC Annual Conference Registration Drawing			
Barbara Harrison	\$545.00		
Vice President Conference Registration (Pam Eaker)			
Pam Eaker	\$545.00		
Hosting Fee			
Greek Rescue	\$240.00		
June 2006			
None			
Expenses:	\$3,795.69	Income:	\$3,892.00
2005-06 Surplus (06/06):	\$96.31		
Checkbook balance:	\$919.14		
Savings balance:	\$5.00		
CD Balance:	\$1,014.83		
Beginning Checking Balance	\$1,903.66		

STC Annual Conference - Las Vegas, NV

By Sharon Garrity

I have visited some of the most interesting places in the United States attending STC's annual conferences. Let's see...Orlando, Seattle, Chicago, Dallas, Washington, D.C....oh! and Toronto, Canada! The first priority, of course, is to increase knowledge, improve skills, buy books, and visit with exhibitors.

This year my focus was to research availability of authoring tools to create comprehensive Help and find options for creating and deploying context-sensitive Help. With the rumors of RoboHelp's demise, it was imperative that I find an alternative for creating new Help and something that would support portability for our legacy Help files. Usability testing has indicated that our clients would be much happier with context-sensitive Help. I also had an interest in improving our training.

So, with those goals in mind, I committed to the post-conference workshop on "Life After RoboHelp" and plotted my attendance to sessions throughout the conference, and I was not disappointed.

Neil Perlin's session "X Factor: From HTML to XHTML" and Scott DeLoach's session "MadCap Flare Tips and Tricks" were excellent. (I bought DeLoach's book, "MadCap Flare for RoboHelp Users," for my own library.)

The "Life After RoboHelp" workshop presented by Neil Perlin was also well worth my company's money.

Paul Mueller's session entitled "Exploring and Implementing Embedded Help" was valuable and gave me confidence that we *could* implement context-sensitive Help in our products and the information to begin dialog with the developer.

Another excellent experience was the "Show Me Demos" session by Jim Maciejewski, Karin Carlan and Matt McDonough.

Mark your calendar

STC Region 2 will host "Making Cents of Making Sense: Technical Communication and Business" in London, England, Oct. 13-14, 2006.

This regional conference is aimed at companies in need of technical communication and the people who produce it. The program is going to include speakers

I came home with three clearly defined objectives to improve our Help and training:

1. Purchase MadCap Flare to transition our legacy Help and create new Help files.
2. Work with a developer to include context-sensitive Help in the next release of our legacy products.
3. Begin to include Show Me Demos in my training demonstrations.

Although I thought Show Me Demos would probably go on the wish list, I found that software I'm already using can capture the demo. I've prepared one training presentation with the demos intact in less than a month after the conference.

The Las Vegas conference more than met my expectations for my first priority. My company will realize a valuable return on investment in improved Help and training with the potential for more satisfied clients.

We invest a lot of time and money into attending a conference...sometimes personal time and personal money. So location, environment, facilities and accessibility are also important to me. While Las Vegas may be attractive to some, it was not to me. Having to go through smoke-saturated casinos to every session was not enjoyable. The lack of reasonably-priced food options within walking distance of the hotel was also discouraging. Two of my daughters and my 3-month-old grandson joined me for this trip. We had more fun playing Rummikub in our room than walking the strip.

If Las Vegas is an attractive location for future annual conferences, I would suggest they pick a conference site away from the Strip. If conference attendees choose to go to the Strip, they can, but those who choose not to be in that environment would also enjoy the conference.

who can show the business value of quality technical communication.

Visit www.stcuk.org/R2conf for more information. (The next Board meeting will be held Oct. 12-13 in London, so the full board will be in attendance at this conference.)

Professional Technical Communicators, Lucky #13

By Sandee Wagner

Like other STC members, I received the email celebrating the profession of technical writing making the top 20 best jobs. The survey was done earlier this year and published in the May issue of *Money* magazine and on salary.com (<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bestjobs/top50/index.html>).

Job satisfaction is something that I think about day-to-day. I know I add value, and I feel like they can utilize my skills. But sometimes they don't bother.

May is a month that our sales and marketing departments work toward every year. They plan for months to attend three different trade shows that are seminal to our business. This year, they redid ALL the printed materials with a new, jazzy theme. They went so far as to create an entire booth with all the signage and posters following this new "branding."

Interestingly enough, they never asked for input from any other department. The fact that the company employs a professional technical writer was probably never bandied about during departmental meetings. They know OF me, but they do not utilize me. I am assigned to the IT department and apparently, they don't cross those lines.

So when I looked at the display—the entire show booth was assembled in the office after they returned from the shows—and found four different typos and errors in the signage, I had to wonder.

What's the right thing to do?

The stuff is already printed and very, very expensive. They have already displayed the booth at four different trade shows from May through June. The sales and marketing departments are extremely proud of this new signage.

They misspelled one of our product names. Really. The error in trademarking could be excused because it's a technicality that many folks don't understand, but the typos... that's just unprofessional.

So what does a professional technical writer do?

I have two choices: I can point out the errors and allow them to spend the money to have those panels and posters reprinted. If I do it correctly, it will sound as if I am just pointing out something picky—not criticizing the booth. Or, I can put my head down, ignore the errors and let it ride. This stuff is going to be packed up and it won't come out of the boxes again for months. I could wait until a few months before the next trade show and THEN tell someone. I might suggest they make the corrections before displaying the show peripherals again. It's hard to know which choice is more appropriate.

In larger organizations, the departments seem more willing to "cross utilize" personnel like technical writers. In past jobs, I was "loaned out" by the project to other groups, filling the corporate need instead of just my department's needs. In this smaller company, there appears to be a stronger division between work groups, more concern about budgets and staffing as they affect the bottom line. I guess that's a normal outshoot of organizational size and staffing concerns.

When I discussed the political repercussions of saying something to sales and marketing, my office mate indicated that criticism might be viewed negatively. Keeping my opinions to myself might be the better part of valor... but I'm a professional technical writer. It offends my sensibilities to see that incorrect spelling and usage in full color, blown up life size.

It reminds me that part of being an employee in an organization is thinking strategically and considering the good of the whole organization. STC pointed out that having technical writers singled out in the *Money* article "...is a prestigious acknowledgement of the rising profile of technical communicators." With that kind of pressure, I know what the professional response will be. I have to tell them, don't I?

From my standpoint, it can only go one of two ways: well or poorly. But I'm feeling lucky, so I think I'll give the sales department a call.

Key content, too many pieces

by Bill Albing, STC Carolina Past President

Do you ever think about how much time you spend tackling process issues and tools issues? As Greg Rakauskas said at a local STC meeting about wikis, and I'm paraphrasing him, "Even with new online collaborative tools, it is still difficult to get information out of subject matter experts." Even further, there are still too few resources to develop all the content you know is needed for a product, and too little time to meet the deadline with a great quality piece of writing.

There are still process issues that are perennial, regardless of the tools we use. As long as we are working with people, there will be clogs in the flow of information. As long as we are working for corporations, the bottom line will be money. With the dependence on computers and information in accessible and digital form, there is still a challenge in getting meaningful information. The tools, as advanced and automated as they are, will not fix all our problems. But we have to work with what we have, and automate as much of the production and maintenance of our content as possible. We must, as the British say, muddle through.

Too Much About DITA

There is so much buzz about DITA (the IBM-started open standard for topic-based information architecture), that I have to say a word about this new set of tools. Let me start by saying the term is a little inflated in its self importance, but that's part of the branding. DITA simply stands for Darwin Information Typing Architecture. The Darwinian part has nothing to do with the current debate about teaching evolution in school but rather about the ability to customize (specialize) the topic types for your work and still base them on an ancestor topic type from which to inherit all those base settings. It's really about object-oriented inheritance (to borrow the language of the software development industry), but the creators of DITA prefer their own descriptive vocabulary.

The information typing part means that you look at the types of topics, the metatags in XML, the information about your content. And it also implies modularization in as much as the information is categorized into those types. Where IBM used the word "information," many of us use "content," which is more than "data" and not finalized in a "document." Instead of "pages" or "chapters," we use the generic content container "topic" which may or may not get delivered in a

printable form. With information typing, there is a place for everything, and everything in its place; a type for each piece of information, and every piece of information in its type. And IBM uses the word "architecture" to describe this grandiose set of procedures because it's not just a DTD, a document type definition; it is a way of looking at the information. It is a *weltanschauung*, if you will.

With all this information architecture mindset, there is so much more to making an authoring environment DITA-ready. That's why FrameMaker and Flare and other tools won't be DITA-compatible overnight. FrameMaker is still just an authoring environment (albeit with a great print engine for making PDFs); it will not manage the modularized content in the way a content management tool will. DITA does not have a corner on the market of modularized and reusable content.

Many of us have been working with our own topic-based DTD and our own set of tools before DITA came along. Having a tool that can output DITA-ready XML alone won't transform the technical writers on your team into content developers or information architects. The approach to working with modularized content, and keeping the metacontent as well, requires a different working environment.

The move toward content management systems is a move in the right direction, but is not the complete solution. There are no out-of-the-box solutions that work for everyone. Content management alone will not suffice; now we need translation and localization tools and tools that will publish to any number of output devices and media. Will it output to a wiki or a blog or a podcast?

Some of us have moved to content management systems and authoring environments that promise to be all in one. But even these, I suspect, have a fair amount of customization involved (or consultant expense) and will not offer as much freedom as the content development team might require. As our projects include ever more requirements for accessibility and localization as content development becomes more collaborative, our work in tailoring the tools never ends.

Having a local conference on DITA may be a start for some people who can afford it, but for most of us, the chance to talk with others about how we are facing

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Key content: too many pieces

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our own issues and dealing with processes and picking tools is an ongoing endeavor that involves going to local STC meetings, keeping up with online lists and chats and generally keeping up. DITA is only part of the picture and not the only way of describing the effort of modularizing technical content.

Grand Solution

Our work is becoming more fragmented. Not only is the content becoming more modularized—the very processes we use are becoming more modularized and the very tools we are using are more numerous and more task specific.

To accomplish the software product documentation where I work, we develop some of the content in FrameMaker and some is automatically generated in a tool by Innovasys. Then we use Saxon to parse the XML out of FrameMaker, and we use another tool to compile the HTML to make a help system. We also use a Web site management tool for fine tuning the HTML if needed, and another tool for checking the validity of the generated XML and another to generate the PDF files.

Some of these tools are free and open source, and some of these tools are expensive. Some of the customizations and the template development are necessary and labor intensive.

Certainly getting it all to work together is an effort. Nothing works right out of the box anymore. But getting the right tools is worth the effort. There is no single environment that does everything immediately, but much more can be automated these days and the capabilities of tools are improving all the time.

As a profession, we have never offered enough financial gain for sophisticated tool vendors to focus only on our needs. We borrow tools from the XML world, where most of the effort is tagging data, not human readable content. We borrow tools for content management, where most of the focus is on external Web sites, not large pools of product documentation. We borrow page layout tools, but these are mostly for marketing or graphics teams.

Maybe this hints at what will be the grand solution to technical documentation tools. By being more specialized and modularized and all working together, the tools we pick can be assembled to meet our unique requirements. By picking the authoring components we need, the module management tools we need, the publishing and delivery tools specific to our customers, we can tailor a system that will allow us to develop, deliver and maintain our enterprise's content.

I would challenge the folks behind DITA and the vendors from Adobe and Microsoft to Vasont and AuthorIt to Idiom and Rascal, that until individual components can plug and play together, just as our modularized content is moving toward that goal, we will not be satisfied. Those tools have a better chance of surviving in the market if they interoperate. Until then, we will have to deal with too many pieces.

Bill can be reached at bill.albing@keycontent.org.

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FrameMaker Seminars

- Structured FrameMaker: Authoring, Nov. 29
- Structured FrameMaker: Developing EDDs, Nov. 30-Dec.1
 - Technical Indexing with FrameMaker, Dec.2
 - FrameMaker Template Design, Dec. 4-5
 - Single Sourcing with FrameMaker, Dec. 6
 - FrameMaker-to-Acrobat Advanced Techniques, Dec. 7-8

The instructor for the seminars is Schlomo Perets of MicroType. The group size is typically 5-8 students, encouraging active participation. For a seminar description and participants' feedback, see <<http://www.microtype.com/training.html>>. Seminar hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Location:

Doubletree Hotel St. Louis at Westport
1973 Craigshire Road, St. Louis, MO

http://doubletree.hilton.com/en/dt/hotels/maps_directions.jhtml?ctyhocn=STLWPDT

Cost:

See the registration form:
<<http://www.microtype.com/training/MO2006-FM-Training-Reg.pdf>>

Discounts for early registration, multiple seminars or multiple participants.

Upcoming STC remote seminars

You can't beat the STC remote seminars for a quick, convenient professional development opportunity. Here are the upcoming seminars for 2006.

July 26, 2006

Working in Global Teams

Presenter(s): Melanie Doulton and Makarand Pandit

Level: All levels

August 23, 2006

It Might Be GUI, but It Doesn't Have to Be Messy!

Presenter(s): Leah Guren

Level: All levels

September 13, 2006

Visible: The New Visible

Presenter(s): Austin Skaggs and Christine Granger

Level: Intermediate

September 27, 2006

Creating Interactive CBTs with Captivate-in Half the Time

Presenter(s): Kevin Siegel

Level: All levels

October 11, 2006

Designing Business Forms: A No Nonsense Approach

Presenter(s): Nathaniel Lim

Level: All levels

October 25, 2006

Ten Ways to Increase Your Value as a Technical Communicator

Presenter(s): Holly Harkness

Level: All levels

November 8, 2006

Choosing the Right Usability Technique (to answer the right question)

Presenter(s): Whitney Quesenbery

Level: Intermediate

November 22, 2006

Selling Technical Communication Services-Both Inside and Outside Your Organization

Presenter(s): Robert Dianetti

Level: Intermediate/Advanced

December 6, 2006

Creating Training that Sticks

Presenter(s): Maggie Haenel

Level: Beginner/Intermediate

For more details about the seminars, see the STC Web site at <http://www.stc.org>, or contact:

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Comments? Suggestions? Ideas for meetings? Questions? Contact us. Let us know what's on your mind.

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Oklahoma Chapter logo courtesy Hui Zeng

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The current issue and past issues are posted on the Oklahoma Chapter Web site at <http://www.stc-ok.org>.

Letters to the editor are always welcome, as are articles. Please send letters and articles to Fred Stowell stowellf@osufpp.org.

By submitting an article, the writer implicitly grants a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC