

Principles of Successful Consulting

by Ivan Manestar, Director of Recruiting for Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc. You can reach Ivan at 919-563-2579.

As part of its mentoring process, Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc., works to make each of its employees a better consultant. By contributing to employee success on each contract, employees have increased job opportunities and continued professional growth. This article summarizes an interview with several Advanced Concepts employees and managers about the principles of successful consulting.

Bill Morris, a technical illustrator for Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc., and veteran consultant, approaches contracting with a “Covey-esque” flavor, focusing on a few main principles. According to Bill, these principles are valid for every area of human interaction, not just contracting. If you keep these certain principles in mind, especially while on a contract assignment, you can distinguish yourself as an experienced professional consultant, not just another contractor.

Principle 1: Watch

During your first days on-site, pay particular attention to the group culture. The goal here is to make the client comfortable with you by mirroring them to some degree. One example of an effective tactic is to take an objective look at the average dress and try to be aware of what the group is trying to say about themselves. Adrian West, president of Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc., and successful contract technical writer for many years, suggests that the long-standing guideline is to dress 10 percent more professionally than the others in the group.

Principle 2: Arrive Early and Work Normal Business Hours

Being a few minutes early shows that you have enthusiasm for the project and are willing to make that little extra effort. Unless your project includes off-site work, it’s a good idea to be present during normal business hours so you can have ready access to your coworkers.

Principle 3: Listen

Bill Morris stresses that you need to let your managers do most of the talking. Think of yourself as a psychologist trying to uncover the root of a problem. Jay Shapiro, Advanced Concepts consultant and former technical writer at IBM for many years, suggests that consultants think of themselves as a management resource for providing team support. As a consultant, your job is to understand why a need exists even if the manager can’t (or won’t) articulate it. Bill’s suggestion to let them do the majority of the talking is the first step. When you sense that it is your turn to speak, make sure you address the client’s issues.

Adrian West says a consultant must discover what is relevant to the client and find ways to creatively discuss the underlying issues. He also suggests that if you find the conversations you are having are only task oriented, you can ask, “What new dimensions would you like to see in this project that aren’t being covered now?” A few probing questions can lead to extensions, renewals, or referrals.

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carolina communiqué

A publication of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), Carolina Chapter, serving Central North Carolina

Editor-in-Chief

Michelle Corbin Nichols

Associate Editor

Lee Bumgarner

Staff Writers

Kat Turk

Ann-Marie Grissino

Patricia Tierney

Copy Editors

John R. Stuart

Diane Feldman

Mike Boyd

Newsletter Web Pages

Melissa Powell, Coordinator

Lee Bumgarner

Mike Boyd

The Carolina Chapter publishes the *Carolina Communiqué* monthly to provide reliable and timely information to chapter and society members.

We encourage other STC chapters to reprint the material in this publication as long as they credit us and send us a copy of the reprint.

We also invite our readers to submit material for consideration in the *Carolina Communiqué*. E-mail articles and letters to the editor to tigger@vnet.net or send snailmail to:

Michelle Corbin Nichols
100 Romaine Court
Cary, NC 27513

Submission Deadlines

Articles are due on the first day of every month. We are currently planning the following issues: October, November, and December.

Points of Contact

Carolina Chapter, STC

Voice Mail: (919) 406-6600

Chapter Web page: <http://www.stc.org/region2/ncc/>

Society for Technical Communication

Phone: (703) 522-4114

Fax: (703) 522-2075

Web page: <http://stc-va.org/>

E-mail: stc@stc-va.org

901 North Stuart Street

Arlington, VA 22203

Our Corporate Sponsors

by Michael Uhl, President. You can reach Mike at mikeuhl@mindspring.com.

One of the Carolina Chapter's key goals for 1997/1998 is increasing the support we receive from local industry. We are very grateful for the help we have received and continue to receive from several companies. Without a doubt, SAS Institute, Inc., of Cary has provided more help to the chapter over the last decade, in people and physical resources, than all other sponsors combined. SAS people have served in key chapter positions year after year in the 1980s and 1990s. SAS has printed our chapter directory several times now. And, we hold our annual awards banquet on the SAS campus. The entire chapter owes SAS Institute many thanks.

Glaxo Wellcome, Research Triangle Institute, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency frequently provide us with meeting rooms. Other companies that have provided us with meeting places over the last few years include Data General and Nortel. Cisco Systems provided valuable assistance and a meeting place for our online competition for 1996/1997.

Lucent Technologies in Cary provided us with a valuable computer lab in which we held a FrameMaker class. Some companies, such as Interleaf and Mallett Technologies, offer our members discounts on products and services. Ventana Communications Group donated books for meetings and special giveaways.

Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc., a sustaining member of STC, has increased its support of the Carolina Chapter tremendously over the last couple of years. Their managers get personally involved in the activities of the chapter. They help with programs and our education and training efforts, and they direct their contract staff toward STC membership and participation.

For 1997 and beyond, we hope to get more support from large companies such as Nortel, IBM, and Carolina Power & Light. An essential part of our plan for increasing commercial support of the chapter is publicly recognizing the supporters. If I've overlooked a corporate sponsor in this article, please let me know. If your company would like to be a corporate sponsor, please let me or another chapter leader know. In partnership with local businesses, the Carolina Chapter can achieve far more than it could alone.

Her Nichols' Worth

In the July newsletter, I committed the cardinal sin of news publishing: I spelled someone's name incorrectly. Not only did I do it once, I did it twice in one issue. *Oy vey*. I owe sincere apologies to Ivan Manestar, who had his name spelled two different ways, and to Austin Farrell, one of our STC Fellows. Please, accept my heartfelt apologies.

Catching Up on the Latest Online Information Technology

by Melissa Powell, Newsletter Web Page Coordinator. You can contact her at mpowell@mindspring.com.

Fellow communications professionals, how many of you publish or plan to publish books or other large documents for online use? Can you expect all the people in your audience to use the same hardware and software platforms? Did you go to the STC Carolina Chapter meeting on June 12th? If you did, have you been thinking about the best way to publish your online information? I have. If you didn't go to the meeting, then it's time to power on and catch up.

At the chapter meeting, Al Stefan from Inso Corporation spoke to us about the DynaText Professional Publishing System. The DynaText system is a set of publishing tools, including a software developer's kit, that lets writers use their existing publishing tools to create electronic documents for distribution on CD-ROM, LANs, intranets, and the World Wide Web. Inso brought this powerful online publishing system into its Electronic Publishing Solutions line of products upon acquiring Electronic Book Technologies in July 1996. (Al was one of the acquired assets.)

To evaluate the DynaText system, first take a look at what you do now to put your large documents online and keep them updated. How many publishing tools do you use? For printed documents, you might use Adobe FrameMaker. For online versions of the same documents, the list might include FrameBuilder, FrameViewer, FluidView, or FrameViewer Retrieval Tools. For Portable Document Format (PDF) versions, there's Adobe Acrobat.

For your company Web site, you can convert to HyperText Markup Language (HTML). Several conversion tools are available. But wait. What Internet browser does your reader have? Which browsers support HTML 3.2? Which browsers support eXtensible Markup Language (XML)? Remember, you'll need an HTML editor with good search and replace features to clean up the converted files.

Say your document has been converted successfully. That's great — for today. What happens when you need to distribute an updated version? You get to go through the whole manual process again! (No pun intended.) How long will it take to get the changes out to your online readers after the writers have finished updating their files?

Are you in enough pain yet? Conversions *ad nauseam*, with manual fixes. Multiple copies of your document files. Several tools provided by several companies, with dissimilar interfaces and logic. Technical support from multiple locations. Licensing agreements from multiple companies.

Let's look at the DynaText Professional Publishing System. With this system, your objective is to write your documents once, load or convert them into an SGML-tagged document database, and automatically publish these documents in a variety of formats on a variety of platforms. Your document can be published on CD-ROM, the Web, LANs, and intranets. It can be printed in type or Braille. It can also be output to other database programs.

With the Dynatext Professional Publishing System, your objective is to write the document once ... and automatically publish it in a variety of formats on a variety of platforms.

To create a DynaText book, you follow a three stage process, the last of which is not necessary once you've created a similarly formatted book to be published on the same platform:

- (1) During the first stage, you create the book using Microsoft Word, Interleaf, FrameMaker, or an SGML editor, such as ArborText's ADEPT Editor. It's important during this stage to use word processor styles to format each and every document element and to apply these styles consistently.
- (2) During the second stage, you use the DynaTag program to convert these word processor files, along with their embedded graphic files and media objects, and build an SGML-based repository in a DynaText database. Here you set up conversion templates, which can be used to automate this conversion for similar documents or updates of the same document.
Also in this stage, you use the DynaText Indexer to automatically build an index that is used for full-text searches, a dynamic table of contents, cross-references, and dynamic lists of tables, figures, and footnotes. If your book's source files are in SGML, conversion isn't necessary, but you still need to run DynaText Indexer. The end result of this stage is a DynaText E-book.
- (3) During the third stage, you define online presentation behavior. Using InStEd, DynaText's Interactive Stylesheet Editor, you generate stylesheets for the different views you want to have available for your online readers. With these stylesheets, you control color and format. You can also control visibility of conditional information. With dynamic filtering of conditional

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"Dynatext" from page 3

document elements, you can display information specific to a skill level, a set of tasks, or a security clearance. Once these stylesheets are created, they can be reused any number of times for similar types of documents.

Once the DynaText E-book is created, the publishing begins. As an online publisher, you distribute the E-book in a compressed DynaText repository database, the stylesheets for the views you want your reader to be able to see, and perhaps a viewer or browser. If you publish on CD-ROM, you can include the DynaText Browser or a custom browser created by your software developers. If you know your readers have specific viewers or browsers, just include the stylesheets for those views. If you publish on the Web, you can set up a DynaWeb server. DynaWeb is the Web server component of the DynaText system. The DynaWeb server automatically determines the reader's browser, formats the requested document with the appropriate stylesheet, and transfers only the parts of the document the reader asks to see.

DynaText books are fast and dynamic. When a reader wants to view or search a DynaText book, only the information specific to the user's request is converted through the appropriate stylesheet and sent to the user's browser. This information is displayed quickly because the entire document is not downloaded to the reader's system.

When it comes to delivering large online documents, the DynaText Professional Publishing System can save you an incredible amount of time. Online delivery can be almost instantaneous once writers have completed an update. Where you need to anticipate investing large blocks of time is in the setting up of conversion templates (used in Stage 1) and presentation stylesheets (used in Stage 3). After you are set up, the DynaText system converts documents on the fly.

What happens when the next version of Netscape is released? Create a new Netscape stylesheet (Stage 3). What happens if you must alter the user's guide for your company's new notebook computer to make procedures for novices available without displaying expert information? Identify the new conditional information in the document's source files (Stage 1), edit the conversion template used for the document, if necessary (Stage 2), and create a new novice stylesheet (Stage 3). No new conversion tools are needed in either case.

Of course, we have to ask how much clean up is required after conversions to and from SGML. Al told us during the meeting that if writers can consistently stylize their documents, the process is much smoother with the DynaText tools. The stylesheets you create with InStEd can convert logically as well as literally.

The DynaText system is an online document delivery system, with "delivery" being the key word. The DynaText system is not a system for helping writers create the original source files. At the Carolina Chapter meeting, Al asked

Diane Peterson, from ArborText, Inc., to speak briefly about the ADEPT Editor, an authoring tool that creates pure SGML document source files. With a product like the ADEPT Editor, you can avoid the conversion to SGML that is required to create a DynaText E-book. As you work in ADEPT, the editor constantly checks the SGML document type definition (DTD) to keep you from inadvertently generating erroneous SGML code. Version 7.0 of ADEPT Editor is due out in September and is very similar to Microsoft Word. You can find out more about ArborText and the ADEPT Editor on the Web at <http://www.arbortext.com/>.

As technology and streamlined budgets make changes to the norm, more and more of us face the task of putting our documents online. If you're interested in doing some exploring on your own, look around the Inso Web site (<http://www.inso.com>). This site is filled with information on Inso electronic publishing tools, including good descriptive information on the DynaText Professional Publishing System.

Editor's Note: For additional information about the tools that are mentioned here, read this article on the Web at <http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Heights/4870/dyna.html>. In the Web article, you can click on all listed URLs to visit the mentioned Web sites. Stay tuned for more Web-based articles from the Newsletter Staff!



Job Bank Information

The number of jobs available for weekly posting on the telephone messaging service (a.k.a., the Job Bank phone line) has exceeded the recording capacity, forcing us to rely on our Web pages. The Web has no such limits and will serve our members better—offering more jobs, timely updates, and greater detail about each job listing.

You can reach the Web page at:

<http://stc.org/region2/ncc/www/weeklyjobs.html>.

If you do not have Web access, you can request to have a hard copy sent to you by U.S. mail. We on the Job Bank hope you find this new arrangement satisfactory and invite your comments or suggestions. Send requests or comments to NCSTCJobs@aol.com, or call (919) 406-6600.

For comments about the Job Bank Web pages:

- Gina Caldanaro, Co-chair (ginacal@vnet.ibm.com)
- Dick Evans, Co-chair (infodex@mindspring.com)
- Lee Bumgarner (jlbumgar@aol.com)
- Terry Otto (tnotto@mindspring.com)
- Kim Andrews (lotiki@aol.com)

Principle 4: See the big picture

Your ability to see the Big Picture can make the difference between whether you are perceived as a professional consultant or as just another contractor. Bill suggests you discover where, and from whom, your project is coming, and where, and to whom, your project goes next. By knowing the scope of the project, you will know how your piece fits into the whole and your contributions will be more appropriate. Adrian West calls this having an "investigative spirit."



...people want to work with (or buy from) people they like....Your days will be more enjoyable and your product will be better when your attitude is positive.



Only when you ask enough of the right questions to understand the scope of the project can you best know how to position yourself and/or broaden your responsibilities. Adrian suggests a good way to facilitate getting the information is increasing your visibility. Find reasons to work while in the cafeteria, around your manager's office, or in other high traffic areas. This may give you opportunities to discuss your project in a broader context with other coworkers. You also meet more people this way.

Principle 5: Guard your credibility

If your objective is to win and keep long-term contracts, it is critical to pay special attention to everything you present. Become your own harshest critic and edit yourself from the perspective of your client. They are going to be judging you in comparison to their internal resources. Bill Morris advises to keep copious notes to safeguard your credibility. One reason is simply to get the instructions right. Another reason is to document what your manager says on any particular day so if there's ever any question, you can refer to your notes. A little "CYA" can go a long way toward maintaining your professional image.

Establishing credibility as a communicator is the key to gaining a renewal. Jay Shapiro warns you to meet every deadline. In fact, it's good to beat them by a bit. Jay advises that consultants should know their limitations and resist temptation to agree to outrageous client demands. He sums up his comments by saying that you don't need to be a hero—you just need to deliver. Talk to your contract administrator regarding any client situation that leaves you uncomfortable.

Principle 6: Keep busy

On most projects, there are cycles of activity. During those times when you are waiting on resource documents, feedback from review, etc., never allow yourself to sit on your hands.

Adrian finds that the best defense is a good offense. By nurturing your "investigative spirit" and understanding how your piece fits into the whole, you can contribute to the project in more than one way. However, during brief slow periods on a project, you can sometimes use the time to hone your skills on the client's tool set. If it's possible to learn a new application or more about the client's technology, you may reduce your learning curve on future projects.

Principle 7: Keep your work area neat

This is good common sense. A neat work area gives the impression of efficiency and competency. It helps keep your activities, thoughts, and products in order as well.

Principle 8: Adhere to company guidelines

This suggestion falls in line with the first principle, Watch the group culture. It is the little things that can make a difference. Even a minor *faux pas* can affect the client manager's opinion of you. Examples include eating aromatic foods at your desk, security issues, long-distance phone calls, personal phone calls, etc. If you have questions about the corporate culture or the political correctness of a particular issue, simply ask someone. These guidelines vary widely from client to client and from manager to manager.

Principle 9: Be cheerful

Choosing to be enthusiastic and cheerful while on site makes practical sense. Bill Morris has discovered the same thing that a 20-year sales and marketing career has taught Ronnie Duncan: People want to work with (or buy from) people they like. Being cheerful benefits you most. Your days will be more enjoyable and your product will be better when your attitude is positive.

Principle 10: Be proud of your contributions

You were contracted by the client because of your specific expertise. Bill Morris comments that your professional satisfaction comes from knowing that you act with integrity, always putting forth your best effort. As a contractor, there are few plaques and awards to win, so reward yourself by acknowledging your own effort.

From Contractor to Consultant

Extensions to contracts and new contracts by referral is are key goals of any consultant. By following these ten principles, you are sure to graduate from just another contractor to the ultimate consultant in no time at all.



*"Technology is a way of organizing the universe so that man doesn't have to experience it."
— Max Frisch*

Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc.

Getting The Word Out!



Our Mission

Advanced Concepts Business Communications, Inc. strives to develop and provide high quality corporate technical communications for our clients. We focus on customer needs, personal integrity, and the delivery of superior products and services.

We work to become the preferred technical communications supplier and the preferred technical communications employer in our market areas. Through attention to detail and genuine care, we build lasting relationships, one project at a time.

Phone: 1.919.563.2579 FAX: 1.919.563.0888
Email: advanced@interpath.com
P.O. Box 12702 RTP, NC 27709

We are proud sponsors of the Carolina Chapter Education Committee!

Upcoming Events:

August 19
Committee Meeting
Volunteers Needed!
Help shape the course of training in the Triangle

Congratulations on winning the Region 2 Pace Setter Award in Toronto!

Membership News

Total STC membership: 19,214
Current chapter membership: 346

New members: Richard Bornstein, Ashlee Brown, Richard Bylina, Anthony Dingman, Maryann Eison, Rani Gill, Linda Reznikiewicz, Catherine Stokes, Eric Townsend, Ivana Washington, Audrey Wisner

Transfers in: Michael Bates, Louis Engle, Howard Foster, Michael Klein, Susan White-Robertson, Leatta Welch

Transfers out: Johanna Hafey, Jilanne Hoffman, Susan Preston, Stephanie Conrad

Members reinstated: Pamela Bruns

Members with undeliverable addresses: Jeffrey Miller and Kathleen Craddock

EduSpeak: The Next Generation

by Terry Otto and Doug Ryan. Terry Otto is a member of the Education/Training Committee and can be reached at totto@mindspring.com. Doug Ryan is the chair of the Committee and can be reached at dsryan@mindspring.com.

The Education/Training committee plans to keep growing and pushing outward this year. Indeed, there are now about ten of us involved in making things happen. Does this mean that you, dear reader, need do nothing? That would be illogical ... it means you can get involved without getting stuck alone with big chores.

More Peer-Led Workshops and Mallett Courses

Because the peer-led workshops were such a success last year, more are planned for this year, including the following:

- Indexing, presented by Dick Evans
- HTML, presented by Ceil Shuman and Candee Heldberg
- Online help, presented by Diane Feldman
- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, presented by a certified 7-Habits instructor
- Basic FrameMaker (our second class offering)
- Others?? Your input is needed and welcome!

Also, courses will be offered at major discounts to Carolina Chapter members through Mallett Technology, an Adobe-authorized trainer and value-added vendor.

Beyond Training: Defining Our Education

In addition to the training opportunities, we hope to expand the "education" aspect of the Committee in 1997/1998. With your help, we will address the question: "What constitutes the education of a technical communicator?"

Our current strategy is to develop our partnership with the STC Student Chapter at N.C. State and with their technical communication faculty about what constitutes the education of a technical communicator. For example:

- NCSU students and faculty can discuss with us at meetings the current *theory* and courses of study in our field, and in return
- We can send members to address current *practice* in the workplace and in the job market.

Other Activities

The Education/Training Committee plans to create and maintain a set of Web pages off of the Carolina Chapter Web site. The Web site will list upcoming training opportunities, resources for training within the Triangle, and much more.

See "EduSpeak" on page 8

chapter leadership

President

Mike Uhl
mikeuhl@mindspring.com
(919) 541-4283

Vice President

Christopher Benz
cjbenz@unforgettable.com
(919) 549-9770

Immediate Past President

Bill Albing
wwa@fns.com
(919) 713-1133

Treasurer

Robert Perry
aldolink@aol.com
(919) 468-2308

Secretary

Pat Moell
saspgm@unx.sas.com
(919) 677-8000

Membership

Liz Wing
mew@nortel.ca
(919) 991-2084

Programs Manager

Ivan Manestar
advanced@interpath.com
(919) 563-2579

Job Bank Co-Managers

Gina Caldanaro
ginacal@vnet.ibm.com
(919) 543-0187
Richard Evans
infodex@mindspring.com

Hospitality Manager

Rhonda Keyes
keyes1@niehs.nih.gov
(919) 941-6564

Public Relations

Ven Carver
ven.carver@nt.com
(919) 992-2928

Nominating

Ken House
kehous@unx.sas.com
677-8000, x6086

Education/Training Committee Chair

Doug Ryan
dsryan@mindspring.com
(919) 490-6927

Strategic Planning

Larry Kunz
ldkunz@vnet.ibm.com
(919) 254-6395

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Very soon, the committee will develop and distribute a survey to inquire about Carolina Chapter members' training interests. We hope to make this survey a yearly activity, to stay in touch with the needs of Carolina Chapter members.

Committee Meetings

Of course, the incubator for all of these exciting ideas is the regular Education/Training Committee meeting—probably for August again at Newton's Southwest Restaurant in Cary (but check the Web site or contact Doug Ryan at 380-4552). Newton's has good food and a quiet place to meet with a group of good people. We meet monthly from 6:00 - 7:30 P.M. on the Tuesday after the chapter meeting. If you would like to join, have an idea for a training, or know of a potential corporate sponsor, call Doug Ryan, the committee chair.

• • • • •

No keyboards, hard drives, CD-ROMs, mice or other computer peripherals were harmed while writing this... although the monitor is a little nervous because everyone seems to be staring at him.

-- Paul J. Zoski



c/o Michelle Corbin Nichols
100 Romaine Court
Cary, NC 27513

Monthly Meeting Notice

What:

“Interviewing to Get the Job”

Who:

Ronnie Duncan, Advanced Concepts
Business Communications, Inc.

When:

Thursday, August 14, 6:00P.M.

Where:

Dreyfus Auditorium, Research Triangle Institute,
Research Triangle Park;

RTI is located on Cornwallis Road near Davis Drive. The Dreyfus Auditorium is located behind the Dreyfus Lab building.

Contact:

Michael Uhl (mikeuhl@mindspring.com) or
919-541-4283 for more information.

Thanks go to Beth Keena at RTI for reserving the Dreyfus Auditorium for us so far in advance.

FIRST CLASS MAIL