

Of Course, I'm Renewing My STC Membership!
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A while back, I had an article on how the value of my STC experience has been substantially greater than my dues. So far there haven't been many complaints about the modest increase in dues, certainly far less than the complaints the last time the dues increased by only \$25. I attribute this to Cindy's great letter explaining the whys and wherefores as well as a better understanding by the membership of how it is that we've gotten to where we are now. Nevertheless, with the whingeing about the STC not being worth the dues increase (we hear this every time the dues go up, even when it's as little as \$10 more), I found myself thinking about the STC's worth yet again.

In a previous article, I talked about the STC being incredibly valuable to me because I've made \$500,000 to \$750,000 that I wouldn't have made otherwise. This is as good a reason for being a member as anything I can think of. I made all this money in several ways:

- Networking
- Speaking
- Volunteering
- Fame
- Asking
- Job banks
- New skills
- Synergy

Here's how these worked for me.

- **Networking**

The primary value of any professional organization is for networking. You meet other people in your profession, rub shoulders, get a group of people you can ask questions of when you need a technical or a second opinion, and finding work. When you attend a chapter STC meeting, you have a chance to meet or reconnect with 15, 20, 50, or even more STC members and professionals. At the annual conference, this goes up by a factor of 10. (Even if there are lots more people at the conference, there are only so many people you can meet in 4-1/2 days.) If you aren't near a chapter (or your local chapter isn't as active as you like) and you're not in a position to invest in your future by attending the conference, remember that the STC has 22 SIGs at the moment, which are cheap cheap cheap! Many members believe that their participation in just one SIG is worth the full cost of the STC to them.

- **Speaking**

A number of years ago, *Home Office Computing* magazine did a study to find out what successful consultants did versus unsuccessful consultants (where "successful" was defined as "consultants making at least 2x as much as the unsuccessful consultants"). They found that the successful consultants wrote articles, got referrals, and did public speaking, while the unsuccessful consultants depended on advertising, cold calls, and mailings.

Speaking in public is not something that everyone does well or easily and even for those as like it, it takes a little practice to be good at it. You can volunteer to speak at STC chapter meetings and at the STC Annual Conference. If you're really uncomfortable being a speaker

at first, try joining Toastmasters and hang out with people who are also learning to speak in public.

- **Volunteering**

Another way I've gotten to know people is by volunteering. This has been by volunteering for things me and being visible (see *Fame*) and also by working with people on local committees, Society committees, and even the Board (see *Networking*). In both cases, people have looked for me with because they knew of me and in many cases they'd even worked with me. And, I'm pleased to say, they liked what they saw.

- **Fame**

Fame (well, okay, in my case, it's probably more notoriety) has been a key factor for me in getting jobs. Fame dovetails with networking because it makes you more visible: easier to find and easier to know about. For example, JoAnn Hackos and Bill Horton are brilliant, dynamic people who know more about their fields than anyone else. Their fame isn't mere celebrity; they're famous because of their enormous qualifications. But they have the additional advantage that everyone knows who they are in this profession, and that makes it easier to find them. Their fame makes them highly visible to their peers and potential clients.

One of the best ways to attain a measure of fame is to speak at STC events and conference, to volunteer, and to network. You make yourself more visible, which in turn makes it easier for people to find you. And that will ultimately bring you more money.

- **Asking**

After I'd networked, spoken, and acquired fame and skills, I tried something novel: I asked the people I knew if they had work or knew of work. And guess what? They did! I heard about jobs from my STC compatriots and I heard about jobs working for my STC compatriots. I interviewed with STC members and got leads of all kinds. Sometimes I was recruited directly even before I had a chance to ask! All of this meant bucks, bucks in the bank.

- **Job banks**

Digging around my memories for this article, I realized that I actually had gotten a few jobs through STC job banks. Most of them were early on, but I really did get work from local STC job banks. In recent years, my jobs have all come in from networking and recruitment, but that doesn't mean that I don't religiously check the various STC (and other) job banks emails that come in regularly. And neither should you.

- **New skills**

For the technical communicator just starting out, there are few better ways to acquire new skills and polish than by going to STC meetings and learning things. I've picked up any number of skills and knowledge that's helpful to me from STC meetings. Here's a hot tip: you can request a meeting topic. If you want to learn about something, talk to your local program manager: chances are you can get a meeting scheduled on the topic of your choice. By going to the annual conference, you can attend presentations on just about anything you can imagine and a lot of things you couldn't, and you can also attend certificate sessions that give you in-depth training on a variety of topics.

- **Synergy**

"Synergy" is one of those great words that's been dragged through the muck by the same marketing weasels who recast "actionable" to mean "does something" instead of "does something that will get you sued." Even so, this is a fine example of synergy. (You think "dynamism" would be better?) Networking is assisted by fame, fame is assisted by speaking, new skills are assisted by volunteering, and all of these assist job banks.

What all of these things have done for me is to generate jobs and opportunities. I meet people, I acquire skills, I hear about jobs. I put myself out there so that people could find me and there was certainly a measure of shameless self-promotion as well. (Who, me??)

I've made the better part of a million dollars from being an STC member. I'm looking forward to pushing the meter over the "1M" mark in the next year or two. This money happened because I made connections with people in and through the STC.

If you want to make more money, you can do this, too. This is a game everyone can win; all you've got to do is do more in the STC. Attend more meetings, volunteer more, speak more, ask more people for jobs and leads, subscribe to more jobs banks, post to SIGs, the STC blog, and the STC NING group, and pick up more skills. You'll start getting more jobs and making more money. (I am assuming you want money; surely no-one is mad enough to be a technical communication just for their health.)

In 2009, I'll have made at least \$85,000 as a direct result of being an STC member. I have a feeling that next year's going to be well into 6 figures. I'm sure I could make this kind of money in another venue, but I'd have to work harder and have a lot less fun. Everything we do boils down to fun and/or bucks if you look at it and the STC has been lots of both for me for since 1986.