



PDF of this article // 

print this article // 

A Crisis of (PowerPoint) Communication: Interview with Paul Byron Pattak

*Paul Byron Pattak has just about seen it all in 20 years as a **consultant** to governmental agencies, commissions and corporations including the National Security Council, the White House Military Office, the Department of Defense, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, IBM, Marathon Oil, and Bank One. The problems he sees with PowerPoint go deeper than the surface.*

Cliff Atkinson: *In your experience as a consultant, do you believe there a "PowerPoint crisis"?*

Paul Byron Pattak: I do not feel there is a PowerPoint crisis. There is, instead, a crisis in communicating effectively. PowerPoint is merely a symptom. Cure the first, and the rest takes care of itself.

CA: In response to PowerPoint's critics, is PowerPoint the cause or effect of ineffective communication?

PBP: I feel very strongly that PowerPoint is an effect of ineffective communication. We do not teach communication skills as much as we used to in schools, and it is under-appreciated in the working environment. PowerPoint is reflective of our view of communications, not the cause.

CA: What training would an organization need to provide in order to produce better PowerPoint?

PBP: Start with mandatory issuance of the classic Strunk & White guide to writing. The problem is not to get better PowerPoint, but to get better communications. This will require educating employees in the art of communicating. As to better PowerPoint, setting standards (even informal ones) as to what will be tolerated in a slide presentation will go a long way. PowerPoint is not often the most appropriate way to present information.

CA: What should audience members do when they don't understand a PowerPoint?

PBP: Ask lots of questions of the type that require multi-part answers, and demand something more than additional PowerPoint slides (I have actually seen more slides given as the answer to a question).

CA: What obstacles stand in the way of an organization engaging its PowerPoint culture?

PBP: PowerPoint has become easy and convenient and pretty. The only way to change the culture is to start at the top and have senior managers demand better information in other forms. Other obstacles include that PowerPoint is the only way that some people know how to communicate, and it will be hard to make the adjustment -- especially for folks who feel they communicate just fine.

Cliff Atkinson is an independent management consultant who helps organizations solve problems related to PowerPoint. Visit his website at www.sociablemedia.com, read more articles and interviews [here](#), or email him [here](#).