

Feature

Making the Most of an Opportunity to Attend the STC Conference

By JoAnn Z. Keosaian

If you are fortunate enough to work for a company that supports your attendance at the annual STC conference, you will want to make sure that you get the most value out of the conference and that you are able to communicate that value to your manager. Here is the process I've used to do just that.

Set objectives

Decide what you want to learn. Do you need to research new tools or techniques? Has a corporate merger introduced some management challenges? If you set department objectives as part of your corporate evaluation process, as we do, use them as a starting point. Once you have set one or two department objectives, have each attendee set personal objectives. (You might do this exercise before you even ask your manager about the conference; use this information up front to show the value that you expect to get from your attendance.)

Select your sessions

When the conference schedule becomes available, attendees should select sessions that will meet their personal and department objectives. At this point, they can (and should) select multiple sessions per time period.

The week before the conference, meet with all attendees. Have each person select first- and second-choice sessions for each time period. This provides flexibility in case the first-choice session is cancelled or is full. For maximum coverage, do not schedule two people for the same session. If someone has no sessions selected for a time period, have him/her attend someone else's third-choice session for that time. (This is why you selected multiple sessions earlier.)

At the conference

At the end of each day, briefly review the next day's sessions and make changes if necessary. You might change your focus based on what you learned at another session or a vendor showcase that day.

After the conference

Have the attendees write a brief summary of each session they attended. Schedule meetings for the attendees to present their reports to the rest of the team. That way, everyone benefits from what the others have learned. These presentations usually spark discussion about how we can improve our writing or processes.

Develop a list of team and individual action items to implement what you learned. We often incorporate these into our quarterly objectives. Send the conference reports to your manager, and report on the progress of your action items.

*JoAnn Z. Keosaian is
Technical Publications Manager at
Wise Solutions Inc. in
Plymouth, Michigan.*