

Revisiting Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Abraham Maslow was a renowned psychiatrist, who in 1934, wrote a paper on the Hierarchy of Needs. The purpose of this paper is to revisit Maslow's insights and to correlate them to the work we do everyday.

Survival

This is the most basic of needs. It means having enough food on the table and shelter over our heads to survive. Today survival may also mean the ability to obtain an education, remain healthy, and transport oneself. Scary thing is, in a country with our abundance, there are people continuing their struggle to survive. It may be the employee in the garment, retail, or service industries who earns a minimum wage, which forces them to work a second job simply in order to survive. Many employees chose to pay their employees a "living wage". There are many states and municipalities who have passed living wage ordinances requiring \$15 an hour or more.

There are many today who find themselves in trouble simply because they spend more than they make. That's another form of survival. That can only be defeated with education and discipline.

There are employers such as the In and Out Hamburger chain in California which advertise the fact they pay \$1.50 an hour above minimum wage for entry level employees. No surprise that this corporate attitude produces the best workforce in the fast food industry. I know this because both of my sons and many of their friends worked for In and Out; many for years. When I go through the drive up window and ask why they like working at In and Out, they generally respond, "They pay us well and treat us like adults." That's what these kids need in order to survive.

Most employers want to see how little it is they can pay somebody to work for them so that they don't quit. Conversely, many employees go to work everyday doing just enough so they don't get fired. This is scarcity thinking at its finest. I learned of an L.A. garment manufacturer who chose a new paradigm. He wanted to pay his employees as much as he possibly could, so that they in turn would be as productive as humanly possible. Not

only did he pay them a living wage, he had classes at night where they could learn English and move up the career ladder of the company. No surprise, this garment manufacturer, much like In and Out, has a highly dedicated and loyal workforce, as well as a very healthy bottom line. So, ask yourself this: how do we move past a survival mentality? How do we fight off scarcity thinking? How do we help people liberate themselves from ignorance, want, and poverty?

Security

Now that I'm surviving, I want to make sure it at least lasts for a while. The union movement was born out of the security need. Not surprisingly, the union movement was met with great resistance to the point where there were riots in the streets, accompanied by attack dogs, Billy clubs and rifles. Security implies hope, a future, some promise. I can be in this job with both feet on the ground because I know it will last for a while, as long as I do a good job.

Unfortunately, many workers are beginning to understand that unions no longer afford job security. Just ask the folks at United, Delta, and American. When I do in-house training, I will often remind employees that the only form of real job security is to make a *positive contribution*, in a *positive manner*, to a *positive bottom line*. That person can always work with or for me.

Just as employees have a need for security, so do employers. A very difficult proposition when we are lucky to have a talented employee work for us for three years today. There are jobs in our economy today where our tenure is less than one year! If employers want some security, they are going to have to give some.

I think it is important for today's management to be very clear about the needs of any job position and then to find a person who fits that need. Trying to jam a round peg into a square hole because you

want somebody to do something is a formula long gone. The opposite of job security is turnover and if you take this old school approach, that's exactly what you'll get. My experience tells me that these "misfits" leave the jobs they've taken within the first six months.

Belonging

Now that we're surviving and we have the security of knowing it will last for at least a little while, we are ready to belong to something. Unions are great about filling the belonging role. Companies with strong corporate identities can sometimes fill the belonging role. For example, many Silicon Valley engineers are proud of belonging to a company such as Google, HP or Cisco, or Intel.

I will never forget one day when I was interviewing a potential discrimination client who told me that he suffered the indignities that he did for more than a year and a half as opposed to quitting because he didn't want to have to leave the company's softball team. That is how strong the need for belonging is.

What can employees belong to at your company?

One of the favorite buzzwords of marketers is "branding". Many people want to belong to a "brand" whether it's Coca Cola, Harley Davidson or Mercedes.

I believe that just as the need for survival and security are waning on a traditional level, so too is the need for belonging. Evidence: the decline in the bowling league, Moose Lodge and Rotary Club numbers. Notice the decline in corporate teams, company picnics and elaborate holiday parties. Besides, who has the time to belong to anything today?

Ego

This is where we get to strut. Proud as a peacock. On top of the world. Got my house, got my cars,

got my vacations, got my big screen TV, kids even get to go to private school. Got my title, got my desk, got my six figure salary. Got my gym membership, got my facelift, got the second home and a new relationship too. Funny thing is, for some reason I don't feel any happier. Heck, we even have Viagra and Lipitor and Prozac too. If I can't feel good about myself on my own, science will be there to help me out. We have twice as much as our parents and four times as much as our grandparents – but does anyone really feel any happier?

This country has been fueled by its incredible ego. The march toward success, dominance and control. But it's not sustainable. In the end, we realize there's got to be more. There is a yearning today. There's a need today to go beyond our ego. Be wary of the employer or employee driven solely by their ego needs. Sooner or later it comes crashing down. As the song goes, "when you reach the top, get ready to drop." And so many of us now look for something more.

The Spiritual Quest

Whether you call it being "one with yourself", in spiritual alignment, or bringing your soul to work, we realize there is a need for connection, at a deeper level. My kids go to great schools and are engaged in a million activities, but do I really know them? Do they really know me? Would they rather have less stuff and more time together?

We are running so hard we have become disconnected. No time to think, no time to feel, no time to have a real conversation or engage in real dialogue. Just keep running.

Much has been written on man's search for meaning over the last fifty years. My guess is that this is a trend not going away anytime soon. Statistics tell us that we now have more than 50 million "cultural creatives" who are also on this search for meaning. It is heralded that this

collective consciousness will somehow bring great change upon a society. I can only hope they are right.

How do we bring our soul to work everyday?

Answer: by finding the connection. A classic example has been portrayed by Zappos and the Pike's Place Market in Seattle. Two completely different environments where management and employees focus on creating quality connections with their customers. Both environments encourage laughter – what a corporate concept. As the saying goes, "the shortest distance between two people is a smile".

Buckminster Fuller taught that our essence lies in the precessional effect of the work we do. For example, the direct effect of a bumble bee is to feed itself on a flower with its precessional effect being to pollinate the plant. Let me give a different example. Let's pretend you're a CPA. Kind of hard to sing songs or throw a fish around the office. So where's the connection? Again, in the precessional effect. What is the impact you have on a couple who you've counseled to properly manage their money? Conversely, what is the impact you have on a couple who you have not helped properly manage their money? Think of the fights they've had at home resulting from financial mismanagement. Think about how they've treated their children after having those fights. Remember that the number one reason for arguments amongst married couples is over financial concerns. Then you'll start understanding some of the precessional effects of your accounting

firm. How many of your secretaries have talked to clients to understand the full impact of your office's services on their lives? On how, by way of precessional effect, you impact whether there are unnecessary fights at home and whether the parents have saved enough money for their child to go to college.

Fact is, we all effect people's lives. In ways we haven't thought about. Think about the precessional effect three conversations later. The first conversation being you with the client, the second conversation being the client with their employees or family members, and the third impact being how those employees or family members treat their loved ones.

Elizabeth Kantor Ross, known for her research on dying, states that in the end, there's only two questions asked of us – how much have we loved and been loved; and have we been of service. I'll add a third, have we laughed a lot.

Conclusion

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a reference that has been used by educators and management gurus for decades. There really is no improving on it. One would be wise to consider how survival, security, belonging, ego gratification, and spiritual needs are being addressed in our lives and in our companies.

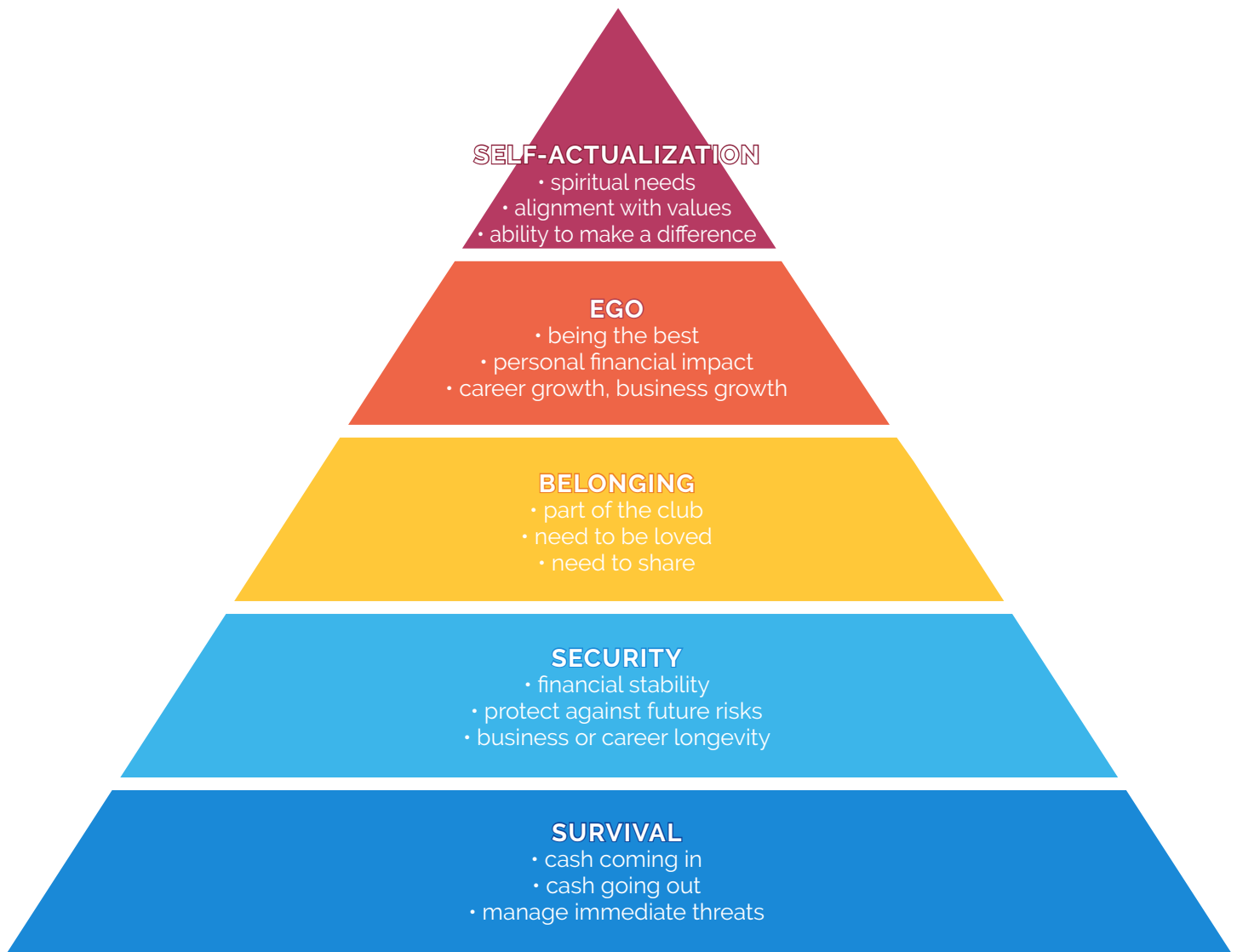


About Don Phin, Esq.

Don Phin is a keynote presenter and strategic advisor. He helps executives and their companies create transformative stories by design.

You can learn more about Don and find great free tools at www.donphin.com. Connect with him at www.linkedin.com/in/donphin or email don@donphin.com.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF EMOTIONAL NEEDS



The point is this: When thinking in terms of retention programs—one size does not fit all. Focus on addressing the employees' needs.

MEETING OUR EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Abraham Maslow is well known for publishing his "Hierarchy of Needs". How well is your agency addressing the following? Remember, attached to every *need* is a *fear* that it won't be met.

Survival – Are wages paid at or above market level? Are they a "living" wage? Are you hiring people desperate for any job?

Safety and Security – Are your health care benefits working? Is the company financially secure? How would employees know? Is there job security? How would they know? How "open" are your books?

Belonging – Have you developed an internal "brand"? Is it on your shirts, marketing materials, lobby, etc? What's your story? How would somebody know without having to ask? Remember, what people *belong* to is the company *culture*.

Ego/Self Esteem – How are people acknowledged? How are their ego needs being met? Do you use thank you notes regularly? Do you show a career path? Do you help publicize their success? Are they constantly learning? Are they working in their "highest and best use"? Are we focused on our "economic hedgehog"?

Self-Actualization – Are we "one" with the work we do? Do we love our jobs? Do we love our clients? Are we growing in our "beingness" as well as our "doingness"? Do we live a balanced lifestyle?