

# Knowledge Worker

## Seven Performance Hats

(October 2016)

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To perform acceptably is to meet expectations, to comport ourselves in ways that are clearly acceptable, maybe admirable and perhaps exemplary. There is more to our performance than how much we produce or how well we do the work we're paid to do. Our performance includes our interactions with others and our impact on them; the example we set; the kinds of remarks we make; the sentiments we express; our responses to the unexpected and the challenging; our attitude toward authority and the way we exercise it; the way we treat others and the way we respond to the ways others treat us.

As employees, we wear many hats and play many roles. In all cases there are expectations of us, of our behavior and of our performance. Meeting or not meeting any of these expectations is reflected in judgments made about our overall performance. Consider the seven "performance hats" worn by employees indicated in the diagram below (meant to be illustrative, not complete or comprehensive).

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- **Employee.** This is the core or most basic role and there are expectations regarding it. These typically include mundane things like complying with company policies and directives and showing up for work on time. It is our basic status as an employee and it leads to additional roles and expectations of our performance in those roles.

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- **Worker.** Our job or position has some specific technical tasks, duties and responsibilities associated with it. This is what we're paid to do and it is probably where the bulk of our time is spent and where most people focus when thinking about performance. But there is more, much more.
- **Co-Worker.** We work with other people and our interactions with them, on or off task, are a key aspect of our performance.
- **Team Member.** We are likely members of one or more teams, either ongoing or time-bound. How well we perform as a team member is another key dimension of our performance.
- **Team Leader.** It's possible we're a team leader. Again, this is separate from our technical specialty and again it factors in to our performance.
- **Subordinate.** Chances are we have a boss. Here, too, there are expectations that we must meet or exceed. Most of our interactions with our boss are probably related to our work but there are interactions not directly work-related and they carry their own expectations and requirements.
- **Boss.** Maybe we have people reporting to us and we are their boss. There are expectations of us as a boss, manager or supervisor as well.

As the preceding roles suggest, we are not just producers of a particular type of result; we are also corporate citizens, members of the organization and perhaps a member of one or more teams as well as a member of a particular unit. We have co-workers and colleagues, bosses and maybe subordinates, in which case we also have to manage, lead and set an example. We have to respect authority and perhaps exercise it. There is much, much more to our performance than the specific results we are paid to produce in the course of doing the work of our technical specialty.

Clearly, performance can be narrowly or broadly defined. Define it too narrowly and it fails to address all that needs to be addressed. Define it too broadly and it loses its power to focus attention and achievement. A well-rounded view of performance and a multi-dimensional view of the performer are required in order to fully understand and appreciate performance in the work place. We need a leader's view of performance and performers, not just a manager's or engineer's or scientists' or technologist's view. Those who lead our organizations have little if any interest in a narrow, technical view of performance or performers. Consequently, we performance improvement specialists are well-served by having a robust view of performance in general and of human performance in particular. Whether as performance improvement professionals or as employees, we must tend to all the dimensions of performance, to all those "performance hats" employees wear, including the ones we wear.

### About the Author

Fred Nickols, CPT, is a knowledge worker, a writer, consultant and former executive who spent 20 years in the United States Navy, retiring as a decorated chief petty officer. In the private sector, he worked as a consultant and then held executive positions with two former clients. Currently, Fred is the managing partner of [Distance Consulting LLC](#). His website is home to the award-winning [Knowledge Workers' Tool](#)

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