

# Atlanta SPIN

Software & Systems Process Improvement Network

The Atlanta SPINnaker

September 2009

Volume 4, Issue 8



**J. Robert Crow**

## Crashing with the Nose Up: Building a Collaborative Work Environment

**J. Robert Crow**

If you are one of those people who has a fear of flying, this presentation did little to assuage those fears. Crashing with the nose up is, however, a very apt description of a very real situation in modern business today. You are (or at least think you are) doing everything right but you still fail!! That is a very frustrating reality for too many people. Our speaker for August was Robert Crow. His presentation caused many of our members to have some second thoughts about what are really “effective practices” and how to separate fact from fiction. Robert peppered his presentation with a whole host of amusing and thought provoking anecdotes and case studies to make his points.

“Performance Appraisals” and others. He then proceeded to explore each by discussing the myths about them and finally dealing with some facts to help level set the expectations when using these techniques. In some instances he gave alternatives to change the outcome by changing how these techniques can be used.

On “Performance Appraisals” the theory is that this tool will identify performance levels among peers and allow the removal of low performers and generally motivate employees to greater performance. In reality Performance Appraisals frequently become a barrier to communication and make employees fearful of being fired for things outside of their control. Also, it is very difficult to be objective when evaluating a large number of employees over a long

*(Continued on page 2)*

Robert started by reviewing some of the types of management tools commonly used for improving performance. This includes things like “Pay for Performance”, “Ranking”,

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### Next Issue

**September 16, 2009**

### Empowering Your Organization - Reporting As A Change Catalyst

Charles Johnson

Time: 6:00 PM—8:30 PM  
Location: La Quinta Inn & Suites,  
6260 Peachtree-Dunwoody Road,  
Atlanta, GA 30328



## “Crashing with the Nose Up ” (Continued)

*(Continued from page 1)*

period of time. It is often reflective of recent performance rather than performance over the longer period. A study of this strategy demonstrated that those who used a different technique known as “Work Planning and Review” gave employees and managers a better understanding of the work being done and the employees ability to contribute to the success of the project. This resulted in better project performance as well as better employee job satisfaction.

The theory behind “Pay for Performance” is that money is a motivator even though many studies have demonstrated that more money is only a “satisfier” and not a “motivator”. Another aspect of this exercise is, “what level of performance is worth a difference in pay?” You have to be careful that you are rewarding for performance that is above and beyond the normal variation of the system.

Next Robert explored some myths about compensation. While managers play with labor rates and product costs they are often surprised to find that they are really undermining teamwork and encouraging employees to focus on the short term goals. Reward systems are another problem area. The theory is that people will work harder for a recognition and rewards. The reality is that they often create win / lose environments and many people will just not participate bringing down the whole organization. They are time consuming and create many more losers than winners often causing additional conflict within the group.

Quotas are actually a self defeating strategy when used alone. They lead to sub optimizing performance. The reality is that they tend to get people to work hard just in time to

realize the quota. People learn the system quickly and are able to “game” the system and not set challenging goals. They perform at some level less than one hundred percent of their effort. In this area it is important to understand who the competition really is. It is not your fellow employee. You should be in competition with your true competitor, the company which your company is competing with for the customer’s attention.

Robert then discussed the old practice of “Management by Objectives”. This is a great way of building a level of inter group rivalry that will undermine the whole fabric of an organization. The way to fix the competition dilemma is to stop using practices that will result in sub-optimizing the system. Pay attention to Dr. Demings concept of “profound knowledge of the system”. Then build ways to focus the energies of the employees on maximizing the output of the whole company.

In closing Robert recapped his major point of not accepting the so called conventional wisdom without first challenging it and investigating it’s usefulness in a particular situation Not taking into account some of these fundamental principles can lead to disastrous results including “Crashing with the nose up”.

*Editor’s Note: This presentation was just packed with material that was not given an appropriate amount of time for discussion in the presentation. You are all encouraged to go to the Atlanta SPIN web site and take another look at Robert’s presentation. Read the slides carefully as you plan your next project or annual performance and employee motivational tasks. It might just give you some food for thought and a different approach to maximizing your group or company’s potential.*

## Call for Suggestions on Articles and Presentations

We regularly seek articles and related information that would be of interest to our readers and members. If you have a suggestion for an article please let us know by sending an email to “newsletter@atlantaspin.com”. Or better yet, if you would like to contribute an article of interest to our group, please contact us at the same email address and let’s talk about it.

Each month, the Atlanta SPIN meetings and newsletters strive to deliver real world practical approaches that can strengthen one’s abilities to succeed in the evolving and often challenging domain of software and systems development. Your feedback and ideas on the programs and supporting newsletter articles is vital and appreciated; it will help us to continue to deliver the valuable information you need for your personal career growth .We want to hear from you!

## Boardwalk

### Stephen Burlingame

### Logistics



The Boardwalk is a regular feature of the SPINnaker. Our board members take this opportunity to give you some insight into their views about being on the Atlanta SPIN Board of Directors.

What experience do you have in the software development lifecycle or technology?

I have been involved in several aspects of the software development lifecycle including the testing and validation phases as a QA Team Lead/Manager and, more recently, the development phase as an EDI Development Manager.

What process improvement related activities have you personally been involved with?

I have been involved in writing a custom SDLC for Navicure, Inc. It attempts to tackle the need for both long term, fully scoped projects and quick cycle enhancements/improvements needed to ensure clients are satisfied.

How did you get involved in Atlanta SPIN?

I was introduced to SPIN by fellow board member Gray Karnes. He described the organization and encouraged me to participate.

What benefits have you personally derived from

participation in SPIN?

Having the ability to interact with other experienced professionals, be exposed to informative presentations, and have a website filled with valuable information has, and will continue to be, a valuable asset to my career.

What motivated you to join the Atlanta SPIN Board?

After learning more about SPIN, attending a board meeting, I wanted to get involved in an organization that could benefit me and have an opportunity to give back to other members.

What do you hope to achieve by participating on the Atlanta SPIN Board?

Being involved with the logistics side of SPIN I hope to make sure that the meetings run smoothly and are planned properly. I'm also very excited about being part of the marketing committee to help spread the word about SPIN and creatively promote the organization.

**Atlanta SPIN Board of Directors**

Director	Role
Bruce Duncil	President
Fred Haigh	Vice President
Bill Reister	Secretary
Mike Sweeney	Treasurer
Scott Banks	Director, Membership
Tarun Talwar	Director, Programs
Gray Karnes	Director, Marketing
Donna Simmons	Director, Sponsorship
Vivian Viverito	Director, Technology Services
Stephen Burlingame	Director, Logistics
Abi Salimi	Director at Large

The Atlanta SPINnaker  
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Contributor to this issue:  

- Stephen Burlingame

## Atlanta SPIN Sponsors

### They Make Our Efforts Possible!

**Platinum SPONSORS****Gold SPONSORS****Other SPIN Contributors****And our many Contributing Members!****Process Improvement Sites:****Software Engineering Information Repository**

<https://seir.sei.cmu.edu/seir/>, has over 30,000 registered users and is a forum used to contribute and exchange information about software engineering improvement activities, including CMMI.

**The CMMI Process Improvement Yahoo! discussion group**

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cmmi\\_process\\_improvement/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cmmi_process_improvement/) is a forum used to contribute and exchange ideas about CMMI-based improvement.

**BSCW Shared Workspace** <https://bscw.sei.cmu.edu/pub/bscw.cgi/0/79783> is a forum used to contribute and exchange CMMI-related materials.

Information courtesy of SEI Customer Relations. Find out more about SEI Membership online at [www.sei.cmu.edu/membership](http://www.sei.cmu.edu/membership) [customer-relations@sei.cmu.edu](mailto:customer-relations@sei.cmu.edu)

**About Atlanta SPIN, Incorporated**

[www.atlantaspin.org](http://www.atlantaspin.org)

The Atlanta SPIN organization was chartered in 1994. This group has been a force for software process improvement in the Atlanta area since then. The organization has a growing membership list that currently numbers 850+ members. The group typically meets every third Wednesday of the month. Our meetings typically attract audiences of 40 – 50 people. These meetings provide a forum for like-minded people, interested in learning from others and sharing their own experiences. There is time allowed before and after the meeting for networking among the participants, including a review from the audience of any job openings that are available. The Board, through its work with Sponsors, ensures that food and drinks are also available at no cost to the membership. Atlanta SPIN is a 501C3 non-profit corporation. Your contributions may be tax deductible and qualify for corporate matching contributions from your company.