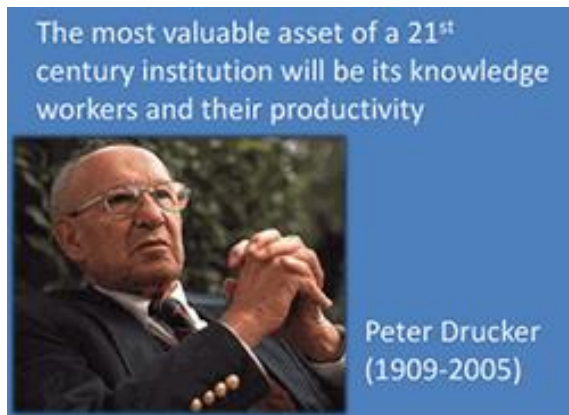# Knowledge Worker
Do It Yourself Performance Improvement
(January 2017)

We all know what DIY stands for – Do It Yourself. And PI stands for Performance Improvement. So why not DIY PI – **Do It Yourself Performance Improvement**? DIY PI is the focal point of this month's column and it is especially relevant to knowledge workers (including me and probably you) and the organizations employing us. Let's begin by looking at why knowledge workers must manage and improve their own performance.

The most valuable asset of a 21st century institution will be its knowledge workers and their productivity

Peter Drucker
(1909-2005)

As knowledge workers, our work consists mainly of configuring appropriate responses to the circumstances at hand. In other words, we figure out what to do instead of simply carrying out prefigured work routines. We exercise a considerable amount of discretion in our work. Moreover, in today's world of work, the circumstances in which we find ourselves are often fluid and continually changing. What worked last time won't work this time and so we have to figure things out again – and again. We must engineer solutions to the problems we encounter – over and over again. Consequently, if a human performance technologist were to study us with an eye toward figuring out how to improve our performance that person would encounter a bewildering display of varying behaviors and non-standard situations. We rarely do the same thing twice and we rarely do it the same way. We knowledge workers are an industrial engineer's nightmare. As Peter Drucker wrote in *Management* (1973, p.183), "Knowledge work, therefore, needs far better design, precisely because it cannot be designed *for* the worker. It can be designed only *by* the worker." What is true of work is also true of performance. If anyone is going to manage and improve our performance it has to be us. In order to do that, we knowledge workers have to know about Human Performance Technology (HPT) and we must know how to apply it to our own performance. How do we do that? How do we learn about HPT and how do we learn to apply it to ourselves?

You can help your organization's knowledge workers learn about HPT. You can provide concepts, tools, publications, presentations, brown bag lunches and other resources devoted to presenting, explaining and making use of HPT. More things you can do are listed below:

- Recast and reframe some of what already exists so as to come at HPT and performance improvement from a DIY perspective.
- Assemble a network of competent practitioners who can provide training, coaching and mentoring services aimed at helping people manage and improve their own performance.
- Locate and select DIY PI trainers, coaches and mentors.
- Explore the DIY aspects of HPT and how it can be deployed and employed in your organization.

- Publicize and promote DIY HPT in your organization.
- Assemble an internal think-tank on DIY HPT.
- Perhaps most important, you can equip your people with the knowledge, skills, tools and techniques needed to engineer solutions to the problems they encounter.

If your organization were to do these things it could quickly exploit the many benefits of DIY performance improvement.

Enter here an important question: Just how do you apply HPT to your own performance?

Make no mistake; it won't be easy. DIY performance improvement is an especially vexing challenge when you consider this: When we apply HPT to ourselves we lose our objectivity; we are no longer disinterested, impartial observers. Here are some thoughts on that score.

- Your organization needs a buddy system, a handful of like-minded and similarly equipped folks who can act as sounding boards, advisors, confidantes and who can ask each other questions that wouldn't necessarily occur to them individually.
- People need to meet with and negotiate with their boss regarding matters related to their performance; the outcomes they are expected to achieve, the resources and support they need to achieve them, and what to do if things go awry, especially when they encounter systemic blocks and barriers.
- Your organization can benefit from a Community of Practice (CoP) focused on the practice of DIY PI.
- Your organization needs to selectively create job/performance aids for the work your people do and it needs to help those in its buddy system and its larger network of DIY PI practitioners do the same for themselves.
- Your organization needs to establish coordination mechanisms between and among peers and co-workers with respect to the contributions they make to each other's performance, the organization's performance, and what they need from and provide to each other.

Once your people master HPT they need to apply each and every aspect of it to their own performance and your organization needs to support them in doing that. That is what DIY PI is all about. Doing it will greatly increase your people's self-esteem and self-confidence and it will also greatly improve the results they achieve individually, collectively and for the organization. In today's world of knowledge work and knowledge workers few things are more valuable than that.

There are lots of HPT professionals out there who can help you do all this but, maybe – just maybe – you don't need anyone to help you. Maybe you can do it yourself. After all, eventually you will have to.

Reference

Drucker, P. F. (1973). *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*. New York: Harper Row

About the Author

Fred Nickols, CPT, is a knowledge worker, writer, consultant, and former executive who spent 20 years in the U.S. 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 manager partner of Distance Consulting LLC. His website is home to the award-winning Knowledge Worker's Tool Room and more than 200 free articles, book chapters, and papers. Fred is a longtime member of ISPI and writes this monthly column for *PerformanceXpress*. A complete listing of all Knowledge Worker columns and access to them is available here.