

How to handle the multi-hat challenge

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Have you ever been stuck having to handle multiple responsibilities with varying levels of authority? It can be exhausting, hectic, and maybe even frustrating when you have one head and many hats. In some situations, wearing more than one hat is unavoidable. However, there are some things you can do to relieve much of the pressure you feel on your shoulders. By knowing when and where to put each hat on, you actually can and should enjoy the challenge. To gain traction in the multi-hat arenas, here are some perspectives and measures you can take:

1. *Remember that the hat sets the context when interacting with others.* Every hat you are asked to wear has its own responsibilities and objectives. If you change hats, the context changes because you are interacting differently with different people. For instance, interactions with your boss will be different than interactions with your employees or other managers. Goals and objectives along with the level of urgency will determine the role and approach you take in each leadership scenario.

2. *Use the appropriate hat at the appropriate time/place.* There were

times I had to wear my boss’s hat when he was absent. In meetings, I had to speak and act on his behalf, endorsing courses of action I knew he would take, not the ones I preferred. But outside that meeting, I had no business trying to wear my boss’s hat.

A military drill sergeant will holler and scream at basic trainees during the morning hours, then be much more civil with colleagues in an afternoon office setting, only to be extremely friendly at an evening scout meeting.

3. *Don’t change your personality when changing hats.* Your attitude and personality should be consistent and predictable with everyone. Even the military drill sergeant will keep the same sense of humor through the various transitions of his or her day. If you change personalities throughout the day, people will find it difficult to trust you. They may walk around on egg shells if they feel you will blow your top on a moment’s notice, or they may do whatever they want if your leadership style blends in with wall paper. So just be yourself!

4. *Don’t neglect any hat you are responsible to wear.* I once had to wear two hats when a peer had been absent for six months. After about one month, I decided to use his office when

wearing his hat and my office when wearing my hat. This helped me not neglect his department’s people or his responsibilities nor to neglect mine.

Sadly, not many people can truly handle the extra hat or two they are directed or required to wear. More often than not, if or when you have to hand your hat to a colleague when you are on a long business trip or vacation, you will come back only to find holes in everything, with the best news being that the building didn’t burn down. Don’t be like “many people” when someone hands you his or her hat.

5. *Be flexible when flexibility is required.* The key to taking on the multi-hat challenge is knowing what hat to put on at any time and enjoying the challenge it offers. You can’t afford to be rigid--you must be capable of turning on a dime or changing hats at a moment’s notice.

Leadership is already challenging enough when wearing one hat. When an extra hat is handed to you, let it energize rather than deflate you. Wear any and all hats with pride and enthusiasm. The truly great leaders can manage more than one scene at a time and can lead different groups of people in achieving multiple objectives. Be a great leader!

~ The End ~