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## The President's Message



By Jeff Cox, President

When someone mentions the subject of STC certification for technical communicators, it is not surprising if “yeah, yeah, yeah” from the Beatles’ tune “She Loves You” comes to mind.

The idea of certification was originally mentioned by STC in 1964 – the year the Beatles came to America. Great headway was made from 1982 to 1986 and in 1993, with a committee being formed in 1996 to study certification.

Yeah, yeah, yeah – what makes this time different? Several things.

Today, forty-three years after the genesis of the idea, STC is defining core and enabling competencies to use for a certification program. Among the competency areas are design, use of media, research skills and use of support tools. Certification will not, however, apply to skills with specific technical communication tools (FrameMaker, Photoshop, etc.). Certification is available for individual tools from other sources.

If you attended our chapter’s February 27 presentation on STC certification by Dan Wise, it is apparent that STC is serious about establishing a certification program and has made great progress, including a three-year implementation timeline.

As technical communicators, what will certification mean for us?

It is obvious that certification cannot take the place of a quality education or strong background in technical communication. In order to attain certification, a technical communicator will have to have a strong knowledge of the discipline. Certification programs such as those offered by the Program Management Institute and National Contract Management Association require educational and experience components before certification will be granted. I would expect STC to also require these, as well as criteria such as continuing education credits, perhaps.

Many technical communicators can relate stories of how a co-worker from another functional area, or even management, did not respect their contribution to a project. Of course, we all know technical documentation is sometimes not considered important until it isn’t there for users.

Certification can elevate the visibility of technical communication from upper management to co-workers, and once

and for all establish technical communication as the professional discipline it truly is.

Dan mentioned that the concept of certification is not popular among seasoned technical communicators. Yet, certification can also provide the nudge that experienced technical communicators may need to stay up-to-date with the field. For example, in a little over fifteen years, technical communication has gone from an exclusively hardcopy medium to a variety of delivery methods. No one can predict what technical communication will be like in another fifteen years.

For industry, certification can provide extra assurance that a writer has a baseline understanding of his/her field. Dan referred to someone who would only hire former union writers because he knew union writers had been trained. STC certification can provide this function.

Certification will also provide an additional revenue source for STC. More funds will likely mean more benefits for members.

If technical communicators want to be considered as the professionals they are, they must have a certification program like other professional groups. If you would like to contribute to the STC certification effort, contact Dan Wise at [dwise@iccsafe.org](mailto:dwise@iccsafe.org).