Quest for Quality

*This column presents practical information about all aspects of quality and process improvement for technical communicators. To contribute, please send manuscripts or correspondence to Ann L. Wiley at **ann@annlwiley.com**.*

ANN L. WILEY, *Column Editor*

STC Quality: How You Can Participate

BY ANN L. WILEY, *STC Fellow*

STC's Quality Special Interest Group (SIG) was founded in September 1991 as the Quality Professional Interest Committee (PIC) to provide a focal point in STC for the study of quality. From the beginning, the SIG has addressed two interests: quality as it applies to technical communication, and the communication of quality processes. It's timely to look back on the considerable achievements of the Quality (now Quality and Process Improvement, or QPI) SIG, and to look ahead at what we can still achieve in the field of quality—and how you can participate.

Accomplishments of the QPI SIG

Like most association SIGs, the QPI SIG has produced two major outputs: publications, and programming for the annual conference. The programming has included the SIG meeting and participation in networking events, as well as educational sessions presented by SIG members and leaders. Often, members have made presentations as individuals rather than as part of the SIG, so, rather than review contributions to the annual conference, this assessment focuses on the information developed in QPI SIG publications. To make an assessment, we need a framework.

Framework for Information about Quality

It's a real challenge to devise a framework for presenting information about quality. In devising categories for the QPI SIG Web site, we have found it's easy to specify too many, so we have used broad categories for the articles. A list of the current categories, including both topics and areas of endeavor (in italics), follows:

- Customers
- *Documentation quality*
- *Education*
- *Financial services*
- *Health care and medical*
- ISO
- Process
- Quality management
- *Software and IT*
- Standards and measurement

To assess how well we have covered the field of quality and where we should focus our effort to improve coverage, analysis of the field and our topical categories is needed.

Quality Progress magazine of the American Society for Quality (ASQ) de-

Table 1. Quality Principles, Models, Basics, and the QPI SIG Categories

Principles of Quality Identified by Duffy	Baldrige Model Areas	ISO Model Areas	ASQ Quality Basics	STC QPI SIG Categories
Customer focus	Customer and market focus	Customer orientation Close supplier relationships		Customers
Process improvement	Strategic planning Information and analysis Process management Business results	System management Fact-based decisions Process management Continual improvement	Principles and methods Measurement Tools Statistics Standards Vision and strategy Process improvement and process management Economic case for quality	ISO Process Quality management Standards and measurement
Total involvement	Leadership HR focus	Leadership Involvement	Teamwork and empowerment Leadership	

emergence of a new system—a documented way to do my record-keeping, bookkeeping, accounting, and financial planning. As I mentioned in my last column—"Are You a Craftsperson or an Entrepreneur?" in the July/August issue of *Intercom*—I learned from Michael Gerber's *E-Myth Revisited* that I can't do it all in my own business. As Gerber writes, "Systematizing your business need not be a dehumanizing experience, but quite the opposite." And let me tell you three stories to prove the humanizing effects of managing my numbers better.

First, my financial guru, Leo, showed up for our appointment with a cast on his arm. Leo is in his late seventies, and I was alarmed. He explained that he was cleaning his gutters and had tumbled off the ladder. Sheepishly, he admitted that his wife had banished all ladders from the house and contracted a gutter-cleaning service. What better validation that I need to hire help, and thank goodness his fall wasn't more damaging.

Second, hiring my bookkeeper, Bev, was an eye-opener. She's fast and smart where I'm slow and stupid … I admit it! I wish I had done this years ago so I could free up the energy I need to develop my business strategy and live my passion, which is to help employees learn how to write better.

And the third humanizing effect: I realize now, in a very deep place, that my students may look at words and writing the way I formerly looked at numbers and accounting—with great suspicion and fear. Maybe they dread writing the way I dreaded downloading my credit card information. Perhaps they distrust text the way I distrusted spreadsheets.

I feel that I now have more compassion for them and their plight because I have confronted my fear, taken action, and improved my financial understanding of my business. I thank my three leaders: Axel, Leo, and Bev. What a great life—to be able to work through fear and help others do the same! ❶

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voted its June 2007 issue to a "Quality Survival Guide." The issue presented 500-word articles on ten "quality basics," as well as a list of essential books and a glossary. The articles on the basics were a challenge for experts to write, and they did a great job. Grace Duffy, ASQ vice president, led with "Principles and Methods." She reminds us that a quality system has three basic principles: customer focus, process improvement, and total involvement. Further, there are two major models for a quality management system—the Baldrige National Quality Award criteria and the ISO 9000: 2000 standards—and each identifies several areas of focus.

The list of ten quality basics covered by the articles in ASQ's "Quality Survival Guide" is also useful in developing a framework. These basics support learning and practice in each of the Baldrige and ISO areas.

Our current categories on the QPI SIG Web site correspond somewhat to the basic principles identified by Duffy. ISO is specified, but not Baldrige, because we have many articles on ISO and few on Baldrige.

Examining the principles of quality identified by Duffy, the Baldrige and ISO areas of focus, ASQ's quality basics, and our QPI SIG categories (all summarized in Table 1) helps us assess how well we have covered the field of quality in the information we've developed in the past sixteen years.

All the Publications of the QPI SIG

The articles developed by the QPI SIG and by the authors of the "Quest for Quality" column in *Intercom* and *Technical Communication* have been listed this year on the QPI SIG Web sites. You can find these lists at the addresses below:

- Articles in the Quality SIG newsletter through December 2003 are listed on the static QPI SIG Web site: *www .stcsig.org/quality/q_newsletter_archive .htm.*
- Articles on the static QPI SIG Web site published through April 2006 are listed on that site: *www.stcsig.org/ quality/q_articles.htm.*
- Articles on the current, blog-based QPI SIG Web site are listed by category at *http://stc-on.org/quality.*

- The "Quest for Quality" columns are listed on the static QPI SIG Web site: *www.stcsig.org/quality/q_QfQ_columns .htm.*

Quality SIG Newsletter through 2003

The Quality SIG newsletter published many well-written and well-developed articles. Much of the work of the SIG was devoted to producing quarterly newsletter issues. Eventually, with changes after the year 2001, even tremendous and dedicated effort could not produce issues each quarter, and publication was suspended. The articles published can be grouped in the following categories:

- Customers (six)
- Documentation quality (twenty-one)
- ISO (eight)
- Quality management (twenty)
- Process (twenty-one)
- Standards and measurement (thirty-two)

Articles in the "process" category include several on product design, documentation design, and usability. The high number of articles in the "standards and measurement" category is due to the enumeration of all the arti-

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cles in Steve Jong's "Musing on Metrics" series, though the topics ranged widely, addressing metrics in many contexts. Many of the articles on metrics are specific to documentation quality, but they are not counted twice.

If you are interested in any of the issues that are not available online, please send me a message and we will post the article you'd like to see on the current QPI SIG Web site.

Quality SIG Web Site through April 2006
Several of the articles published on the Quality SIG Web site prior to April 2006 were moved to the new site, so the articles published and the categories covered are limited, as evident from the list that follows:
- Documentation quality (eight)
- Involvement (one)
- Quality management (five)
- Process (six)

QPI SIG Web Site and Newsletter
DocQment, which is now based on *WordPress* software, is a combined Web site and newsletter. You can readily see the articles in each category. Features are being posted regularly and at the time of writing include articles in two categories:
- Process (three)
- Quality management (a series on change)

News and resource lists are also posted on the Web site, and there is a concentration of information on ISO standards, but less on the Baldrige criteria.

Quest for Quality Column
As editors of the "Quest for Quality" column, Karl Smart and I—together with invited authors—have produced articles that fall into the following categories:
- Customers (eight)
- Documentation quality (eleven)
- Involvement (one)
- ISO (one)
- Leadership (one)
- Process (ten)
- Quality management (seven)
- Standards and measurement (four)

This list represents a considerable body of original work, as there are only a few reprints from the Quality SIG newsletter or any other source.

The Quest for Quality columns pub-lished in issues of *Technical Communication* dating from 1995 are available online; the 1991–1994 columns are not available. *Intercom* issues from 2005 through 2007 are also posted online; many prior articles are not available. If you are interested in the older articles, please send me a message and we will publish an updated version.

The Work Ahead
We have the opportunity to publish as often as we wish on *DocQment* (**http://stc-on.org/quality**). We can improve our coverage by linking to the many resources available about using the Baldrige criteria for self-assessment and about the award itself. Other areas for improvement include publishing articles on topics we have not covered extensively, including customer focus, leadership, and involvement, and linking to new versions of ISO standards as they be-

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May 1–3, 2008

Denver, Colorado

The **American Society of Indexers (ASI)** will hold its 40th annual conference at the Warwick Hotel in Denver, Colorado. For more information, please contact:

ASI
+1 (303) 463-2887
conference@asindexing.org
www.asindexing.org

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May 16–20, 2008

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

The **Council of Science Editors (CSE)** will hold its 2008 annual meeting at the Hyatt Hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. For more information, please contact:

CSE
+1 (703) 437-4377
CSE@councilscienceeditors.org
www.councilscienceeditors.org

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May 28–30, 2008

Boston, Massachusetts

The **Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP)** will hold its 30th annual meeting at the Westin Copley Place Hotel in Boston, Massachusetts. For more information, please contact:

SSP
+1 (617) 262-9600
www.sspnet.org

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June 1–4, 2008

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Technical Communication Summit, STC's 55th Annual Conference, will be held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For more information, please go to *www.stc.org/55thConf/index.asp*.

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June 16–20, 2008

Baltimore, Maryland

The **Usability Professionals' Associa-**tion **(UPA)** will hold its annual conference, "The Many Faces of User Experience: Usability through Holistic Practice," at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront in Baltimore, Maryland. For more information, please contact:

UPA
office@usabilityprofessionals.org
www.upassoc.org/conference/2008

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June 26–28, 2008

Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

The Society on Social Implications of Technology (SSIT) of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) will hold its annual International Symposium on Technology and Society (ISTAS) at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. The symposium is a multidisciplinary event for researchers in engineering, computer science, social sciences, arts, and humanities; community-based researchers; policy makers; and technology-using communities. For more information, please contact:

IEEE SSIT
Bill.McIver@nrc.ca
www.istas08.ca

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July 13–16, 2008

Montréal, Canada

The **Professional Communication Society (PCS)** of the **Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE)** will hold the International Professional Communication Conference 2008 at Concordia University in Montréal, Canada. The theme of the conference is "Opening the Information Economy," and sessions will examine the connections between communication practices and the products, practices, and services that constitute the information economy. For more information about the conference, please contact:

IEEE PCS
IPCC2008@gmail.com

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STC Quality

come available.

Because *DocQment* is based on *WordPress* software, members can register and become Contributors and Authors. As the site administrator, I continually encourage members to do that. You are invited to join in the work on *DocQment* and to contribute news and features on any topic related to quality and process improvement. You are also invited to contribute an article for the *Quest for Quality* column. If you are interested, please register on *DocQment* and send me a message, or send a message with your idea for a *Quest for Quality* column. ◗

Dr. Ann L. Wiley is the founder and immediate past manager of STC's QPI SIG and a member of the Central New York, New York Metro, Niagara Frontier, Rochester, and Tech Valley Chapters STC. She is president of Ann L. Wiley Consultants, Inc., and may be reached at ann@annlwiley.com.

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