

BASIC HUMAN NEEDS



It is clear that all humans have basic needs. What is not clear is exactly what they are.

We can agree, for instance, that our physiological needs of water, food, air, and a reasonably comfortable environment are crucial to our survival. There is also broad agreement for the idea that humans have psychological needs for autonomy (to feel we have authority of ourselves) and belonging (to feel we are a part of a group) along with a need for physical and psychological safety. Beyond this, there are many different perspectives about what we need.

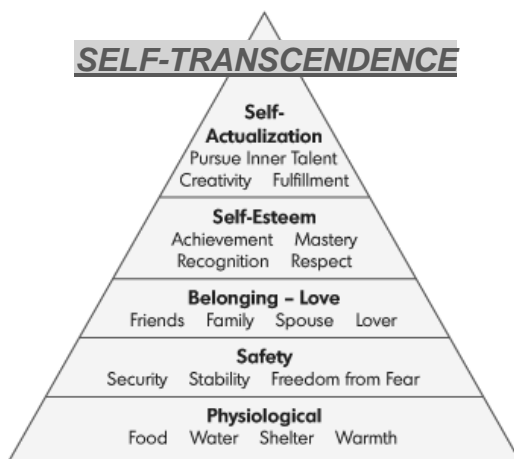
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Most of us recognize this triangle. Abraham Maslow has been attributed with this triangle because his "Hierarchy of Basic Needs" is contained within it...as if the needs were stages of development where we reach a higher level after completing the one below it. This 'managerial approach' was not created by Maslow, however! It was created by business management writers in the late 50's specifically to look like a mountain that we must climb.

The idea for the triangle came from his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" where he described our psychological and sociological needs in addition to physical needs as a "Hierarchy of Needs".



In his paper, however, Maslow clarifies that one need not be met before addressing others. He states: "There are some people in whom, for instance, self-esteem seems to be more important than love." He later adds "In actual fact, most members of our society who are normal, are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time." He continues: "For instance, if I may assign arbitrary figures for the sake of illustration, it is as if the average citizen is satisfied perhaps 85 per cent in his physiological needs, 70 per cent in his safety needs, 50 per cent in his love needs, 40 per cent in his self-esteem needs, and 10 per cent in his self-actualization needs."



Why did we not learn this when we learned about the pyramid he never made?? This is a prime example of why school today is not providing the education we so badly need. Thankfully there is a great deal of information in books and on the internet so that we can dig for the real story.

Kaufman Rocks the Boat!

Scott Barry Kaufman has studied Maslow intensely and discovered that later in life Maslow realized that we also have a deep need for transcendence.

He shares insights like "Maslow defines self-actualization as becoming everything that you're capable of becoming and that you're most uniquely capable of becoming" and "We feel much more fulfilled when we actualize our potentialities, our deepest

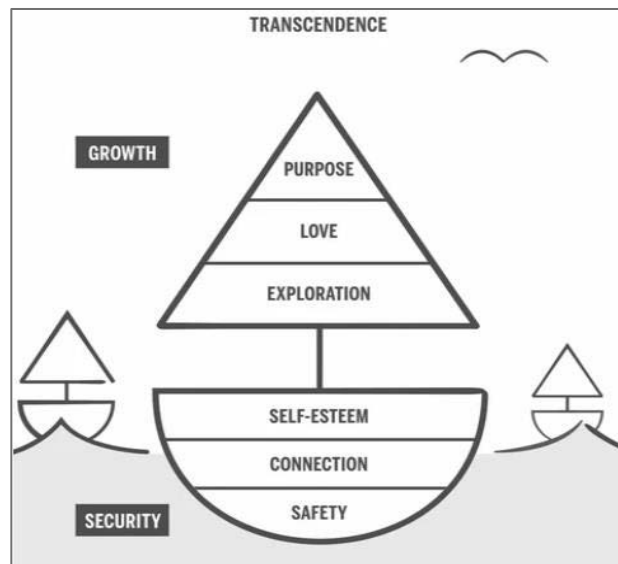
potentials, the things that make us unique, the things that we can uniquely contribute to the world in ways that have a positive impact on the world." He believes that self-actualization, to Maslow, asked the question "What do you most uniquely have to contribute to this world?"

Kaufman also tells us that in "the latter years of Abraham Maslow's life, he was working on a theory of transcendence, arguing that our highest motivation in life wasn't self-actualization but it was actually transcendence. What is good at the highest level of human development, the highest level of human motivation transcendence? What is good for oneself is automatically good for others."

Kaufman revised Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" and traded the pyramid for boat. He tells us:

"I argue that a better metaphor than a static pyramid is a sailboat. With a sailboat we absolutely need to have a boat that is safe and secure or else we don't go anywhere. If you have a huge leak in your boat you're not going very far in life or in the ocean. But being safe and secure and having a secure boat is not enough or else we won't go anywhere. What we need to do is we need to open up our sail, as well. And when we feel very comfortable and safe enough to open up our sail, we can really move through the ocean in the direction that we want, usually it's in a purposeful direction. We have some sort of meaning or purpose in life.

But as we're moving, we're still moving in the vast unknown of the sea and the truth is we're all in this together. We're all in our own boats going in our own direction but we're all in the vast and unknown sea. Especially in this time that we're living in right now. We all see quite clearly how choppy these waters are. But it's important that we recognize that while safety is important in these unknown times, we must not neglect our higher possibilities in life. They're just as important."



I appreciate Kaufman's boat and sea metaphor and his expanded perspective of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. You can find out much more about his insights in his book called *TRANSCEND: The New Science of Self-Actualization*.

Metaphors are great for giving ourselves our mental models, or frames of thinking, so we can more easily access them since there is so much information constantly swirling around us, vying for our attention. Kaufman's idea that the combination of the boat, and the water and even the air suggests that we affect one another. This is critical for development as individuals, keeping in mind that we develop together, since we constantly impact one another.

Adding Ubuntu to Our Basic Needs

UBUNTU means: I am who I am because of who we all are.
(for more about ubuntu, see page xx)

According to the philosophy of ubuntu, we are not fully human while we are thinking of ourselves as solitary individuals. We are, in fact, 'persons-through-other-persons'. The models above describe a solitary individual on their own unique journey. "Ubuntu" reminds us that we are always connected, always impacting one another, always on one shared journey together. Transcendence is important to understand that to improve my life I must do what I can to improve the lives of others, and ubuntu clarifies that the idea of 'others' is an illusion – an incomplete mental model. We are not only interdependent here and now, but that we continue to carry information and behaviors - and much more - from those who have gone before us and passed on their ideas of humanity and wisdom. To me, the ubuntu need differs from the need for belonging because in "belonging" we recognize ourselves as separate from others while the ubuntu recognizes that we are an inseparable part of others.

We constantly struggle with our needs. Our need for belonging and our need for autonomy and agency are often at odds, pulling us in different directions. Sometimes the most important thing for us to do is to reflect and weigh which one will be the better route: Should we take our own path and think and act for ourselves? Or suppress our desire to do something different this time and, instead, to go with the group? The answer is: 'it depends!' We decide, we act, we deal with the consequences, we reflect, we learn and we grow.

The question we must ask ourselves each day is:

HOW AM I ADDRESSING MY BASIC NEEDS?

Our need for UBUNTU envelopes us.

