

# In-the-SPIN

Newsletter of the

**BostonSPIN**  
Software Process Improvement Network

Issue 41 Fall 2001

Editors: Judi Brodman  
Sheila Lynch

## In Memoriam

### Anna Williams Allison



September 11, 2001

American Airlines Flight #11  
World Trade Center

It is with great sadness that the Boston SPIN announces the loss of their Program Chair, Anna Allison. Anna was aboard the American Airlines Flight #11 that was part of the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy. Anna was the Program Chair for Boston SPIN for last year and this year - a job she did very well. She leaves behind her husband, Blake Allison, as well as many friends and colleagues. She worked very hard to ensure that we would have a wonderful program this year. Therefore, we are dedicating the following 2001-2002 Boston SPIN program in her memory:



### 2001- 2002 BOSTON SPIN Program

9/18/01	<b>Tom DeMarco</b> "Teaching, Persuading and Storytelling", author of "Dark Harbor House"
10/16/01	<b>Rick Brenner</b> "In Person-to-Person Communications, Quality Really Pays Off"
11/20/01	<b>Ed Yourdon</b> "Extreme Project Management"
12/18/01	<b>Watts Humphrey</b>
1/15/02	<b>James Bach</b>
2/19/02	<b>Donna Johnson</b>
3/21/02	<b>Annual joint ASQ/SPIN meeting</b>
4/16/02	<b>Judi Brodman</b>
5/21/02	<b>Tim Lister</b>
6/18/02	<b>Linda McInnis</b>

## Editorial

Sheila and I are very pleased to take over as the editors of the In-the-SPIN Newsletter. Carol Pilch, the previous editor, expended an extraordinary amount of energy over the years to produce the informative Newsletter that In-the-SPIN has become. Thank you, Carol! Sheila and I will work to produce a Newsletter with equal quality for our readers

You will notice that we have already made some changes to the Newsletter – the issues will be shorter in length and will be produced on a monthly basis. The reason for this change is to provide more timely accounts of the Meetings and Roundtables held each month. Articles and Summaries will be shorter encouraging you to read them and then go to the Boston SPIN Web site for further information on a chosen subject - for example, meeting slides from the presenters are available on the web site. We will also be producing an email version of the Newsletter which will inform you about specific articles and information featured in the Newsletter and provide you with a link to the full article or additional information on the subject.

As always, we ask you to submit short articles for publication that deal with your experiences in defining, developing and managing software efforts as well as Process Improvement experiences.

We also encourage you to write emails to us with comments on articles and editorials – pro and con. Our goal is to encourage an interchange between readers, and between the readers and the editors.

Judi Brodman, Editor <mailto:brodman@LOGOS-Intl.com>

**BostonSPIN** Established January  
Software Process Improvement Network 1993

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# October SPIN Meeting

**October 16, 2001 Roundtable Program for Boston  
SPIN 6:30 - 7:00 PM, before the SPIN Meeting**



Roundtables are focused group or "birds-of-a-feather" discussions, with a Facilitator to stimulate and moderate discussion. Please join us for a lively series of discussions during the Networking portion of the SPIN meeting, before

the speaker. Choose the topic of your choice, but come early. The Facilitators will determine the number of participants, and "first come, first served."

In order to address membership concerns resulting from the events on September 11, the Boston SPIN October 2001 Roundtable Program has focused on "Security and Issues about Security."

Roundtable # 1. "Disaster Recovery Plans"  
Facilitator: Dolores McCarthy

Roundtable # 2. "Information Security, Trouble indicators and Counter Measures"  
Facilitator: Peter Malpass

Roundtable # 3. "Managing Projects without Air Travel"  
Facilitator: Rick Brenner

Roundtable # 4. Boston SPIN Book Discussion  
"The Inmates Are Running the Asylum: Why High Tech Products Drive Us Crazy and How To Restore The Sanity" by Alan Cooper  
Facilitator: Barbara Purchia

Come share your experience and concerns with other software professionals from New England. We look forward to your participation.

**October 16, 2001 Meeting Topic: *In Person-to-Person Communications, Quality Really Pays Off***

Speaker: Rick Brenner, Chaco Canyon Consulting

Misunderstandings, confusion, and unintended offenses are just some of the ways interpersonal communication can go wrong. They are examples of defects in the communication system, and they can be very expensive, both personally and organizationally. When we talk to each other, when we listen, when we send or read emails, when we read or write memos, or when we leave voice mail messages, we're communicating person-to-person. If everyone in an organization has a deep understanding of how this system can fail, they can frame their communications to minimize the occurrence of expensive failures. Analyzing information flow using the Satir

Interaction Model, we gain insight into the elements of the communications process, and we come to a new understanding of how it can go wrong. Understanding, though, is not enough. We must have access to what we know in the moment, when we are deeply involved in problematic communication. In this fun and interactive presentation, we'll explore how our person-to-person communication system works, with special emphasis on its failure modes. We'll emphasize communication under stress, where the most expensive failures occur. And we might just change how some of us send and receive interpersonal communications.

# November SPIN Meeting

How lucky can we be – Ed Yourdon speaking on November 20<sup>th</sup> on "Extreme Project Management". Ed will discuss the management issues versus the technical activities of the "extreme" project.

**Abstract:** "Historically, all software projects have involved a certain degree of risk and pressure -- but many of the projects in today's chaotic business environment involve such intense pressure that they require non-standard, extreme management techniques. Ed Yourdon's presentation will provide guidance and insights for managers and project team members who are about to embark upon an "extreme" project -- i.e., a project whose schedule is so compressed, and/or whose budget, or team size is so constrained, that the only "obvious" way to succeed is to work 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, with no vacations until the project is finished. Such projects may also be using some of the concepts of the popular "extreme programming" (XP) approach; this presentation is designed to be compatible with current views on XP, but it focuses entirely on the management issues, rather than the technical activities of design (e.g., refactoring), coding, and testing. Extreme project management involves five key issues: politics, people, process, project-control, and tools."

# SPIN Perspectives

*This issue's SPIN Perspectives column features a short article by Johanna Rothman, Rothman Consulting Group, Inc.*

## "Process Improvement: It's "All Set"

© 2000 Johanna Rothman



Cleo, a process improvement specialist, gave her status report to her manager. "The process is all set now. We have a defined process, with templates and guidelines. Now all we have to do is use it."

Product development, like most of life, is never "all set." Since product development isn't all set, neither is process improvement. As soon as we think everything is all set, something changes, showing us that it's not all set. If you hear the phrase "It's all set" from one of your staff, get ready for some big change that will rock you out of complacency.

While working on a process definition with a client recently, I explained that we didn't have to get the process completely right the first time. We could keep tweaking it as the projects progressed. I suggested they embed the process in their project plans, so they could test the process in a way that made sense and change the it as necessary.

One of my process group colleagues turned to me and said, "What do you mean by embed the process? Don't we have to tell the project managers what to do?" Embedding the process means creating a project plan and schedule the way you've laid out the process. You don't tell the project managers what to do, you work with them to see what happens on a real project (or two or three or four). There's a good reason for this:

The process improvement group doesn't actually know what's going to happen with the process until they can see it work in a project. They need to assess results from at least two projects, preferably three to four projects, maybe more.

Since the process group doesn't know how the process will actually work, it can't be "all set" until it's used. Since it takes time to use the process, by the time you've gathered the data about the process, it will be time to change it, or at the least, tweak it.

So what's a process team to do? Here are some suggestions for making the most of your process improvement work:

Use project retrospectives to learn about the experiences on a project. Use those experiences to modify your process.

Test the process definition as you define it, with the people who will be using it.

Define more guidelines than absolutes in your process definition. Especially, get rid of those big honking binders.

Make sure that all the process people work on projects. The people who define the process should be the people who live with what they've defined.

Remember, process improvement is never all set, unless the company goes out of business. Then it's really "all set".

## Meeting Summary

The following synopsis of the September 18<sup>th</sup> meeting is contributed by Matt Gelbwaks, Vice President, Operations and Deliver, NewLane, Hudson, MA.

### "Teaching, Persuading and Storytelling," with readings from Dark Harbor House

Speaker: Tom DeMarco



In what proved to be a light and refreshing interlude to the events over the past week, Mr. DeMarco came into town an esteemed leader in the field of software development and left a recognized novelist of record. Although the title of Mr. DeMarco's lecture was "Teaching, Persuading, and Storytelling", the focus seemed to be purely on the storytelling. Nonetheless, for those willing to make the leaps, Tom left plenty of opportunity for the attentive listener. This forum, *In-the-SPIN*, is usually a factual representation of the month's presentation, due to the nature of the lecture, I thought it more appropriate to add a

little liberal interpretation.

The evening started with an interesting discussion of the differences between the "Great American Novel" (GAN) popularized more by those seeking it than by those writing it, and the "Little Novel" (LN), initially popularized in Europe and later transferred to the US. The GAN, a tome of epic proportions, is characterized by momentous events, heroic and tragic characters, and themes describing contemporary America. It is the great transcendental novel and though true to period, is easily transferable to current conditions. The LN, on the other hand, is diametrically opposite to the GAN. It is not momentous but still richly satisfying. These stories are designed more to entertain and thus they relate events without prejudice, though the reader is always free to take away insight and significance. Easily Knuth's classic tome can be considered one of our genre's GANs, and just as easily, Tom's earlier novel "Deadline" is a wonderful LN. If we extend this discussion point, it is easy to remark that many GANs are read more to say we have read them and then to reference from periodically, as situations arise that can benefit from particular deep passages. Certainly our genre is full of *important* books that exist purely for their reference ability. In fact, many never read the complete works, but restrict their education purely to the quotable references. LNs are lively reading and their images stick with the reader well past when the book is put down. Those of us who listened to Mr. DeMarco, probably can still picture the dream sequence that he read from Dark Harbor House, and many who participated in the discussion groups on the "Deadline" can still picture various entries from Mr. Tompkin's Journal.

Mr. DeMarco took us through the book in what I assumed to be chronological order, but again true to the form of the LN, his readings could have been in reverse or even some random order. The passages reflected images and actions whose only temporal association were a deepening of the various character's relationships. This is an attribute that stands out in the process improvement discipline. There are always many aspects of a process that can be worked on in many ways. It is often less important as to the order we address them in and more so that we do address them. Clearly the strategy of a process improvement effort (the plot) needs to be laid out before we embellish the actions with methodologies, but the order by which issues are addressed remains flexible – subject to developing plot twists proffered by changing business requirements.

Another theme that Tom presented was that of Ephemera. In Dark Harbor, he was referencing the various aspects of society that the era assumed to be *permanent* – the importance of radio, summers in the country, steadfast ways of the rich and the near-rich. In our environment, we too have the concept of ephemera. We have legacy systems that were thought would never need to be replaced, we have "new" technology that is already passé, and we have development methodologies that worked well in a world where multi-year product cycles were the standard. These are all elements of our ephemera, and the list goes on. In fact almost everything we do today will be replaced by new approaches and methodologies and techniques before their return on investment are even able to kick in. Tom also discussed *perception*, *demonstration*, and *acceptance*. Three watch words we all know from our practices. Every action has

various perceptions amongst those who view them. Not all are complimentary or complementary. It is tantamount that we manage the perceptions and ensure that they complement our objectives. Without that synergy, the changes will not be adopted and the shift will not take place. Demonstrations, like kisses around the fireworks, help people visualize what we are trying to teach them. Not only are pictures valuable, but walk-throughs and physical demonstration greatly enhance the ability to remember and internalize approaches and methods. Acceptance is the basalt that which we are trying to achieve. Once actions seem natural, they become internalized and inherently repeated. Like the quiet woods, perfect for yet another kiss.

Finally, there were several phrases I jotted down that struck me as quite memorable. They were:

- *Simplicity creates moments of great charm* – I strive for simplicity in my process and methods. Simple rules are easy to follow, easy to remember, and easy to teach. A simple process has an inherent charm and radiant beauty.
- *Religion is 1 part God and 10 parts theater* – Process is a religion. Many prescribe to it quite fervently. It is these people who are most often accused of committing process for process sake. By allowing process to include 10 parts theater, we can demonstrate and illustrate rather than just preach. This tends to minimize the brimstone and maximizes adoption.
- *Do not misrepresent* – Process, like the young lady in Tom’s rowboat, needs to have the purveyor stay true to the story. We should not use process for our own devices, but remember it is merely a means by which the business can better and quicker achieve its objectives.

All in all, the evening was entertaining, and though I wanted to, and succeeded, in reading into the story from my one-tracked process-weenie perspective, I am sure that come my next vacation, Tom’s book will be a wonderful read – richly satisfying with none of the standard trappings of big heavy novels. Judging by the smiles and the warm response, the audience was well pleased with the change of pace.

## Roundtable Summary

*This following synopsis is contributed by Pete Malpass, Program Management Support Office (process, QA and project data management) for the signal processing projects of Tellabs’ Media Processing Technologies Group in Bedford, MA.*



**Thesis for the Roundtable:** The Defense Systems Management College notes that the indications of a failed project include any or all of the following :

- Missed schedule dates
- Failure to meet requirements in unit, subsystem, or system tests
- Communication breakdowns
- Confused / disoriented staff
- Crisis management
- Cost overruns

Roundtable participants added their indicators of a project in trouble. Activities to prevent the indicator from happening or to nudge the project back on track follow the indicators.

1. **Project goal statements** by the manager, lead engineer, marketing, etc., are not recognizably the same. In the extreme case, there is no statement of the project goals:
  - Remind executive sponsor(s) about “truck/lottery sensitivity.” Ask them for a set of information to be able to orient a new leader if one leaves in mid-stream. Ask them to review and resolve confusion.
  - Use cross-functional teams involved in early decisions like goals (separate from discipline turf-wars)
  - Look hard at what they’re doing versus saying. Is it really different?
  - Make sure the project has one strong sponsor (> 1 may result in turf war)

### 2. Requirements:

- A. The sum of the requirements does not appear to result in the whole product.
- B. No signatures on the requirements list. (A lack of a reasonable agreement on a list of requirements)
- C. Serious requirements scope creep versus managed scope increases.
  - Ensure that there is adequate time in the project life cycle for discovery
  - Make sure there are one or preferably more (mixed stakeholder) input sessions
  - Invite all product and project stakeholders to submit their lists of requirements

### 3. Plans and Estimation

- A. This year’s plan is the same as last year’s plan (not maintained!)
- B. The sum of the milestones does not equal the project.
- C. Repeatable estimation process with some detail to it. "Some formulas or data, not all 'engineering judgment' by one or two people."
- D. Engineers don't believe the schedule up front.
- E. Missing key sub-plans: EDS participant supplied the 10 from the Project Management Body of Knowledge: CM, QA, risk management, cost (budget), staffing / resources, communications, schedule, training, procurement, test, and scope (requirements).
- F. Managers don't know risks, dependencies and assumptions of the project.
  - In your organization, what’s the impact of the plan? A wrong plan does not mean failure to achieve goals. Von Clausewitz: “the planning is everything, the plan is nothing.”
  - Sometimes it’s political-economic system reality to lie a bit. “We lie less than others.”

- Planning is about getting a set of people to buy into an approach. Get their commitment to do a project, then trust entropy to finish it. EXCEPT if the plan tries to cover the universe of potential requirements (plan = search for “holy grail”)
- Go to the users to get priorities, and then let engineers (“what \*can\* be done”) run the project.
- Estimation:
  - + Decompose the project and product into components, then get engineers’ estimates for those (buy-in): the gut-check that prevents “Engineers don’t believe the plan up front.” After the first tests of a firm subset of the project, calibrate the estimates and adjust the rest of the project’s estimates. Iterate.
  - + It’s not the development engineers who are the disbelievers. It’s the receivers. Include them in reviews of plan/estimates and listen carefully to their negative feedback.
  - + Watch for correlations among Work Breakdown Structure elements. That’s where the domino effect can be predicted if slips start.
  - + Every estimate looks like a point, but actually has a probability distribution. Use three point (max, min, expected) estimation and PERT to get boundaries. Use large variance (max – min = 4 standard deviations) activities on critical path to identify risk management focus.
  - + When re-calibrating, if you missed by 20%, recalibrate all tasks of similar size by 20% from their estimates, don’t just add the 20% you missed by to the rest of the project.
  - + Get those who will do the project’s estimates first at the 15% level (7 steps/activity) versus 50% level (2 steps/activity)
  - + Infrastructure is not “natural” to recall and estimate in plans. You have to have a template or outline in order not to forget critical infrastructure tasks.
  - + Do continual estimation updating as risk management. Test and re-calibrate what you will need. “It’s what you think you know that kills you.”
  - + Every project has a ledge that needs dynamite. (Movie reference)
  - + Allocate estimates to the doers at the lowest level.
  - + Developers and marketers are always optimistic. They tend to estimate theoretical cycle time and what’s necessary to win the business durations, respectively. “If an engineer estimates a project, s/he’s likely to use theoretical cycle times (best it could be in a vacuum). We’ve discovered that world-class engineering/manufacturing systems run at twice the sum of theoretical cycle times. For admin tasks where people have to physically get together/coordinate, world-class organizations take 10 times theoretical cycle time. Others typically take 100 times theoretical cycle time for admin tasks.” - Hank Hayes, TI, 1995.

**4. Credible, known-to-all-project-participants, change management process (lack of, is defect)**

**5. Necessary cleanup and finishing tasks lose resources to new features every time** (also stated as, "Design loses to new features." That is, "Management don't say, "no" to

new a feature but there is no relief on schedule and no new resources to do the work."

- Boil the issues to impacts of current behavior or approach and benefits of alternatives -> there has to be a business reason for changing the priorities
- Use teammates and friends to listen and improve the content and presentation.
- Jim Cloud, Motorola Space Systems Lead SysEng: "To get 95% of the people to understand something, you need seven (7) ways to say what it is and how it works. No single person can say something more than three different ways. You’re going to need help communicating."
- You have to identify and obtain a "high enough" sponsor (someone with clout) to listen and act.

## Dear SPIN Doctor



### The purpose of the column...

by Judi Brodman, 'the SPIN doctor'

Dear SPINners:

Many of you are new members of SPIN and so I thought it appropriate to reprint part of the original “Dear SPIN doctor” column which was published in the very first issue of *In-the-SPIN* Newsletter, January 1995.

“We need to plan for success in both cases by choosing actions that we can accomplish with the time and energy level that we have available to us. One of the things that can help us to do this is ideas and information from others. But getting others to focus on our own specific scenarios is not always easy.

To help YOU get the focused information you need to accomplish your process improvement goals, the SPIN Committee is hereby launching a "Dear SPIN Doctor" column. Send your questions! As your SPIN Doctor, I will attempt to answer them through local resources and big-name mega-experts---including Bill Curtis, Ray Dion, Watts Humphrey, and Mark Paulk. Think of this column as your hot link to the vast resources of the collective process improvement consciousness.

You can submit your questions (or your comments on our answers to questions!) via email to me (<mailto:brodman@LOGOS-Intl.com>). You may sign your name, or use an alias if you prefer to be anonymous. I look forward to the challenge of addressing your questions... “

As we celebrate 5+ years together, please continue to send your questions or comments to me. Send your comments or questions to "Dear SPIN doctor" at <mailto:brodman@LOGOS-Intl.com>. Sign them or use a "pen-name"- I respect your confidentiality.

"the SPIN doctor"

## New Meeting Location

The 2001-02 year for Boston SPIN has brought us a new meeting location. After many years of gracious hospitality from General Dynamics/GTE in Needham, we have a new host at The MITRE Corporation in Bedford. MITRE is located a short distance from route 128/95 and the Burlington Mall. We are delighted with this new facility which features a large auditorium with a complete suite of state of the art audio-visual equipment, a meeting room and a large entrance foyer where we can network with our colleagues. The 300 seat auditorium is a major asset in attracting the caliber of speakers we have on this year's program schedule. Our deepest appreciation to MITRE's Deputy CIO for Information Systems, Bob Boonstra, for hosting our meetings.

Please be aware that MITRE has advised us that, due to increased security concerns, you will need a Picture ID for admission to the SPIN meetings. We encourage you to leave all carrying bags, backpacks, and briefcases behind (i.e., in your car). Otherwise, you should be prepared to have these opened and inspected upon arrival.

MITRE's campus is located at 202 Burlington Road (route 62), Bedford. SPIN meetings are held in the 'S' building.

Directions can be found on our Web site:

<http://www.bostonspin.org/>

## 2001-2002 Board Members



Pictured above are the newly elected Boston SPIN Board Members:

Front row, left to right: John Brtis, At-Large member; Sheila Lynch, Editor In-the-SPIN Newsletter; Barbara Purchia, Vice Chair; Anna Allison, Program Chair; Dolores McCarthy, Secretary; Linda McInnis, Chair; Caroline Starita, Roundtables Committee; Back row, left to right: David Heimann, Webmaster; Judi Brodman, Editor In-the-SPIN Newsletter; Jim Withall, Membership; Ron Kay, Treasurer.  
Missing: Rick Brenner, At-Large member

## Letter from the Chair

### Welcome to the 2001-2002 Season of SPIN

I want to welcome you to SPIN on behalf of all the volunteers that put together such great programs for you. We have a really great schedule of speakers, roundtables, book club and educational opportunities this year and want to invite you to participate.

Our speaker program, as you saw earlier, includes: Ed Yourdon, Tom DeMarco, James Bach, Donna Johnson, Rick Brenner, Tim Lister, Judi Brodman, and Watts Humphrey.

Our roundtables allow you to network and learn successful (or not) approaches to common problems like disaster recovery, project management, configuration and release management and the ever popular, how to keep the quality of what's going on high. Caroline Starita leads this effort to bring you hot topics for discussion.

A new addition in the last few months has been the Book Club led by Barbara Purchia. It gives you a good reason to read those books you've been putting off and offers the opportunity to talk with others who have read similar thought provoking books related to the work you're doing or would like to do.

*In the SPIN* has two new editors this year, Judi Brodman, one of the founders of the Boston SPIN, and Sheila Lynch. They will be bringing a new look to the newsletter. We can't move along until we salute the outgoing editor, Carol Pilch, who valiantly did the newsletter single-handedly and we will miss her.

Coming this fall we have given a new look and new domain name to our web page at <http://www.bostonspin.org/>. Hopefully, we'll be on-line and up-to-date by the time you're reading this letter.

These programs exist because of tremendous creativity and support on the part of a team of volunteers and sponsoring organizations who are here to help you. I want to invite you to be one of them. We have tasks that take as little as 1/2 hour a month to Chairmanships.

If you need information or have questions, please get in touch with me at <mailto:lindamcinnis@yahoo.com>.

Join us on the third Tuesday of the month at MITRE for great programs, great discussions and great networking.

Regards,

Linda McInnis  
Chairperson, Boston SPIN

## Wanted: SPONSORS

### Sponsorship Opportunities:

Sponsor for the Boston SPIN Web site - \$500 per year  
Great opportunity for a Small Company!  
Company name will appear on the web site.  
Contact: [mailto:Boston\\_SPIN@yahoo.com](mailto:Boston_SPIN@yahoo.com)

## Wanted: Interesting Speakers

We are always looking for interesting speakers. If you'd like to speak at Boston SPIN, please review the criteria specified on the Boston SPIN web site before sending an abstract to Linda McInnis, : [mailto:Boston\\_SPIN@yahoo.com](mailto:Boston_SPIN@yahoo.com)



**BostonSPIN** Established January 1993  
Software Process Improvement Network

### SPONSORS:

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The Boston SPIN is a forum for the free and open exchange of software process improvement experiences and ideas. Meetings are usually held on third Tuesdays, September - June. Boston SPIN welcomes volunteers and sponsors. There is no charge to attend the meetings

For more information about our programs and events contact: Linda McInnis, Chairperson  
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Send letters-to-the-editor, and general correspondence to:  
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