

The LAKESHORE WRITER

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Roles of a Technical Communicator

Technical Writers as Trainers

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Developing materials for adult learners consists of evaluating the critical elements of the learning environment, developing a shared framework of material that helps everyone, and building a future foundation for interactions. I recently interviewed Jane Tanner, an independent consultant, to gain an understanding of how Technical Communicators can impact our users from a training perspective. My interview with Jane reiterated how necessary these strategies are in implementing an effective course curriculum for adult learners.

Elements of the learning environment

Taking advantage of a technology environment requires more of a hands-on or lecture approach to learning and provides a great environment to teach skills learning in a controlled time frame.

When I spoke with Jane, I learned how important evaluating the individual's learning environment becomes in delivering information in both a classroom and business environment. Before Jane even begins to prepare anything, she evaluates the learning environment to determine what resources she has available. "Available resources, time, money, and the environment end up driving a lot of how you teach a class" she said.

Jane's strategy to evaluate the environment also applies in a professional practice.

In a business environment, a trainer usually has less time to present new techniques, ideas, or skills so the elements of the learning environment have an even greater impact on the course development.

Developing a shared framework

No matter what type of learner, the most effective way to help students make sense of what they know or need to know, is through communicating with one another.

With adult learning, the more autonomy we give learners and how appropriately we relate the course to help them make meaning of their own experience, the more interested they will be in participating in the task. Jane further expanded on the idea of developing an adult's learning process by creating exercises or activities that better help learners understand their experience. "I encourage them to work with a partner or work individually, depending on what works for them," she stated.

Building a future foundation for interaction

A future foundation for interaction includes not only the environment and curriculum a trainer creates, but how the trainer emits a sense of leadership to the learners and helps them build self-efficacy throughout the development process.

As trainers we help others develop their interpersonal and social abilities while being a source of knowledge transfer. Jane designs her curriculum to involve the collaborative efforts of other students in a classroom, and outside resources in a corporate learning environment. She uses her leadership techniques to build the learner's self-efficacy through positive reinforcement and motivation. The social interaction Jane encourages in her teaching environment models the cognitive approaches Bandura discusses as the 'two-way influence' process.

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Students learn best through modeling or interacting with others. Jane talked about how she reinforces the 'two-way influence' with students by encouraging them to apply their experience in a professional environment. Unfortunately this teaching approach is not as applicable in a professional teaching setting, because "when you use that type of training on the job, it's taking that person and putting them in a controlled situation. There's less opportunity to present the conceptual understanding of how to interact with the group."

No matter what methods trainers use to build self-efficacy through social interaction, their main objective is to encourage critical thinking and development. As students become more conscious of their learning, we create "opportunities for self-assessment in which students themselves reflect on their learning and identify their learning strengths and needs (Riordan, 1993, pp. 1-11). Jane encourages this self-assessment in the classroom.

"After they've worked with a problem and solved it, I have them analyze the solution and look at how it could have been better by taking that experience and evaluating it. It also adds a new dimension and takes them deeper into the subject matter, especially in skills driven learning.

It motivates them more because they have more control and they participate more in the activity and look at ways to improve it. New learners are overwhelmed with the how to, and the different approaches to developing critical thinking. Advanced users begin to critical think. They branch out and ask themselves how they can improve the process."

This type of self-assessment, whether in

a classroom or professional environment builds character and motivates learners to challenge themselves and become better critical thinkers. When students can take the concepts they learn in class and apply them, then the teaching process has been a success.

Summary

Jane applies several inherent strategies to evaluate an individual's environment, develop a shared framework, and build a future foundation for interaction. It is really a combination of strategy, different cognitive approaches, and her leadership skills that makes her a successful teacher or trainer. Park Palmer expressed it best in the "Loom of Teaching," when he stated that "...methods are secondary. Teaching is far more demanding of my sense of self than of my pedagogical technique. Good teaching is, above all, a connective activity" (Palmer, 1994, p.1).

Teaching is a vehicle for influencing people. When, not how, you build a sense of connectedness between trainer and learner, you know that you have made teaching the development process it deserves.

Jane Tanner has been a technical writer, trainer, and college teacher for several years. I had the opportunity to meet her a few years ago. As a reputable technical communicator in Milwaukee, Jane has provided me and the other writers on my team with leadership and mentoring skills. She continues to serve as a communication model for all Informational Technology professionals.

References

Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived Self- Efficacy in Cognitive Development and Functioning, *Educational Psychologist*, 28 (2), 117-148.
Riordan, T. (1993, March). Beyond the Debate: The Nature of Teaching. Alverno College Institute. Pp. 1-11.
Palmer, P. (1994, April). Apr. The Loom of Teaching. The National Teaching and Learning Forum, p. 1.~::~

Small steps
You've got to think about big things while you're doing small things, so that all the small things go in the right direction. (Alvin Toffler). ~::~

December Meeting
Annual Holiday Party
Tuesday, December 8, 1998
Come spread some holiday cheer with other STC members at the Mitchell Park Domes. We also will be collecting donations (either monetary or toys) for "Toys for Tots" if you would like to contribute. Once again, we will have door prizes and hors d' oeuvres.
Mitchell Park Domes
524 South Layton Blvd.
Milwaukee
6:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Cost is \$5
Please call 299-0048 then press 1 and leave your name and a guest's name if applicable. Please RSVP by Friday, December 4. ~::~

Careers

Job Exchange

Todd Evans

Wondering about Job Exchange? Well, our Job Exchange has been undergoing some changes to serve you better. We've taken steps to expedite the availability of job ad information, and we've also done some things to protect the job seeker's anonymity.

The most noticeable change is that we **will no longer accept resumes**. We made this change for a number of reasons. By not handling resumes, we eliminate any possible perception of unfairness. When the job seeker uses the Job Exchange page of our Web site (<http://stc.org/region6/mwc/www/jobs.html>), they can view the posted job ads and initiate contact with the person who posted the job ad. If the job seeker contacts the Job Exchange Coordinator by voice mail, fax, or e-mail to inquire about job ads, the only person aware of the job seeker's identity is the Job Exchange Coordinator.

By not handling resumes, we can edit more job ads, post ads online expeditiously, and respond to the voice mails, e-mails, letters, and faxes of job seekers. To help us out, however, we ask that you use our Web site as much as possible when inquiring about job ads.

We are in the process of installing an online job ad form along with instructions. By late September or early October, we hope to have this form active.

The following information explains how Job Exchange works.

Technical communicator job seekers

You can review Job Exchange job ads by two methods. The easiest way is to review the ads on the web site, and then respond directly to the poster of the job ad.

November meeting

Managing Documentation Projects and Practical Usability Testing

JoAnn Hackos, PhD, Comtech president and STC fellow, is an internationally known expert on information design and development. Recognized as an expert on information design and management, JoAnn has conducted seminars dedicated to enhancing practices and products that best promote customer satisfaction.

This is a joint STC/WORD meeting. A brochure containing information and a registration form for these workshops was sent out to all members. If you didn't receive a brochure, please contact Lauri Gerlach at 341-5377. You can also print a copy of the brochure from the web site at <http://stc.org/region6/mwc/www/pdf/hackos2.pdf>

Space is limited so register now by filling out the registration form in the brochure!

Each workshop is from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

The \$100.00 per workshop registration fee includes:

- ▶ Workbook
 - ▶ Continental breakfast
 - ▶ Sandwich and salad luncheon
- The workshops will be held at:

**Milwaukee School of Engineering
Alumni Partnership Center
1120 North Broadway
Milwaukee, WI**

You will receive a confirmation letter with a workshop schedule, parking directions, and a visitor's pass once your completed registration form and money are received.

For more information, see Comtech's web site at: www.comtech-serv.com

You can contact the Job Exchange Coordinator as indicated below, and the Job Exchange Coordinator, only, will provide you with job ad information. The web site will be updated weekly.

Confidentiality regarding your job search is protected—your identity, including any clues to your identity, will not be revealed.

Posting job ads

While Job Exchange benefits those who are seeking labor resources, it is primarily intended to be a service for the technical communicator job seeker. While we are a confidential conduit between you and the job seeker, we do not handle resumes or pass information other than ad

information. It's up to the job seeker to contact you. To place your ad, fill out the Job Ad Form on <http://stc.org/region6/mwc/www/jobs.html> and send it electronically. Otherwise, fax a completed form to the Job Exchange Coordinator.

Todd Evans
Job Exchange Coordinator
STC—Wisconsin
544 E. Ogden, #700-350
Milwaukee, WI 53202
414.299.0048 (STC-Wis voice mail box)
414-273-7785 (fax)
todde@execpc.com

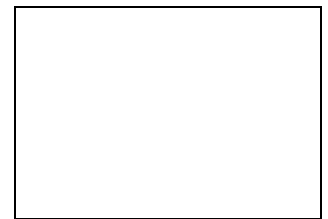
Ads will be retained for sixty days unless you request that we continue to carry it.
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Calendar of Events

- ▶ Friday, November 13, 1998 and Saturday, November 14 – Managing Documentation Projects and Practical Usability Testing (2 separate workshops)
- ▶ December 8, 1998, Annual holiday party at the Mitchell Park Domes

Remember to call the STC Voice Mail number, 414-299-0048, for updated meeting information. ~~~

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED