



What Technical Communicators Need to Know to Succeed in the Real World

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Our Goal Today

- To leave this session with three specific things you can take action on to improve your chances of succeeding in the real world
- To find a “buddy” to hold you accountable to that progress



Introduction

- Barbara's Background
- Her research in 2003



What does it mean to be successful?

BREAKOUT #1 (10 Minutes)

In your group, do the following:

- Discuss among yourselves the following question:
 - Who do you know personally who you consider to be successful (from any arena, not just limited to technical communication)?
 - What makes him or her successful?
- Be prepared to share 1-2 examples with the room



Report Back Your Findings

Skills Required for Success in the 21st Century

In the digital economy, one U.S. technology company expects current and prospective employees to bring this set of skills to the workplace:

Set business direction	Align and motivate others	Deliver results
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Business acumen○ Customer focus○ Financial acumen○ Strategic agility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Build effective teams○ Develop direct reports○ Hire and staff○ Motivate others	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Command skills○ Deal with ambiguity○ Drive for results○ Intellectual horsepower○ Integrity and trust

Source: Partnership for 21st Century Skills



Where are you today?

BREAKOUT #2 (10 Minutes)

In your group, do the following:

- Be prepared to share 3-5 responses from your group to each of the following questions:
 - Where are you, as a technical communicator, or as a professional in general, succeeding today?
 - Where are you failing?



Report Back Your Findings



Who We Are

- WRITERS!!
- Big-picture people
- User oriented
- Understanding of readers and reading
- Quick studies
- Critical thinkers
- Interviewers
- Designers

But are we also....

- “An industry of whiners?”
- Lacking the ability to evaluate what’s important?
- “Un-savvy” when it comes to business and the politics of the office?
- Not a value-adding contributor to our organizations?





My conclusions: What we needed to succeed in late 2003

- Become Part of the Development Process
- Launch a Public Relations Campaign for Our Profession
- Improve Our Professional Societies
- Become Better Business People and Managers
- Repackage Ourselves for the Future



An update in 2007....



George Hayhoe

- You need to:
 - Relate to management
 - Understand your cost
 - Understand your business/industry
 - Work cross-functionally
 - Understand your products and colleagues
 - Communicate cross-culturally



Vici Koster-Lenhardt

- Become an industry expert
- Know the skills your company values and get them!
- Remember that communications skills have wide relevance in other corporate roles
- The “middle-(wo)man” writer is becoming a thing of the past (think BLOGS)



Vici Koster-Lenhardt

- If tech writing is your specific passion, work for a tech writing service provider; company-employed writers are out
- The workforce is shifting out of the US
- The whiners have left the industry




Jack Molisani

- There is a shortage of good writers and rates are going up again
- Content management systems are key in large, global companies
- RoboHelp is declining




Jack Molisani

“To be successful in the future, I predict that tech writers will need to be hyphenated – in the not too distant future it won't be enough to be just a technical writer, you'll need to be a tech writer-usability expert, tech writer-UI designer, tech writer-compliance monitor, etc.”




Do you have what you need to succeed? Ask yourself...

- Do you understand business in general?
- Do you understand your company's business/industry and what it needs to be successful?
- Do you know how to be political or interact with people?




Do you have what you need to succeed? Ask yourself...

- Are you keeping your job skills current (NOT tools, but industry concepts like content management and usability)?
- Are you still really hung up on formatting, punctuation, and perfection?
- Are you the most casual of the “business casual” people in the office (and could your cubicle could use a makeover, too)?




Do you have what you need to succeed? Ask yourself...

- Do you understand who your real customers are and how to please them – inside and outside the company?
- Can you do work but not manage projects and multi-task?
- Do you write well, but don't like to speak in public or at meetings?



Do you have what you need to succeed? Ask yourself...

- Do you see your job as a job and not as a career?
- Have you taken a close look at who you really are and seen what may be holding you back?
- Do you accept that your career growth and advancement are your responsibility (and your boss' or your company's)



So what do YOU need to know to succeed in the real world?

- Whatever specific thing you heard here today that is holding you back from achieving career satisfaction or advancement to the next step
- Deep down inside, you probably already knew what “it” was before you walked into the room today!



Where would you like to be a year from now?

BREAKOUT #3 (15 Minutes)

In your group, do the following:

- Take 5 minutes to fill in your own worksheet with three success factors you would like to work on in the coming year
- Then, go around the table and share at least one of yours with the group.
- Offer suggestions to your colleagues for how to approach their issues



Report Back

- Share a few goals with the room



What do YOU need to do?

- Learn more about business?
- Learn more about my company's technology or industry and its drivers to success?
- Work on my presentation skills?
- Take management training?
- Learn more about content management, usability or some other discipline?



What do YOU need to do?

- Understand what advantages and disadvantages outsourcing or off-shoring might offer my company?
- Know how to articulate the value of what I do – have an elevator speech?
- Plan where I would like to be in five years and what I need to get there?



What do YOU need to do?

- Go back to school for a degree or certificate in...(you fill in the blank)?
- Learn the difference between tactical and strategic thinking?
- Learn project management basics?



So what are you going to do about it?

- Take specific action
- Hold yourself accountable
- Discuss this with your manager, mentor, best friend, close colleague – whoever can help you keep accountable to accomplish your goals



Where would you like to be a year from now?

CLOSING ACTIVITY (5 Minutes)

- Select a “follow-up buddy” from the table. Exchange contact information with that person and set a specific time or method to follow with each other
- Complete you session evaluation form



Questions

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