

STC Meets PCS

PCS AdCom members staffed a booth at the Society for Technical Communication's (STC's) 41st annual conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 15-17 May. Although quite a few PCS members also are members of STC, this was the first time that PCS has established a visual presence at an STC conference. The concept was a brainchild of the IPCC 94 steering committee, who felt that many STC members would be interested in PCS's Banff conference if only they knew about it!

The committee approached IEEE Press and suggested a joint venture: if the Press would share the cost, PCS members would staff the booth. Then they approached the Banff Centre for Conferences and asked if they could borrow the Centre's scenic backdrop panorama (the one that sparked so much interest at IPCC 93). Both agreed, and so Exhibit No. 508 was created. The booth was staffed by members of the IPCC 94 steering committee and the PCS AdCom.

STC's conference attracted close to 2000 delegates, many of whom thronged the aisles of the exhibition hall between sessions and during lunchtime breaks (the exhibit hall was open for 14 hours spread over three days). Although we did not make a physical count, we estimate that between 300 and 400 visitors stopped at the IEEE/PCS booth.

Many had not heard about IPCC 94 and were surprised by the range of topics that will be covered. Others knew about it and used the opportunity to ask specific questions about the facilities, travel arrangements,



Pamela Kostur, IPCC 94's general chair, observes early visitors to the booth.

and accommodations. A third group—whom we were particularly pleased to meet—were prospective IPCC 94 speakers who just wanted to talk to the steering committee.

The IEEE Press table drew equal attention. Again, many STC delegates were unaware of the Press's range of publications and were particularly interested in David Beer's *Writing and Speaking in the Technology Professions* and Bob Woelfle's *New Guide to Better Technical Presentations*—both PCS-sponsored books.

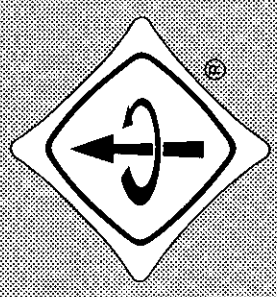
We were also happy to have Minne-

Continued on page 6

INSIDE

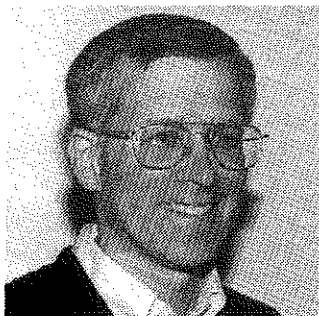
From the Editor	2
Letters to the Editor	3
From the President	4
On Management Communication ...	5
Tools of the Trade	7
What It Takes to be a Good Editor ..	9
Curmudgeon's Corner	10
AdCom Meeting in New York	11
Call for Nominations	12

IEEE Professional Communication Society
NEWSELETTER



ISSN 0161-5718

FROM THE EDITOR



Dexter Johnson's letter to the editor (next page) brings up the point of what we are doing today to avoid gender-specific pronouns. His annoyance at the use of "their" in a singular construction is common enough, and my answer to his question of whether this usage is gaining acceptance is "No, not yet." Too many people see the mismatch between singular and plural, stop, and lose the message as they puzzle over the construction. I don't expect it to be the accepted form in the near future.

The wider question is the entire subject of gender-specific pronouns. It's been more than 20 years since the argument against using "he" as a universal pronoun gained prominence, and in that time, many alternatives (most of them ghastly) have been proposed and none of them have seriously taken hold. "Writing around" the problem is still the solution most often used: recast the sentence so you don't need a third person

singular pronoun, usually by making the noun plural so "they" or "their" is the appropriate pronoun.

"Writing around" is an effective approach that has two serious problems. First, it does leave a writer with the feeling that . . . First, it does leave writers with the feeling that they can't *ever* use the singular, causing (as here, quite unintentionally) a lot of restarts, which can in turn cause the writer to lose the flow of the piece. Second, as an editor (in my everyday work, not for this *Newsletter*), I can't always use this option; reconstructing many such sentences requires time I often don't have on a project.

To me, the notable point is that no bright person has figured out a better replacement for a universal "he" than the deadly "he or she", the grotesque "s/he", or the dichotomous "he/she". My guess at the reason would be that you don't alter language on demand; language alters itself as needed.

I have tried, unsuccessfully, to discover the single, magic word that will replace "he" to the satisfaction of all readers. At the same time, I have refused as a writer to submit to the "s/he, he/he, he or she" doctrine, because those choices make any writer seem clumsy, no matter how well intentioned the effort is. What I do in my writing is write around the problem sometimes, and other times simply use either "he" or "she" as it comes out of my key-

board when the singular construction is better. I no longer care that some English experts find that solution jarring or that others find it exclusive. It represents precisely the case that I will explain to my daughter: *either* singular third person pronoun can sometimes represent everyone; just don't use the same one all the time.

—D.E.N.

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IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter is published bimonthly by the Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc., 345 E. 47th St., New York, NY 10017. Five dollars per member per year (included in Society fee) for each member of the Professional Communication Society is paid as the subscription price. Printed in U.S.A. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. *Postmaster:* Send address changes to IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter, IEEE, 445 Hoes Lane, Piscataway, NJ 08855.

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IEEE Service Center, Attn: Susan Schneiderman, 445 Hoes Lane, Piscataway, NJ 08855. Phone: (908) 562-3946; faxes: (908) 981-1855. Internet: s.schneiderman@ieee.org. The publisher reserves the right to reject any advertising.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear David:

The Electron Devices Society is reactivating a Newsletter, so I have been reading those from several other societies recently.

I noticed the "technical" discussions regarding quotation marks and it recalled to my mind two specific "fine points" that have bothered me, as a past editor and publications chairman for our society. Maybe you could enlighten me as to the present trend, particularly as seen in the IEEE community, where I know trends are set (indexes for indices, for instance).

1) It annoys me considerably that the use of "their" as a non-gender-specific third person singular possessive form seems to be gaining acceptance. Is it? (As in "We will make it possible for each person to realize their potential.")

2) The "simplification" of the language by the use of phonetic or regular spelling. Specifically, I see "lead" substituted for "led" quite frequently, even on professionally prepared resumes. (As in "1988-1991: Lead a cross-functional design team . . .")

I thought at first that 1) was just sloppiness, until I was informed that the EEO folks at my company (AT&T) had decided that was "better style" than the various his/her options.

As for 2), I see that you have used "led" as the past participle form on p. 1 col. 2 of the March/April PCS Newsletter and "lead" as the past participle form on page 15, col. 3. I hope the latter is just a typo—or is there a "better style" movement here as well, to make lead go like read? I could stretch the point and remark that *either* led or leaded could fit, on the p. 15 item—with

the latter meaning that Dr. Lantsberg provided functional pencils to the signatories.

So much for today's intellectual dilettantism. Seriously, yours is one of the better newsletters, and I hope we achieve some measure of the form and content in our effort.

—Dexter Johnston
President, EDS

"Lead" in page 15 of the March/April Newsletter was one of those typos that should prove to all scientists and engineers that you can't rely on spelling checkers, as either an author or editor; you have to read the copy with your brain engaged! See "From the Editor" for discussion of the first question.

—D.E.N. ◀

I enjoyed reading the March/April issue of the PCS Newsletter, which just arrived here in Israel.

Please tell Joan "Curmudgeon" Nagle that I enjoyed her column. She asked if anybody knows where she can find one yellow tulip in February. Please tell that Israel is the place!

All the best,
—Mordechai Brown

I enjoyed your [From the Editor] column this month in the Newsletter. I also empathized with your problem about getting students to take the writing task seriously. I, too, teach a technical writing class. It is at the senior undergraduate level. The first year I taught it 2/3 of the students tried to get out of taking it. (It's a required course.) They all wanted another technical option instead. One student moaned that I was ruining his career.

However, that's all changed. Now they come up to me at graduation

and tell me how useful the course is. They pass the message along to the people in lower level courses. I have people who are not required to take the course ask whether they can enroll. This is in spite of the fact that my first assignment (given the first day of classes) is to write a fifteen page essay (word-processed, double-spaced, minimum 3500 words, no spelling errors, no major errors in grammar).

May I tell you my secret hook? I teach them some elements of marketing first. Then I teach them how to use the knowledge to write a resume. We get around to letters, next: using the cover letter as an example.

They all must write a thesis on a project. They start by writing memo's to their supervisors. Then they need to write a project tender (again marked by both the supervisor and myself). Finally they write the thesis. In the meantime I have developed chunking, issue trees and other organizational tools. I never touch grammar or spelling. I just don't accept anything with major errors!

They think it's great. Our reputation with local employers has improved dramatically. If I'm asked I say I teach interpersonal skills—and writing.

I won't be able to come to Banff, but none-the-less wish you all a great conference.

Regards,

—Raymond D. Findlay
Director IEEE Canada

I probably agree with Joan Nagle's Curmudgeon's Corner column in the May/June issue, but with some further observations. Ms. Nagle takes exception with anyone who asks the guy in the next cubicle for the spelling of a word. "This is research?" she asks. Why, I ask, *should* it be considered research?

Isn't getting the right answer quickly and efficiently the goal—not whether it is considered research?

Given the high pace of doing business these days, it is inevitable and actually an advantage of the cubicle environment to ask advice of a neighbor or nearby expert. The only caution is to be sure you are asking the right person. After all, you don't ask a salesman how to spell a word, but you would ask him for the benefits of the system he is selling. In the end, it is still "you get what you pay for." Ms. Nagle's observation that the mark of a professional is knowing what to do in those situations when experience does not inform is quite valid. Scoping out the situation in advance to know from whom or where to get the information you need to support your work is the mark of a true professional. Sometimes, just sometimes, that means knowing that the authoritative answer can be from someone who sits in the cube next to you!

—Emily Sopensky
Austin, Texas

Scientists will have rifled the secrets of the moon and of Mars long before they will know the secret and subtle workings of the myriad-minded force which shapes the course of the language.

John Moore

as quoted in
Contemporary Quotations,
J.B. Simpson, 1964.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Deborah
Flaherty Kizer

One of the advantages of the timing of this issue is that it enables me to report on the recent AdCom meeting, held 3 June in New York City. Fortunately, even the weather cooperated, making up for the less than perfect day we had at our New Jersey meeting!

I was pleased to have as our guest John Vitale of the IEEE Technical Activities Department. The more we understand each other, the better we will be at communicating our Society's needs effectively to TAD and the better TAD will be at addressing our concerns.

One area of particular concern to the AdCom is maintaining the financial integrity of the Society for the long term. Because two areas, membership and conferences, are the primary engines of our financial growth, the AdCom spent considerable time discussing these. My goal this year is to develop a long-range plan that will assure the financial stability and growth of PCS while continuing to meet your needs as members in innovative ways. Clearly, there are other avenues we can explore for growth as well, and AdCom will work with the respective committee chairs to identify and develop these opportunities.

More and more, I see PCS extending its reach to other countries and or-

ganizations. This is clearly a "win-win" situation for all involved. Specifically, we are very close to the formation of a Russian PCS chapter, thanks to the efforts of Rudy Joenk, Dave Kemp, Henrich Lantsberg, and others. We are also continuing to recognize that we do not really compete with other organizations, but rather complement them. As such, we will continue to explore ways to partner with other organizations. For example, PCS and SIGDOC will be holding back-to-back conferences in Banff. We will also be hosting a joint PCS/SIGDOC reception. Such interactions not only expose us to new ideas, concepts, and networking opportunities, but enable PCS to spread its reach and get its message across to a larger audience. Most definitely, both partnering organizations benefit in terms of member development and membership growth.

I look forward to seeing you in Banff. Please write to me with your concerns, issues, and thoughts on how we can improve PCS to meet your needs.

Newsletter Schedule

The *Newsletter* publication and deadline schedule is:

Issue	Deadline
Nov./Dec.	7 October 1994
Jan./Feb.	2 December 1994
March/April	3 February 1995
May/June	7 April 1995
July/August	2 June 1995

Contributions are welcome; ASCII e-mail and ASCII IBM-compatible diskettes are preferred. Please send them to:

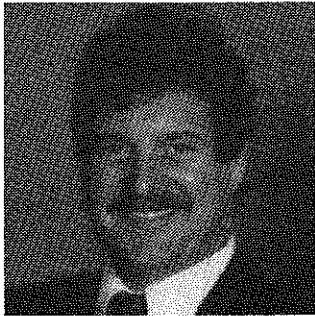
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1994 Calendar

28-30 September

IPCC 94, Banff, Alberta, Canada. Contact Ron S. Blicq, RGI International, 569 Oxford St., Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3M 3J2. Tel: (204) 488-7060; facs: (204) 488-7294; e-mail: r.blicq@ieee.org

ON MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION



by Michael B. Goodman

This column on management communication appears regularly in the PCS Newsletter. It covers topics related to the technical, cultural, financial, and political environment that characterize contemporary business. The discussions concern communication among technical and business disciplines; technical marketing; crisis and emergency communication; and communicating technology to the public. Send in suggestions for topics that interest you.

I. Change in the Corporation: the Metaphors of Change

With rare exception, corporations are changing. They are reinventing, rethinking, transforming, and re-engineering themselves. And with change comes chaos, uncertainty, and renewal. For everyone involved, change represents a threat to security or an opportunity to move forward.

Other people react to new situations without fully realizing what their true feelings are; they cannot articulate their underlying understandings. In an effort to do so, the metaphors they use shape and reveal how they understand the events. How people understand is critical for them in assessing the need for change, and indeed, their concept of change itself. Paying

attention to managing the metaphors of change has become an essential skill for leaders and change agents.

The metaphors of change can be roughly aligned with four types of organizational change:

- Maintenance
- Developmental
- Transitional
- Transformational

In *maintenance*, change is equated with something being broken or poorly maintained. Change in such an environment means that something is wrong and needs to be fixed. The metaphor provokes a fix-and-maintain image represented by agents such as a mechanic, maintenance worker, or "repairperson". Ross Perot was fond of such metaphors during his campaign for the presidency: "Let's get under the hood and fix it."

In *developmental*, change builds on the past and leads to better performance over time. In this environment, teamwork is the key to build and develop. The agents are often called trainer, coach, mentor, facilitator, or developer. You might hear metaphors

*Note the word
images used to describe
the change.*

borrowed from sports: There is no "I" in "TEAM".

Transitional change involves a move from one state or condition to another; for instance, an operation goes from manual to automated. The image is often one of movement and relocation and the agents are often called planners, guides, or explorers. In such environments you might "need to create a map for unexplored territory".

Transformational change implies the transfiguration from one state of being to a fundamentally different state. An example might be a business or industry that changes from a regulated monopoly to a market-driven competitive business. The image is often one of liberation and recreation, and the agents are often called visionary, creator, liberator. In this environment, you might "create a vision for reengineering the corporation".

In managing the metaphors of change:

- Note the word images used to describe the change.
- Say what you mean; make the metaphor coincide with the literal meaning. For example, "We need to
fix and maintain
build and develop
move and relocate
liberate and recreate
[issue X]."
- Describe the change using the four metaphor types to gain insight.
- Align the language with people's behavior.
- Use metaphors, symbols, and images to shape the way people think about change.
- Change the metaphors and images as a way to get "out of the box" and stimulate new ways of thinking.

Understanding and using the language of change can benefit everyone involved and help them perceive of change as an opportunity to move forward, rather than as a threat to their well being.

II. The Eighth Conference on Corporate Communication

The Eighth Conference on Corporate Communication, devoted to exploring "New Forces in Corporate Communication", will be held

Wednesday, 24 May, and Thursday, 25 May 1995, at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey. Topics will include new forces such as customer demands, media and technology, ethical environments, competition and globalism, and strategic alliances. Plan now to participate with an original paper, panel discussion, or workshop. Proposals are due by 1 November 1994.

For further information, write to

The Conference on Corporate Communication
M.A. Program in Corporate Communication
Fairleigh Dickinson University
Madison, NJ 07940

or to goodman@sun490.fdu.edu (e-mail). Telephone inquiries to (201) 593-8709 (voice); 593-8510 (facs).

III. Coming Up . . .

In the next "On Management Communication" column, an overview of some of the forces changing communication in the workplace and the nature of work itself. ◀

STC Meets PCS

(continued from page 1)

apolis resident James Lufkin as an active helper over the three days. Although Jim is now retired, he is still involved in technical communication as an editor and translator. He is best known to PCS members as a past Society president and the author of close to 15 playscripts drawing attention to enigmatic technical communication situations. (At IPCC 90 in Guildford,

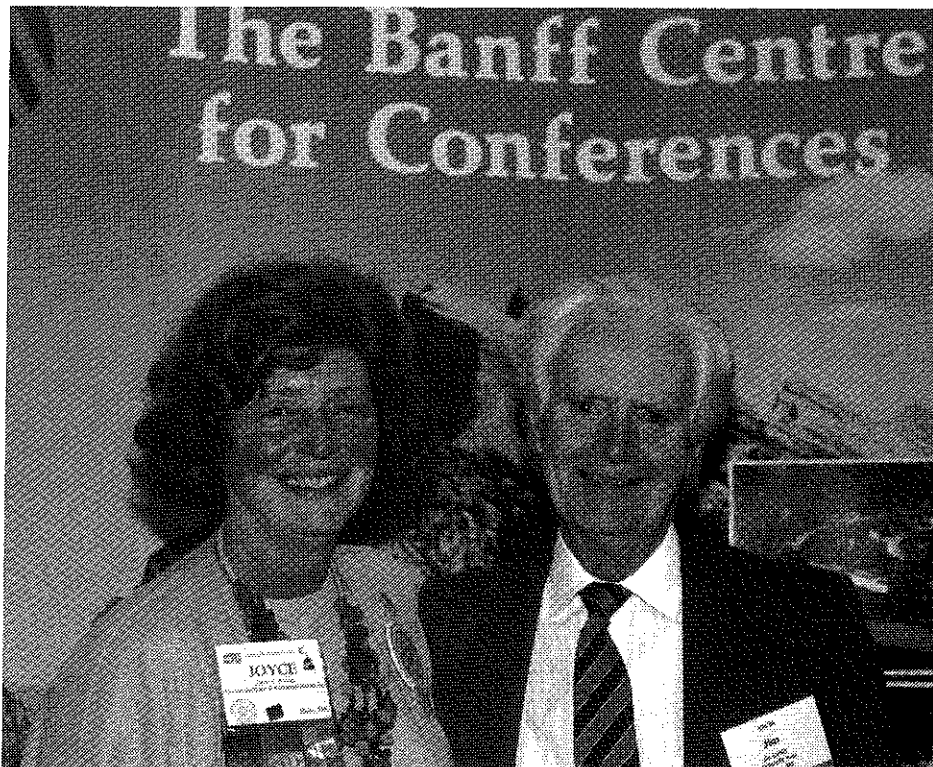
England, he presented a lunchtime play called "Shakespeare Gets a Computer", and at IPCC 87 in Winnipeg he presented an operetta!)

Probably the greatest advantage of the booth is that it created awareness of PCS among STC members. Both societies have similar interests and goals, and we need to meet and talk more often.

—Ron Blicq ◀

Worth Reading

Kurti, N., and T.B. Hervé. Chemistry and physics in the kitchen. *Scientific American* 270(4): 66-71 (April 1994). This is a fascinating look at how things we do every day to prepare food are explained by science. The topics of discussion include mayonnaise, cooking of eggs, and the soufflé. Included is a short list of books for further reading. [My wife prepares a great dessert by making a very liquid batter, pouring it into a bowl, and baking it. Out comes a delicious dessert that has a cake layer (dry, not soggy!) on top and a delicious, liquid lemon sauce below. I hope one of those books will tell me how the flour knows to head upwards and yet not take the liquid it was saturated with along for the ride. —D.E.N.] ◀



Old friends Jim Lufkin and Joyce Woods (STC Region 6 Director Sponsor) meet in front of the Banff Centre's breathtaking display.

*In science, read, by preference,
the newest works; in literature,
the oldest.*

Edward Bulmer-Lytton

as quoted in
Harvest of a Quiet Eye,
A.L. Mackay, 1977.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



by Cheryl Reimold

Management by Communication: The Language of Authority

Charm is the ability to make someone else think that both of you are quite wonderful.

—Anonymous

"How do you get authority?" The question was whispered to me during a break in a class on communication skills. The speaker was a soft-spoken woman who had just been promoted to manager. It was a surprising question, simply because no one had ever asked it so clearly and openly before. Yet it is one of the foremost concerns of anyone who has been dubbed "boss".

You have people "working for you", employees "reporting to you". Perhaps you would really rather get on with your own job—but that job is no longer just your own. It involves other people, all the time. You have to motivate, inspire, and empower other people—or, if you can't do all those wonderful things, you have to get them to do the job, period. You are responsible for their work. That means you must have authority.

Many people have two problems with authority. First, they believe

it "comes with the territory"; once promoted, they assume they will automatically be obeyed and treated with the deference due their new "position of authority". Second, they confuse authority with dictatorship.

Those who make the first error discover their mistake very quickly, usually on their first big project. Those who make the second may never realize what they are doing wrong. They may have problems with their staff for years, but they rarely question their own managerial style. Rather, they talk about the laziness, unwillingness, or incompetence of their people. To combat these perceived sins in their staff, they only intensify their tyranny.

These "dictators" are often very nice people off the job. In fact, many are by nature rather gentle, reserved people. One "dictator" whom I know quite well actually has a slight sense of inferiority, which is probably the basis of his tyrannical behavior at work. He and other "dictators" believe the

"Dictators" believe the only way they can "get authority" is to do a daily impression of Ivan the Terrible.

only way they can "get authority" is to do a daily impression of Ivan the Terrible.

Authority means expertise

Authority is above all a communication skill. It is, fundamentally, the ability to communicate your own knowledge or professional expertise and your confidence in yourself and others. You exert authority when people believe you

know what you and they should be doing.

How do you develop this skill?

First, you must be knowledgeable and expert in your specialty. This means keeping up to date on all important developments, all the time. Read the journals. Go to conferences, if possible.

Second, you must understand the work of each member of your staff very well. This does not mean you have to be a technical whiz in 30 distinct specialties. Nor does it mean you have to be able to do each person's job. But you must know

- what each person on your staff is doing
- how he/she is doing it
- what results you and your staff member expect
- what problems he/she may face

If you don't have this information for everyone who works for you, you have some critical homework to do. Talk to your subordinates. You are not expected to be omniscient. You are expected to have as much expertise as possible on all the work going on in your group.

If you know all four points listed above, you will be competent to direct your staff with authority. You will be able to help each member with a work problem, to coordinate efforts meaningfully, and to explain to your superiors what your department is doing and why.

Authority means "charm"

Look back at the anonymous quotation at the beginning of this column. It is a perfect description of effective authority.

To have authority, you must believe in yourself and your people. If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will. And if you don't believe in your people, you will not be able to inspire their confidence

or empower them to do their best work. To work on developing authority, try telling yourself three things:

- I know enough to guide other people.
- I believe in myself.
- I believe in them.

Try saying those words to yourself before a challenging situation at work. You may be surprised at their effect.

Communication of authority

You communicate authority when you make people willing to take direction from you and act on your instructions. People with true authority do not have to threaten or beg to get their instructions followed. They are accepted as having the knowledge and competence to guide others in effective work. To communicate this authority, you must first feel secure in your knowledge and competence. Then you can work on your communication skills. Here are five ways to start.

1. Cultivate deliberation

A young manager I know makes slow, deliberate gestures. She walks slowly. She always allows herself time to consider a question before answering it. This young radiates the impression of being in complete control and not being constantly swayed by other people's behavior or demands. Her latest promotion makes her the youngest woman in her organization to hold such a high position. I believe this is a result of both her good work and her communication of calm, steady control.

Quick, unfinished movements and speech communicate nervousness. Avoid staccato motions—tapping your feet or hands, blinking your eyes rapidly, drumming your

fingers. Resist the temptation to break off mid-sentence to follow a thought that has just popped into your mind. These gestures and speech patterns say: I'm nervous. I'm not in control.

By contrast, deliberate movements and speech calm your listener and give you poise. In all your movements, slow down. Practice speaking more slowly, distinctly and completely. When asked a question, pause to think instead of rushing to answer and then having to correct yourself. Speak in complete sentences—that's the only way you'll utter a complete thought.

2. Be open and candid

Communicating authority means expressing belief in both yourself and the other person. You can't do this if you avoid personal contact or difficult issues.

Consciously make direct eye contact with people. Use generous, expansive gestures. Choose honest, straightforward words to express your message, not phony fancy ones that cover it up with fluff.

3. Never apologize for yourself

Apologizing for a mistake you made expresses self-assurance. Apologizing for exercising your rights communicates self-doubt.

People will not respect you if you apologize for doing what you have a right to do—including your job. You can communicate apology-for-self without saying a word. If you feel that way, it will show in your body language; people will pick up your discomfort right away and will think the less of you for it. So walk, stand, and sit tall—and never apologize for doing your job, even if your job is to tell other people what to do.

4. Show respect for and interest in other people's abilities

Authority does not grow out of the belief that you are the only one who's any good. On the contrary, it comes with the conviction that you are an able leader who can guide a group of terrific people with different talents and strengths.

Look at your people. What does each one do best? When you give a person a task, say clearly why you know he or she will do it well. Name the strength you have observed in that person—and watch him or her shine.

5. Give directions

Many managers and supervisors confuse "empowerment" with abandonment. They think they will have a happier workforce if they concentrate on being pleasant to their people and letting them get on with their jobs. This is not effective management.

Your people want you to give them directions; it's your job to do so. Listen to them to be sure you understand their needs, problems, and abilities—but don't stop there. Show them you have understood and then give them the guidance they need.

You have the authority.

Cheryl Reimold is a member of the PCS Administrative Committee and the author of more than 200 articles and several books, including How to Write a Million-Dollar Memo, Being a Boss, and The Language of Business. She is President of PERC Communications—6A Dickel Road, Scarsdale, NY 10583; (914) 725-1024—which offers businesses in-house workshops and courses in writing, presentations, and on-the-job communication skills. ◀

What Does It Take to Be a Good Editor?

by Laurel K. Grove and Beverly V. Johnston

It sometimes seems as if people in some branches of our profession draw invidious distinctions between their own branches and others; for example, many consider writing to be somehow "higher" than editing. The result is that managers may hire individuals who are good at writing, because theirs are the "higher" skills, and assume that anyone can learn to edit. However, editors have specific skills and traits that are distinct from those of writers, and we present this list as a guide for those who would hire the best person for the job.

So what does it take to be a *good* editor?

The ability to listen

In conversations with authors, a good editor listens to pick out the points that are most important to the author and to the audience.

Attention to detail

An editor has to note whether the same thing is being referred to in more than one way, or if the same term is being used to refer to more than one thing.

Awareness of diversity

An editor needs to know that what suits readers in one area may not be appropriate somewhere else.

Creativity

Editors recognize the good ideas in a document and apply the good ideas from the language and other sources to create a better document.

Curiosity

Good editors are really interested in what's going on in the world and how it all fits together, and especially how what's in the current document fits with the rest of what they know.

Detachment

Because authors frequently get caught up in details, editors must retain a detached view that lets

them represent the eventual reader who is not familiar with the general project, let alone the details of it.

A dictionary

Editors know how much they don't know, and they check before they change.

Flexibility

An editor fights for the "rights" of the first meaning of a word, but must also know when to say when.

Healthy skepticism

Editors don't take things for granted. If the evidence for a claim isn't presented, they represent the outside or even hostile reader and raise doubt about the truth of the claim.

Investment

Good editors invest their own time in furthering their knowledge of the fields they work in.

Negotiation skills

Editors have to negotiate time, money, and resources. Is there time to make the nit-picking changes that will make the document less cumbersome to the reader? Whose resources will be used? Whose time can be best used to accomplish what must be done?

Objectivity

Because much of the editor's job is judgmental, editors must be able to separate content from form, fact from fantasy, and passion from sentiment.

An open mind

Good editors realize that new ideas may not be wrong.

A passion for clarity

Good editors want to understand the author's message, and they want all future readers to understand it too.

Patience

Editors realize that their authors' time is often even more limited than their own.

A sense of humor

How else can we survive having a document that is no more than a sheaf of unnumbered pages fall and scatter? And a sense of humor also lets an editor recognize when a statement could be misconstrued in ways that would be embarrassing to the author.

A sense of logic

In general, what people see is what they expect to see. If a document is not in the order they expect, it can confuse and disorient them, so that they miss the message. Therefore editors must know what is usual and fit the message into the "logical" framework.

Sensitivity to people's concerns

Editors must consider not only the feelings of the author, who may be hurt by criticism, but also those of the reader, who may be hurt if a message is inaccurate or unclear.

Tact

Much of the editor's task is critical and judgmental. The good editor reminds the author that these are judgments of the work and not the person.

A wide range of interests

While researchers specialize, editors must generalize to be able to make sense of all of the disciplines brought to bear on projects.

The authors are with Battelle Pacific Northwest Laboratories, Richland, Washington 99352.

Reading is a lot like sex. It is a private and often secret activity. It is often undertaken in bed, and people are not inclined to underestimate either the extent or the effectiveness of their activity.

Daniel J. Boorstin

as quoted in

Dictionary of Contemporary Quotations, J.G. Burke, et al., 1987.

CURMUDGEON'S CORNER



by Joan G. Nagle

How I Learned to Stop Saying *Nonetheless*

At least one reader of this column will snicker at the title and say, "I know the answer. I *told* her never to say that again."

And he did. He was my boss at the time, and he got tired having to mend fences that I had broken down between our department and its customers, by my haughty insistence that, no matter what the client wanted, **NONETHELESS** I was right.

"I don't want you ever to say that again, do you understand?" he ordered.

I understood, but that wasn't really learning. I understood that I was externally constrained. It took a few more years, and a few more layers off my stomach lining (and his, and the customer's) before I internalized the dictum. What I eventually learned, really learned, was that *it doesn't matter*.

It doesn't matter, in communication work, who is right. Or what is right, or even if there is a right way to say or do the thing. What matters is the communication process itself, and whether it happens or not. If it doesn't, I have failed in my part of the task. A couple of instances:

- I once used the analogy of *alchemy* to describe the complexity and near-mystery of a process.

The client said "No way." He went on (at some length) to explain that he was a committed Christian, that alchemy is (or was) the Devil's work, and that there would be no reference to it in anything he was responsible for. I explained (at even greater length) that alchemy was, in its day, *science*. That no matter how misguided their efforts, alchemists were searching for truth, for valid ways to describe the universe. That it was the forerunner of modern chemistry.

It didn't matter. No matter how much I happened to know about alchemy, how certain I was on the subject, he still wasn't having any. Alchemy was an abomination to his soul. What I came to understand was that, even if he had okayed the description, someone else (maybe a potential customer for the product) could have had the same negative reaction, and stopped reading about it then and there. We would not have made the sale.

- A manual writer was present during usability testing of her product (as writers should be). Unfortunately, no one ever told her that they are to be a silent presence unless specifically asked for clarification. When the test subject didn't understand an instruction,

It doesn't matter who's right.

the writer commented, loudly and unfavorably, on the subject's intelligence. "I explained it very well," she said. "If you don't understand it, you're just stupid."

It didn't matter. Whether the subject was stupid or not, the explanation did not meet his requirements. If he truly represented the user population, his failure to understand indicated that the manual writer was not giving her

audience what they needed. She needed to know this.

- Parents, especially parents of teenagers, know all too well the difficulty of communicating with their offspring, and how often communication fails in these relationships. "I told you to clean your room," Mother says, heatedly. "And just look at that bed!" "But you didn't tell me to make the bed," says the kid. Mother knows that cleaning a room includes making the bed, and the kid *should* know that too.

It doesn't matter. The bed is still unmade, because the directive was not satisfactorily communicated.

It's taken a lot of on-the-job writing (and parenting) for me to learn this important principle: if a reviewer does not understand something I have written, I have to change it. Period. Not because of politics, or corporate muscle, or the loudness of the reviewer's voice. Simply because there's at least one reader to whom I have not been clear, and that means I've probably misspoken to more than one member of my potential audience. That means I've failed to communicate.

A few months ago a gentleman called me to solicit help in a cause dear to his heart. I asked him to fax me more details, but didn't receive them. To make a very, very long story short, his faxes were not getting through to my system, even though he insisted (over and over again) that he was sending them. My machine, and I, had to be *wrong*.

It didn't matter. I didn't get his message, and I didn't buy into his mission. He didn't accomplish his purpose.

It doesn't matter who's right. *Nonetheless* has nothing to do with it. As technical communicators, we must write, not so that we can be understood, but so that we cannot possibly be misunderstood.

I understand that now. I just hope it isn't too late. ◀

AdCom Meeting in New York

The PCS Administrative Committee held its June meeting at IEEE Headquarters in New York City. Committee chairs "buzzed" as they reported on the synergy they have seen developing with other professional societies, the increased membership during the first half of this year, and the sudden interest by members of other professional societies in PCS. Highlights of the AdCom meeting:

- The committee for IPCC 94, to be held in Banff, Alberta, expects a record-breaking attendance. In addition to a top notch program, the conference offers free workshops on Saturday. A joint reception is planned Saturday evening with the SIGDOC conference participants, whose conference is back-to-back with IPCC 94.
- Ron Blicq's *Writing Reports to Get Results*, 2nd edition, will be available from the IEEE Press in August.
- Work is progressing steadily toward Intercom's FORUM 95, to be held 13-15 November 1995 in Dortmund, Germany. PCS is co-sponsoring this conference with technical communication societies from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands. The language of the conference will be English.
- Plans are approaching the final stage for IPCC 95 in Savannah, Georgia. Full details will be available at the Banff conference and in future *Newsletter* issues.
- Terry Lutwen, PCS representative to the IEEE-USA Energy Policy Committee, reported on recent committee activities. An update of key IEEE position papers will focus on the role of electricity in the U.S. energy picture, strategic issues in electricity, and the role of end-use efficiency and electrification in the energy picture. Terry is a member of a newly formed *ad hoc* subcommittee that will address ways to improve productivity of the Energy Policy Committee.
- Al Nauda reported on the Defense R&D Policy Committee of IEEE-USA. At the committee's 10 May meeting, a position statement on "The Future of Federal Laboratories Performing Defense R&D" was discussed. The statement recommends that any laboratory cutbacks be made with consideration of retaining unique, useful facilities and expertise that have no parallel commercial sources. Also covered were items from last fall's National Forum on the roles of Department of Defense laboratories in domestic technology, technology transfer, small business utilization, and tax incentives. A new IEEE award, the Electrotechnology Transfer Award, is being sponsored by the Defense R&D Policy Committee to recognize key contributions toward effective transfer and application of government-sponsored developments in electrotechnology to the commercial sector.
- Both the PCS *Transactions* and the *Newsletter* are looking for articles. *Transactions* submissions should go to Mike Markel, Dept. of English, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, ID 83725. *Newsletter* contributions should be sent to David Nadziejka, 6009 Osage Avenue, Downers Grove, IL 60516.
- The Membership Committee is seeking volunteers to help with its work. If you would like to be a member of this committee, call George Martin at (410) 730-7862 or Dave McKown at (412) 856-3947.
- The Washington DC Chapter is trying to regroup and revitalize itself, and it needs volunteers and participants. The person to contact is Nancy Corbin, at (703) 367-6013.
- Want to play a more active role in PCS? Interested in offering professional communication workshops to your organization? Need professional communication books for your personal or company library? Call Nancy Corbin at (703) 367-6013 (office) or (703) 754-9502 (home).

PCS Logo To Be Designed

A logo is in our future. A contest will be held to select a design for a PCS logo. Richie Robinson and Stephanie Rosenbaum have been working as an *ad hoc* committee to make the arrangements for the contest. Details will be announced at IPCC 94 in Banff, and the complete story will appear in the November/December issue of the *Newsletter*.

AdCom Meetings

30 September 1994 The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta, Canada
2 December 1994 IEEE, Washington, DC

Call for Nominations

Candidates are being sought for seven positions on the Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom). The positions are for three-year terms starting in 1994.

Candidates must be members of IEEE and must be willing and able to attend AdCom meetings, which are held four times a year. Some assistance with travel expenses is available.

Feel free to nominate yourself or someone who has given you permission to nominate them. For each person nominated, please submit:

1. A biographical description and/or resume.
2. A brief (50-200 words) description of what the nominee would contribute or accomplish as a member of the AdCom.

To be considered for this election, nomination packages must be received by 1 September 1994.

Please send nominations to or request additional information from:

Roger Grice
52 Doris Lane
Lake Katrine, NY 12449 USA

phone: (914) 382-2015 (evenings)
e-mail:
73444.3235@compuserve.com ◀

Say Again?

A comment by an officer of the International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology about the Society's meeting:

Some of the interesting, very contextualized history has begun to happen at this meeting.

Wouldn't you expect the history they study to normally be going on in the world *outside* the meeting? ◀

Flash!!

For East-Coast PCS members heading for Banff:

Air Canada now has a daily nonstop flight from Newark, N.J., to Calgary. The aircraft is a wide, comfortable, A320 Airbus!

- Westbound: Depart Newark 7:00 p.m., arrive Calgary 10:00 p.m. AC Flight 839.
- Eastbound: Depart Calgary 12:05 p.m., arrive Newark 6:10 p.m. AC Flight 838.

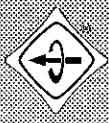
—Ron Blicq
IPCC 94 Publicity Chair

A great truth is a truth whose opposite is also a great truth.

Thomas Mann

as quoted in
Harvest of a Quiet Eye,
A.L. Mackay, 1977.

IEEE Professional Communication Society
NEWSLETTER



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