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### Secrets of a 'PowerPoint Virtuoso'

An interview with Lawrence Lessig, Stanford Professor of Law

*Larry Lessig is not only one of the country's most influential thinkers in intellectual property and constitutional law, but he has also been described as a "PowerPoint virtuoso" by people who have seen his presentations. What would it take to earn the title of 'virtuoso'? How does Larry's approach differ from most, and what can we learn from him?*

**Cliff Atkinson:** *Larry, I've come across postings that refer to you as a "PowerPoint virtuoso." Why do you think people have called you that, and what do you think when you hear that term?*

**Larry Lessig:** Simple. Powerpoint has all sorts of power built into it, but it turns out the hardest thing is to keep it simple, and I think people connect with simple.

**CA:** *Based on your experiences seeing other PowerPoints, how would you assess the current state of PowerPoint presentations in business and education?*

**LL:** Awful beyond belief. If I were an executive at a major corporation, I'd ban it most of the time. The tool makes it too easy to hide reasoning. The viewer is less critical and less engaged. Less is communicated. This is not always the case, of course. Visuals are sometimes important for conveying some ideas. But bullet slides packed with data and text are worse than useless.

**CA:** *How would you describe your own approach toward PowerPoint? How is it different from other PowerPoint approaches you've seen?*

**LL:** I use the screen to frame what I am saying. One word, or a few words, so that the audience sees what they are hearing. But I never allow the screen to compete with what I am saying. I want them to be focusing on my words, not on PowerPoint graphics. So the word(s) on the screen help them tune into the words on the stage. Plus I use it to demonstrate abstract ideas, with drawings or moving objects. And it is brilliant for clips, etc.

**CA:** *In your presentations, what is the relationship between you, your voice, your body language, the audience, and your projected media?*

**LL:** I want them to focus on my words. I don't care if they look at me, but it is the rhythm and timing of my words that are important. The PowerPoint helps keep them focused -- so their mind doesn't wander. It is a feature/bug of present society, that attention span requires constant prodding.

**CA:** *What do you think it would take for people to move beyond the typical bullet-point approach to PowerPoint, and try more innovative approaches? What skill set would they need to have?*

**LL:** They would need to learn to speak again. Oration skills are awful. I don't think it would be easy. I do think it would be good.

**CA:** *For people who would like to see what you've done, do you approve of the link [here](#)?*

**LL:** Sure. It's not the best, but it's the most available.

**CA:** *Do you have any other thoughts or points you'd like to make about PowerPoint?*

**LL:** Lots that I wish Microsoft would listen to, but they don't listen to me much.

*Cliff Atkinson is an independent management consultant specializing in organizational issues related to PowerPoint. Visit his website at [www.sociablemedia.com](http://www.sociablemedia.com) or contact him at [cliff.atkinson@sociablemedia.com](mailto:cliff.atkinson@sociablemedia.com).*