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Ginny Critcher explains why no two days are the same

I've been a technical author for 16 years, so when it comes to writing brevity, a numbered list is often what I aim for. However, having read other excellent contributions for this column I decided that a short numbered list might not cut it, so here goes with something a little longer.

It's true that we technical communicators favour a brief, to-the-point style but this does enable us to communicate very effectively with a wide audience. Our business is all about communication and it's been interesting for me over the years to see how my writing style has changed and developed in order to communicate better. I started my career as a technical author 16 years ago for a technical writing company based near Oxford, where I was lucky enough to receive some excellent on the job training in technical writing and using technical authoring tools. Then 13 years ago I, along with three other technical communicators, formed Cherryleaf, a documentation company specialising in technical writing projects, training technical authors and recruitment of technical writing specialists. Cherryleaf is where I continue to work today.

There's no typical day in my job so I've taken strands from a few days and tied them together to give you an overall idea of my working life. On any given day I could be: involved in project work for our clients, producing and delivering training

courses (we deliver both online and classroom based courses), scoping new project work, helping find candidates for our recruitment division, blogging, writing articles for our web-site, clients and other publications, dealing with email and all the other activities involved in running a business.

Training days differ greatly from other work days. Firstly, I'm out of the office (Cherryleaf delivers training in two central London locations or on client sites) and secondly, as the courses last all day that is all I'm involved with on those days. Training courses are a great opportunity to meet other technical authors and find out from them the challenges they face and different ways technical authors work. Training days are enjoyable because I'm able to meet interesting people, and as anyone who has ever trained others will know, the buzz you can get from teaching somebody a new skill is a definite plus.

Project days are usually office-based, though occasionally we work at client sites, which means we travel all over the country as well as to the rest of Europe (this year's foreign highlight was working

“... it's been interesting for me over the years to see how my writing style has changed...”

with a client based in the beautiful city of Budapest). Most mornings I start work by looking through my email. The contents of my inbox helps determine what goes onto my daily list of tasks. By prioritising the list in order of importance, urgency, length of time something takes to get done, I am able to stay focussed throughout the day. Email tackled, list compiled, I get started. Project days mean scoping projects, writing user documentation, chasing client reviews, and updating projects with any requested changes. By 11am coffee is needed, so I usually take the opportunity to stretch my legs and go out to a coffee shop for an espresso. The caffeine keeps me going until lunchtime. I stop for lunch, try and eat something healthy and go for a quick walk for some fresh air. Batteries re-charged I head back for the afternoon's work.

At Cherryleaf we have a very varied list of clients so the type of projects I'm

involved with are rarely the same. Some of the projects I've worked on this year have been in the following areas: medical, both for the NHS and private companies, telecommunications, construction, microscopy and teaching. We write user manuals, training guides, policies and procedures, reports: in fact, any kind of writing that could be deemed technical. We also use a range of tools and technologies, and so part of my job is to keep abreast of the latest developments in this area.

We get a lot of our clients through word of mouth, social media, our website, repeat business, or occasionally, it can be a chance meeting. For example, last week I was chatting to a passer-by near my house. The passer-by turned out to be Libby Coleman, one of the award-winning authors of *Yes we can read* a phonics-based reading scheme for anyone aged 8-80. Libby has another reading book in the pipeline: *Go for it!* After talking to Libby (on my doorstep) she asked if I could contribute to her new book by offering Cherryleaf's writing skills and expertise. Working for yourself means that you never really stop working as this encounter demonstrates, but when you love what you do it doesn't feel like work.

We work flexi-time at Cherryleaf and so there's no official end of day time, but every day after work whatever time that may be, I take a walk along Brighton seafront to clear my head. The combination of sea, fresh air and seagulls works its magic and leaves me calm and energised for the evening ahead. **C**

Reference

Coleman L and Ainley N (2010) *Yes we can read*. Gatehouse Books.

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