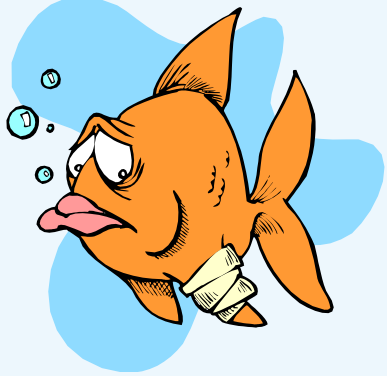


# Office working: Tips for an easier life

Dr. Martin Block, FISTC



# Office Working: Some Tips



John Doe...a cautionary tale



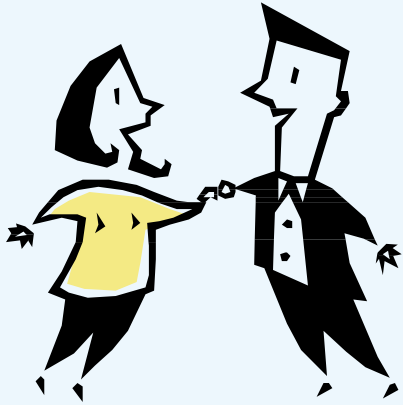
# Office Working: Some Tips



A look at how our conduct in an office environment can ease (or make harder) our job as technical communicators



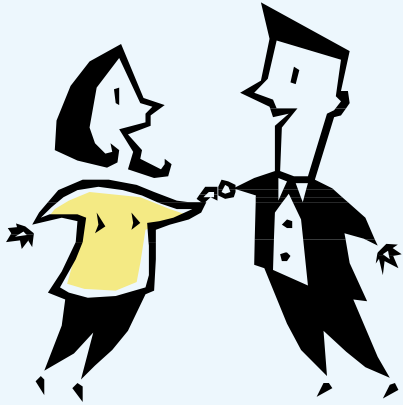
# Office Working: Some Tips



Talking heads...



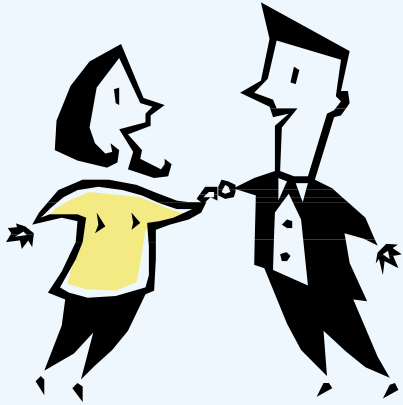
# Office Working: Some Tips



‘If I dwelt on all the mistakes that I’ve made in my working career, I wouldn’t have the courage to get out of bed’



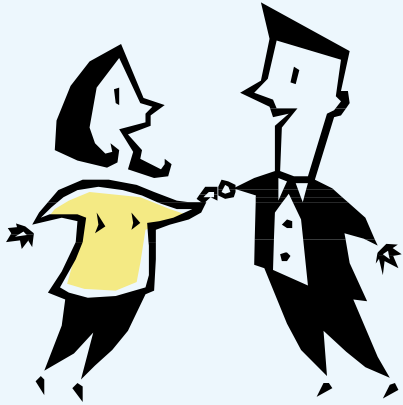
# Office Working: Some Tips



‘As technical communicators, we cannot function without information, which often comes from busy colleagues who are kind enough to give of their time’



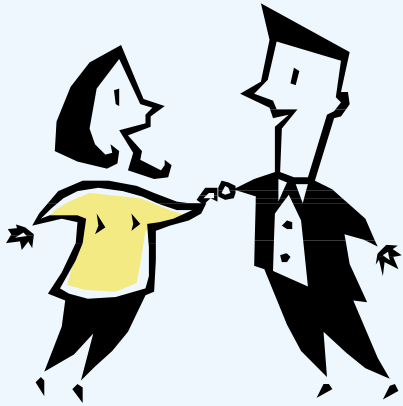
# Office Working: Some Tips



‘I want to do a good job but this often means pestering colleagues with questions. What happens if I do this too much and lose their support?’



# Office Working: Some Tips

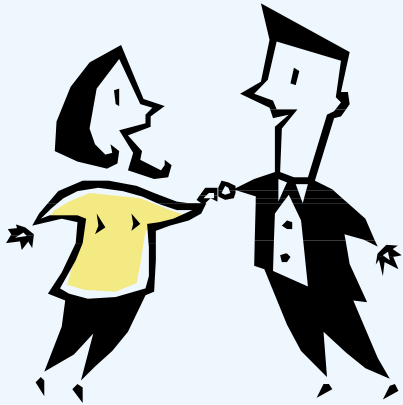


“This job has more to do with diplomacy and peoples’ egos than imparting knowledge. Next time I’m made redundant, I’ll sign up for the diplomatic service!”





# Office Working: Some Tips

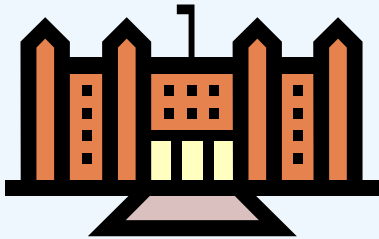


‘I learnt a skill at school that I regularly need in this job: the ability to look as if I understand something completely, whereas in fact I haven’t got a clue. I apply it often while listening to an explanation or attending a one-to-one product demonstration.’



# Office Working: Some Tips

## New to a company?



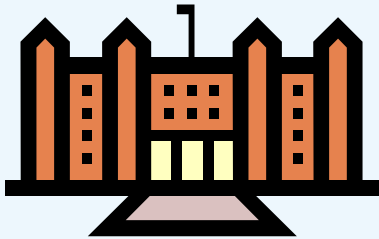
### Social tips:

- Professional books on desk
- Informative 'background' on monitor
- Email/Internet/headphones policy
- Use 'coffee machine' trips carefully
- Visit people rather than emailing/phoning
- Don't 'pan' previous company



# Office Working: Some Tips

## New to a company?



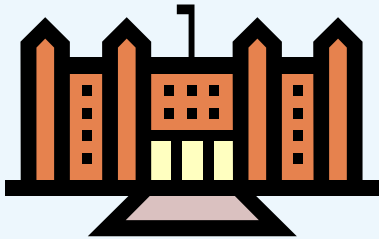
### Professional recognition tips:

- Create something a.s.a.p.
- Respond quickly to requests
- Follow up requests with visits
- Be seen to be helpful to others
- Make emails good (especially company-wide)
- Prepare for even short, one-to-one meetings
- Gain domain knowledge



# Office Working: Some Tips

## New to a company?

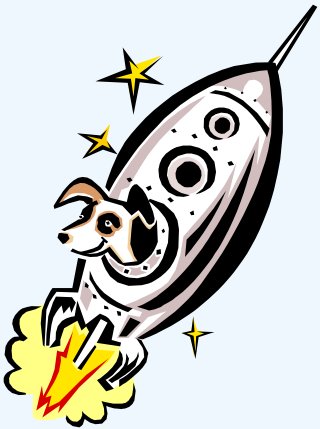


### Professional recognition tips (cont'd):

- Be prepared to make mistakes
- Admit fault readily
- Accept constructive feedback with good grace
- Say if ready for more challenge



## Being shown a product?



- Do not despair
- Do not know it all (a fine balance)
- Ask about ‘driving blind’
- Ask if your entries will pollute product
- Write up scruffy notes a.s.a.p.
- Try to ask insightful questions



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Need to ask a question?



- Respect colleagues' time
- Be concise (if necessary, plan)
- Kneel down to ask something
- Consider a longer, on-screen session at your desk, with questions marked up



# Office Working: Some Tips



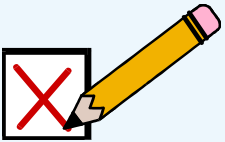
## Need to ask a question?

- Be loyal to other colleagues
- Be careful not to play colleagues off against each other
- Ask the right person
- Be transparent - acknowledge others help



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Found a fault?

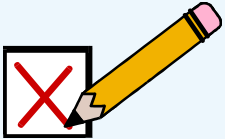


- Be kind
- Avoid a triumphant attitude





# Office Working: Some Tips



‘This is wrong’

‘This doesn’t work’

‘Can I check something with you? I may have found a problem with XYZ. It could well be that I’m not using it properly, but when I...’

‘Do you want me to note down anything else like this? You can get your own back later when you review my manual.’



# Office Working: Some Tips



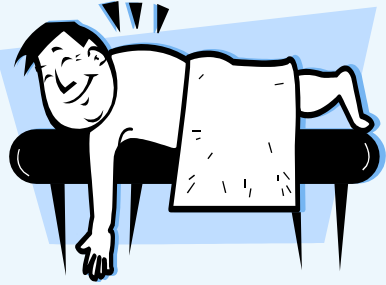
## Approached for help?

- If possible, stop immediately to deal with the query
- Be welcoming - others are listening
- If don't know answer, go with person to someone who does know, certainly if the person is new
- Follow up with a 'check'



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Time for the review?



- Be transparent
- Give reviewers opening to dislike work
- Show reviewers their actioned edits



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Need to send an email?



- Make it good, especially if it is company-wide
- Send it to yourself if important (don't rely on 'Sent Items')
- Follow up with contact if appropriate
- If copying-in, check that this does not put a copied recipient on the spot



# Office Working: Some Tips



X, please can you give me authority to up-issue this manual for release? Y and Z have reviewed it and both are happy with the content.



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Need to send an email?



- Make it good, especially if it is company-wide
- Send it to yourself if important (don't rely on 'Sent Items')
- Follow up with contact if appropriate
- If copying-in, check that it does not put a recipient on the spot
- If thanking someone, consider copying in their boss
- Try not to use copying-in to force peoples' hand



# Office Working: Some Tips



With her boss copied-in:

Dear 'Trying my best',

Due to pressures of work I can no longer help you with Product BLOGGS. I have consulted with my boss and he supports this decision.

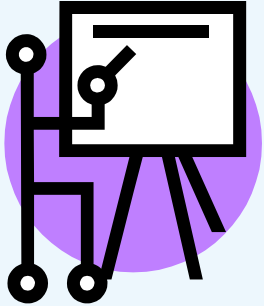
Regards

'Fan of Dear John letters'



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Presenting at a meeting?

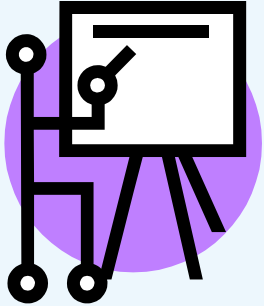


- Be economic and precise
- Be honest (for both good and bad)
- Don't be the one to start being accusatory





# Office Working: Some Tips

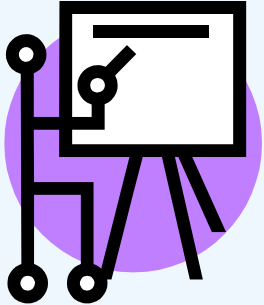


‘I’ve made little progress because Phil took an entire week to send the source material’

‘Phil has sent me the source material and I’m starting to make progress’



## Presenting at a meeting?



- Be economic and precise
- Be honest (for both good and bad)
- Don't be the one to start being accusatory
- Never put other people down
- Always leave a meeting knowing what is required of you
- Use meetings to expand domain knowledge



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Editing other peoples' text?



- Be prompt in returning edited text
- Never make the person small
- Be warned - it's a rare person who takes kindly to another person's edits
- Be kind - either positive or witty



# Office Working: Some Tips



- ‘Enthusiastic’
- ‘Interesting’
- ‘Promising’
- ‘A good read’
- ‘Has conviction’
- ‘Lively’
- ‘Informative’
- ‘Trying to keep me on my toes?’



## Editing other peoples' text?



- Be prompt in returning edited text
- Never make the person feel small
- Be warned - it's a rare person who takes kindly to other's edits
- Be kind - either positive or witty
- Differentiate between 'fact' and 'opinion'



# Office Working: Some Tips

## Original:

We each had soup and bread and three large beers. (Afterwards I fell asleep). Suffice to say that the afternoon was a write-off.

## Fact:

We each had soup and bread and three large beers. (Afterwards I fell asleep.) Suffice to say that the afternoon was a write-off.

## Opinion:

We each had soup and bread, and three large beers (after which I fell asleep). Suffice to say that the afternoon was a write-off.

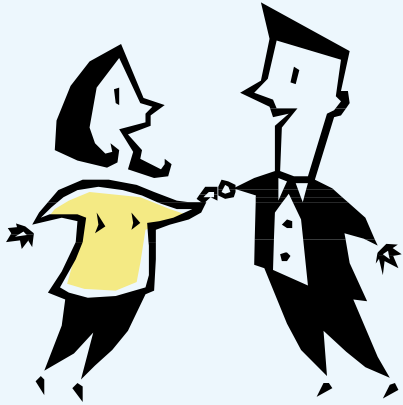


## Editing other peoples' text?



- Be prompt in returning edited text
- Never make the person small
- Be warned - it's a rare person who takes kindly to other's edits
- Be kind - either positive or witty
- Differentiate between 'fact' and 'opinion'
- Establish what level of editing is required

# Office Working: Some Tips

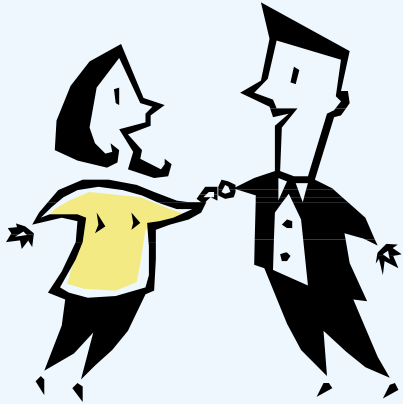


Talking heads...





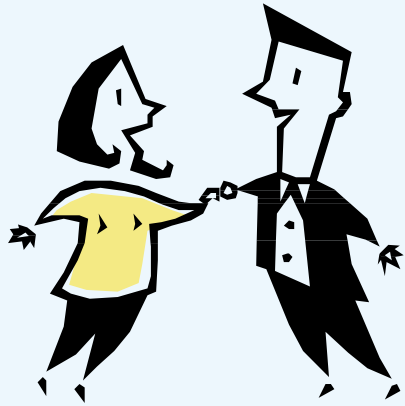
# Office Working: Some Tips



‘X came out of the pub and stopped me as I walked to the bus stop. He gave an excuse for why he had been drinking all afternoon while I had been struggling with work. I lost it and swore at him.’



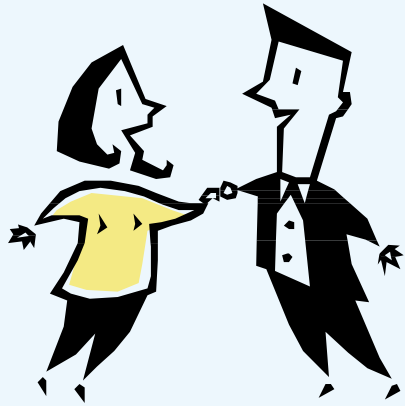
# Office Working: Some Tips



‘We had a blazing row, she and I, separated physically by a bed of flowers, and emotionally by a million miles. Things got much worse before they got better. Parts of the building were no-go areas in case we met. Eventually, after three months of this, everything burst out (over an orang-utan sanctuary, God help me); HR got involved and we were both hauled over the coals.’



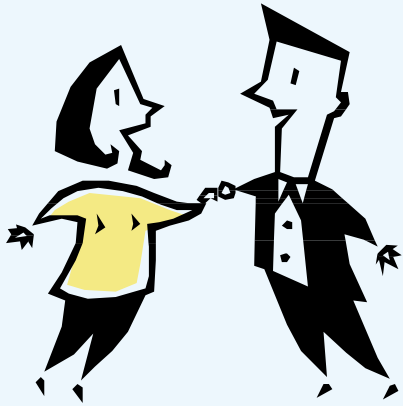
# Office Working: Some Tips



‘I’ve had this fault reported by other people, but now I’ve heard it from you I will take it seriously’



# Office Working: Some Tips

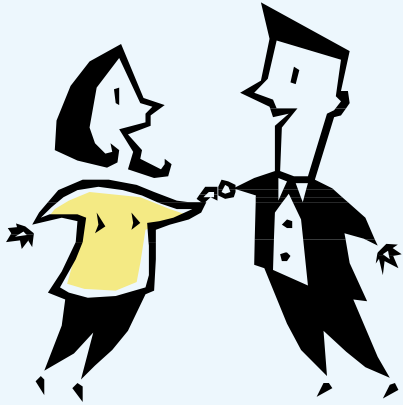


An email to X, my boss who is sitting five feet away, about Y, a fellow colleague in the team, also sitting five feet away:

‘X, can you quickly step in with Y? I’ve glimpsed an email that he’s about to send and it amounts to professional suicide’



# Office Working: Some Tips



‘I felt like hitting him and then quitting. Instead, I noticed he looked really down so I emailed him a joke. Pop went the bad atmosphere and the sun suddenly started to shine. One of my better decisions.’

