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Carol Leahy's exciting day writing API documentation

My day starts at 6am with my extremely annoying alarm going off. I don't really have much time for a quick snooze as I have to be out the door if I want to catch my early morning train. It is an early start for me, and most mornings I'm fighting the urge to go back to sleep while washing my hair in the shower. I live in Peterborough but work in Cambridge and commute each day via train. This normally takes about 50 minutes and I spend the time reading through the back log of books that I have managed to accumulate over the last year and on occasion having a quick snooze before I arrive in Cambridge. When things go to plan with the trains (which they rarely do when trains are involved), I am normally at my desk with my coffee by 8:30am.

My work day starts similarly to most in that I check my emails to see what has come in overnight. If anything urgent needs addressing, then this goes at the top of my to-do list for the day. Otherwise I add it to my weekly to-do list and address it depending on its priority. I write Application Program Interface (API) documentation so I spend my day interacting with software engineers either face-to-face or via email. Most people think API documentation is a scary domain and stay away from it as much as possible. In reality, it's not scary so much as challenging. Some technical

communicators working on API documentation write sample code to be included in the documentation. This is not called for in my particular job; however, I do need to be able to read and understand code and, to a certain extent, the wonderful mathematical world that software engineers live in. I'm lucky enough to work with a good bunch of them who do try and explain things as best they can in non-mathematical terms.

Our documentation team consists of me and my team lead. We have planning meetings once a week where we assess any documentation work that needs to be done and plan the changes that we need to make. Our documentation is really a team effort and our planning meetings play a key role in this. We both voice our opinions on how we think things need to be documented and we pick the option that works best for the user of our documentation. These meetings have proven invaluable over the last few years and ensure that our documentation is consistent. We often find that these meetings highlight areas where the current documentation can be improved, new styles that can be added to our house style guide or areas where our own documentation processes can be improved on.

We are consistently improving the way we work and we try to stay on top of the latest trends in technical communications. I try and spend a bit of time during the week catching up with the latest technical communication news and see if there is any new technique that we could incorporate into our documentation work. Working in the software industry, I also keep an eye on the latest developments in the CAD, CAE and CAM industries, which can often be surprising.

Most of my meetings tend to be in the mornings so I'm free to spend the rest of the day focused on documentation work. This can be anything from writing new sections for upcoming development projects and creating new images to support these sections, to updating our house style guide. I usually start any new documentation work by reading the project specifications to get a clear idea of what it's about. I often have chats with the developers if I need help understanding how something

works so I can explain it clearly to the user. Depending on the complexity of a project, this can keep me going for the whole day or a whole week. Once I've finished a piece of work, I send it for out for review. Generally, people are pretty good at reviewing documentation. If they haven't reviewed the documentation in a specified time, then I gently remind them that it is waiting for their attention.

I am a bit of a chatterbox and I love getting to know people. The company moved offices early last year and since then I've met a lot of new people through this and become heavily involved in the office social scene. Last year, I organised weekly yoga classes to take place in the office. It has become hugely popular and we now have two lunchtime classes a week for staff. If I'm not attending one of these classes, then lunchtimes can see me either in book club, taking photos for the photography club, or power-walking around Cambridge.

By 5pm, it's time for me to pack up and head for the train home. By the time I get home, it can be quite late in the evening so I usually don't have much time for hobbies until the weekend. I love to bake and have been doing so since I was a child. Outside of baking, my other favourite and oldest hobby is completing jigsaw puzzles. Some people find them really frustrating, but I find them really relaxing. Having to concentrate all your efforts into finding how one tiny piece fits into another helps to focus my mind. If I can finish a jigsaw puzzle, I can do anything. **C**

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