

## **Pittsburgh STC WorkQuest™ Group Presented “Smart Job Searching” at 2002 Region 4 Conference**

On Saturday, November 9, five members of the Pittsburgh Chapter STC WorkQuest™ group presented the session “Smart Job Searching” at the 2002 Region 4 Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Capsules of these presentations follow, and handouts are posted on the STC WorkQuest™ Web site. Also, be sure to read Mary Ann Pike’s report, in this issue of the *Blue Pencil*, on other sessions at the Conference.

The Pittsburgh STC WorkQuest™ group presenters hope you’ll find our presentations helpful no matter where you are on your career path, and we thank the Pittsburgh Chapter STC and Nancy Carpenter for financial contributions that significantly defrayed our costs for attending the Conference and presenting the Pittsburgh STC WorkQuest™ initiative to our Region.

### **About Pittsburgh STC WorkQuest™ - Janis Ramey**

Group founder and Region 4 Conference session Moderator Janis Ramey reviewed how Pittsburgh’s STC WorkQuest™ group developed and where it stands today. Janis got the idea for this support group for technical communicators looking for work from the experiences of a friend, an article she wrote on the topic, and outplacement functions offered by some companies. She obtained the blessing of the Pittsburgh Chapter STC to start this initiative to motivate members and help them focus on specific tasks and issues of job searching.

**Who Attends STC WorkQuest™.** Those attending STC WorkQuest™ meetings include STC members who have been laid off, contractors and freelancers whose business is down, non-STC technical communicators, recent graduates, people who want to enter the field of technical communications, and other professionals. Although Janis expected that the group would attract mostly laid-off relatively young writers who were inexperienced in job searching, those attending the Pittsburgh STC WorkQuest™ group have been mostly experienced people and have included several from other professions (such as information technology and sales).

**How it’s organized.** The group meets every Tuesday at 10 a.m. – early enough to get everyone going and late enough to miss rush hour traffic. The meeting place moves around the region each week to provide variety and the opportunity to become familiar with various areas of the city and suburbs. Attendance averages 10 to 12 of a total roster of about 25.

**“Check-in Round”.** The Pittsburgh STC WorkQuest™ presentation at the Region 4 Conference session, “Smart Job Searching” modeled a weekly STC WorkQuest™ session. Each session starts with a “check-in round” in which attendees (newcomers and “established” members) reiterate their job search objective(s) and report on their past week’s job-related activities and results. After presenters reported, many members of the small but focused group of session attendees also “checked in” and handed out their business cards/marketing materials.

**Professional Presentation.** In addition to a professional activity each week, STC WorkQuest™ meetings provide outlets for attendees to demonstrate and develop their professional expertise. So, following the “check-in round” at the Region 4 Conference, each of the four additional STC WorkQuest™ presenters gave a very condensed version of presentations they had developed for STC WorkQuest™ meetings this fall. The presenters have further “encapsulated” their presentations below.

### **Sell Yourself Effectively – Mary Ann Pike**

In her presentation, Mary Ann touched on a number of tasks that need to be completed to prepare for a job search. She listed the following: develop a personal marketing plan, create an effective resume, write effective cover letters, build an impressive portfolio, work with recruiters and agencies, and use the Internet to further your job search. Mary Ann then focused her presentation on resumes, providing a brief overview of her article in last month's *Blue Pencil*, and on Internet job searching.

Mary Ann noted that in today's market, the average human resources person spends only 20 seconds evaluating a resume. She provided many tips for getting your resume noticed, from organization to content, to format. She gave excellent advice about how to use your resume to best advantage in your job search.

In the second part of her presentation, Mary Ann gave tactics for successful use of the Internet in your job search. Internet searches can focus on specialized job searching, corporate job searching, gathering background information on companies and locations of interest, or general and/or specialized education to increase your value. Mary Ann discussed a number of ways to get the most out of each type of search.

### **Finding Opportunities – Jim McCarty**

Jim McCarty talked about how we go about finding those elusive jobs in this very tough job market.

He noted that conventional approaches to job searching, such as using the internet, reading want ads, talking with headhunters, recruiters and temp agencies, put us in touch with only 20 to 25% of the jobs that are out there. The other 75 to 80% are never advertised! These jobs seem to be uncovered through networking.

Networking was an important part of the presentation. Jim talked about the importance of getting ready to network, making networking contacts, getting a networking interview, and how to conduct yourself during a networking interview. He emphasized the difference between a networking interview (to gather information and referrals) and a job interview (to sell yourself into the job).

Jim also discussed the Hiring Life Cycle, or the process companies go through from recognizing the need to hire someone, to actually bringing someone aboard to fill that position. He explained that the earlier you can infiltrate the Hiring Life Cycle, and get in front of persons who can hire you, the greater are your chances of getting the job. Networking provides great opportunities for such infiltration.

His closing remarks hit home with everyone who is out there looking for work. **Looking for work is a full time job.** If you are spending less than 40 hours a week looking for work, you are short-circuiting your employer. Who is your employer when you are unemployed? **YOU**, of course.

### **Nurturing Yourself – Diana Mathis**

Job crises or losses are special opportunities to nurture ourselves professionally and personally. Attitude is vital: think and act "newly self-employed", not unemployed. Adopt an active, not a passive approach to the freedoms and responsibilities of your new job. Who knows, you may decide to remain self-employed!

Objectives of your new position include taking charge of your finances and budgeting to meet the physical and medical needs of yourself/family, deciding what path your career will take,

and honing psychological and emotional coping skills to maintain equilibrium in this time of high stress. Three points to remember about coping: Life is stress; stress is life. People respond to stress in different ways. Learn and practice coping skills to manage stress.

**Life is stress.** Dr. Hans Selye, a medical specialist in endocrinology, noticed that all illnesses have similar basic symptoms (feeling/looking sick, aches and pains, digestive upset, fever). These symptoms, due to hormonal changes, can be triggered by physical stress (a cold) or psychological stress (job loss). Physical reactions to increased stress include increased heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, and stomach acid. Chronic excess stress leads to high blood pressure, sleep disorders, chronic headache or other pains, exhaustion, more infections, and, in those who are predisposed, illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and cancer. Mental reactions to chronic stress include psychological exhaustion, lethargy, depression, and anxiety.

**People respond to stress in different ways.** To be alive is to experience stress, but as Selye said, “The same stress which makes one person sick can be an invigorating experience for another”. Know yourself. Know how you respond physically, mentally, and socially to excess stress.

**Learn and practice coping skills.** Tactics to control physical symptoms of excess stress include breathing and relaxation exercises. Mental coping skills include using imagery and silently reciting a personal verse or mantra. Learn to use tactics such as silence or a stock phrase to defuse stress in a social interaction. Prevent the build-up of chronic stress by following a healthy diet and regularly participating in physical exercise, stress-relieving leisure activities, and conversations with supportive friends.

Hone your coping skills **now** - you never know when you will be contacted about a new job, called for an interview, or win the lottery!

### **Presenting Yourself – John Clark**

In his presentation, John focused on the key points to a great interview: think straight, do your homework, and “swing the bat.”

**Thinking straight** means what you think about regarding interviewing can make all the difference between a successful interview and one that doesn’t go so well. Part of it is realizing that the most qualified people don’t necessarily get hired; the most prepared usually do. Thinking about interviewing as a game, a dance, or a play can help with the mental preparation. When you think about interviewing as a game, you then realize that you need to know how the game is played in order to do well.

**Doing your homework** involves preparing and researching four key areas. First, learn about the interviewing process itself. Research the typical questions that interviewers ask. And for that, John recommends two books: *Knock ‘em Dead* by Martin Yate and *Job Interviews for Dummies* by Joyce Lain Kennedy. Both books help you by providing the tough questions that will most likely be asked, along with how to give good answers tailored to your specific situation.

The second area where you need to do your homework is about yourself. Turn your skills and accomplishments into stories and examples that show how you helped the company make money, save money, or save time. You’ll use these stories to amplify and support your answers to the tough questions.

The third area of preparation is about the company. Find out what's important to them. Research them through the Internet, newspapers, and business articles. Plan to use this information in your answers.

The last area of homework is about the job. Before you go on the interview, find out about the job's scope and responsibilities, typical projects, and anything else that will help you match your skills and accomplishments to the job you're applying for.

In order for all of this preparation to do you any good, you've got to **"swing the bat."** Just as professional sports players routinely practice to stay at the top of their game, you need to do the same for your main event. It isn't enough to think about the answers. You've got to actually say the answers. There's no substitute for role playing with a friend or associate in a mock interview.

Follow these guidelines and you'll have a great interview.

### **For More Information**

Pittsburgh's STC WorkQuest™ group has its own Web site, developed, hosted, and managed by Tod Pike, who posts materials almost instantly. In addition to presentations by WorkQuest™ members at weekly meetings, the site's "Documents/Articles" directory has copies of the handouts prepared by each of the 5 presenters at the Region 4 Conference. Check out the wealth of info. for career management at <http://home.earthlink.net/~workquest/>.