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## What Color is Your Collar?

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Past President

I'm sure that you have heard of blue collar workers, who traditionally work in manufacturing-related jobs, and white collar workers, who handle clerical-type tasks. The 1990s brought a new term to the business community, "gold collar worker," which is generally defined as a knowledge worker. Among the traits of gold collar workers are:

- Finding solutions to problems
- Networking with contacts
- Possessing a portable and flexible skill base relevant to many types of work environments
- Finishing projects briskly
- Being self-motivated
- Encouraging constructive criticism and open communication
- Working with heart for love of their career

Of course, certain professions have always had these gold collar worker traits: lawyers, doctors, scientists, engineers... and technical communicators.

As members of this profession, each of us can name a time in which we served in one or more roles outside our job description, and did it well. A writer may edit, perform quality assurance testing, create illustrations, create macros, etc. He or she may work in marketing, public relations,

training, or R&D areas, or may cross over into one or all of them. A technical communicator may be the leader of a documentation team, but is not a figurehead but, rather, an equal contributor to the success of a project.

"Never missed a deadline" is more the exception than the rule. Loving our work? How many reading this can honestly say they didn't spend at least one restless night thinking about what they could have done in a manual?

This gold collar employee has become the norm more and more within all organizations. For example, many Federal government job notices require the completion of a questionnaire as part of the application process. The questionnaire may contain 150+ questions.

Some of the questions I saw recently while applying for a job include:

- Have you successfully done work that regularly involved planning, prioritizing, scheduling, and monitoring work for 10 or more people?
- Have you successfully done work that regularly required you to lead or facilitate briefings, meetings, or conferences, or formally present technical or other complex information to others?

- Have you participated in training classes, workshops, or seminars outside of school that helped you improve your computer skills?

An important thing to consider is that "work" includes career, education, and volunteer and professional organizations. Some of us could satisfy the above sampling with our job tasks, but some cannot. That is where STC comes in. Our community and the national organization offer a number of ways to make your gold collar larger or to make it shine even brighter. There are opportunities to lead, to learn, and to educate others with your own unique education and experiences. Resources are available to help you at any stage of your technical communication career. I urge each of you to use your STC membership to its fullest to help you attain the most golden of collars, whether that means serving as a local leader within the Huntsville-North Alabama STC community, attending workshops, or merely using the available printed and Internet resources. After all, as motivational speaker Earl Nightingale said, the best in their fields (the gold collar workers of their day) were never unemployed during the Great Depression.

Shine on, fellow technical communicators.