

## Selecting Strong Objectives

In order to select objectives with high stakes that are driven by a sense of urgency, the objective must be strongly rooted in basic human needs, like: love, recognition, and education. This also creates a universal quality to the objective, allowing any witness of the performance to immediately recognize and relate to this need, thereby strengthening audience empathy with the performance. We can all relate to the need to be loved, to want recognition for something we do well, or for the need to know more.

There are a number of human needs theories and models illustrating basic human needs and motivations. One well-regarded model is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, developed by Abraham Maslow and first published in 1954 with five basic needs. Later developments, made by Maslow and other psychologists and theorists, added more layers to the original five-layered hierarchy, eventually concluding with eight basic needs. Maslow's Hierarchy, later interpreted by placing the needs in a pyramid diagram, is displayed on the following page listing the qualities of the eight needs.<sup>10</sup>

10. Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, Second Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 72-75.



**1. Body Needs** - Feelings of sated hunger, thirst, sleep, sex, physical comfort, well-being, health, energy, and euphoria

**2. Security Needs** - Feelings of safety, security, protection, peace, lack of danger and threat

**3. Social Needs** - Feelings of belongingness, love and being love-worthy, acceptance, and affection—and identifying with a group, family, co-workers, friends

**4. Ego Needs** - Feelings of self-reliance, self respect, self-esteem, achievement, competence, independence, recognition, prestige, success

**5. Cognitive Needs** - Feelings of growth, self-realization, maturity, curiosity, learning, knowing, logic, philosophical and/or religious satisfaction; and feelings of unified connections and values

**6. Beauty Needs** - Feelings of valuing aesthetics, beauty, thrills, delight, comforts, pleasing the senses, perfection, symmetry, rightness, suitability

**7. Ultimate Fulfillment Needs** - Feelings of self-fulfillment, self-actualization, peak experiences, high values and taste, reaching one's ultimate potential

**8. Spiritual Needs** - Feelings of exaltation, mystic experiences, orgasmic emotion, ecstasy, spirituality, nirvana, helping others achieve self-actualization

## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The foundation of human behavior is need. Needs are both biological and psychological. The biological needs are the lowest three levels in the hierarchy: Body, Security, and Love/Affection. The higher levels are psychological: Ego, Knowledge, Beauty, Fulfillment, and Spiritual.<sup>11</sup> The majority of the needs are psychological, and according to this hierarchy, our thoughts and beliefs influence the majority of our actions. In addition, when experiencing biological needs, we respond to these needs by forming thoughts about how to satisfy them. For example, we have thoughts about how we should and should not satisfy our needs for love and affection, food consumption, and appropriate shelter. It is quite a common reaction to express thoughts of regret if a person feels as if he made a bad choice in the pursuit of love or food. Likewise we form beliefs about what is good food or an appropriate place to live. We can surmise then that the character's thoughts and beliefs can be a strong basis, and ultimately a Through-Line, for building the character's TEAM.

Body Needs form the base of the triangle, representing the most basic physiological needs for all human survival. According to Maslow's theory, the lower needs are deficiency motivators, which must be satisfied before one can gratify higher-level needs, or growth motivators. Once lower-level needs are satisfied, we can essentially aspire to higher interests and needs.<sup>12</sup> Below are some examples of how lower needs may hijack the higher needs:

1. A person who is starving must satisfy the Body need first before he can satisfy the higher Cognitive or Beauty needs, like furthering his education or creating art.
2. An individual who does not feel safe will satisfy her Security needs before she can address her Ultimate Fulfillment needs, like going on a book tour to celebrate her new book, or going up for a partner position at her law firm.

11. Abraham H. Maslow, *Towards a Psychology of Being*, Third Edition (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998), 21-43.

12. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 72.

3. A businessman with the Main Objective, *to become a CEO with my company*, but who has a client who threatens his life just before he is going into a meeting with the company partners, will change his immediate need to Security, *to save my life*. His Security need temporarily supersedes his Ultimate Fulfillment need, to become a CEO.

The lower, more biological needs will most likely override the higher, social and self-fulfilling needs, even if a person was already in pursuit of satisfying the higher need. In most cases, the urgency of the immediate lower need rising up will demand attention and satisfaction before the higher needs can be addressed again.

In some cases, however, the character's basic physiological needs do not override the higher needs like self-fulfillment or transcendence, particularly if they are using a base need as a strong tactical choice to get them to a higher need. For example, in Ben Kingsley's portrayal of Gandhi in the movie *Gandhi*, he depicts the true story of a man who goes on a hunger strike as a strong tactical choice to stop hatred and war. Here we have an example of a conscious device used to override a basic human need in order to obtain a higher need, as well as attempt to bring others to higher levels by his example.

## **Needs Are Interpreted Individually**

It is important to understand that these needs are individually interpreted by the person experiencing the need, and according to the given circumstances. When using Maslow's diagram, you must consider the given circumstances of varying cultures, socio-economic conditions, religious beliefs, and personal beliefs. Consider how many different ways people might perceive sex: as a biological need, a social need, or a community building need. Additionally, one person's need and her understanding of when that need is satisfied can be quite different from another person's interpretation.

**[Example]** Consider two people in pursuit of satisfying the Cognitive need for education. One person may feel that he has learned enough once he has satisfied society's requirement of a high school education. He may choose to move on to satisfy his Beauty needs with the nice car and pleasant living conditions. His Cognitive need is satisfied, and

he moves to a Beauty need. However, another person may interpret her Cognitive need as being unsatisfied until she gains a college or graduate school degree. She will put more attention and action into satisfying that need, and delay gratification of the higher Beauty needs.

When working on character analysis, it is important to approach the script like a detective. Determine what your character's individual needs are, how these needs relate to the given circumstances, when each need has been satisfied, and what need the character moves to satisfy next. This may be challenging if your character's values contradict your own, or if these values are far removed from your own life experience. For example, some may assume that anyone who is homeless would not be able to pursue the higher-level needs. However, when we recognize that all these levels are individually interpreted by each person's own beliefs, values, cultural background and levels of personal tolerance, then there are many possibilities to consider for each character.

## ***The Underground***

*I am acting in a new play, written and directed by one of my professors in graduate school. It is a story about homeless people living in the New York City underground tunnels, which connect subways, maintenance tunnels, and deserted pathways for old trains. I play a woman in the underground who is constantly organizing protests and public demonstrations concerning employee rights, taxes, and anything associated with government or big business control issues.*

*As a young actress still developing my craft, I struggle with my portrayal of this character. I keep dwelling on her homeless situation, preferring to focus on her poor living conditions, basing this choice on my own interpretation of her lack. My director pushes me to be more active, to find the joy in her speeches and the blissful excitement of her protests. However, in my own short-sightedness, I interpret her grandstanding as angry, rebellious, and sad. I am failing to see how the role could be played the way the director and playwright indicate.*

*One day, outside of rehearsal, I study and ponder the script with a*

*good friend and director, Robert, who always seems to help me see what I am missing in my acting. He points out to me that this woman, who used to own a big health food store in the city, became frustrated with the bureaucracy of business and government and decided to give it all up and live “on the streets.” He points out that this move to the streets was her decision—not something she perceived as a condition forced upon her. She likes not having to pay taxes, rent, or utility bills and not putting her energy into managing a business. She revels in the freedom found in the underground and now can focus her attention on social action, rallying other homeless individuals to change policies while she works on writing a healthy cookbook. These are all things she could not do when she was struggling to keep her business going and pay bills. This realization that she was not acting like a victim of her homeless situation and was indeed reveling in its freedom suddenly opened my mind to an entirely new understanding of my character's motivations.*

*To support her Body needs of food, drink, and warmth, she manages to make an income by collecting cans and bottles off the street and turning them in for refunds at the local recycle center. She satisfies her Security and Social needs by creating her own supportive family of homeless individuals who develop a security protocol so that all in the underground feel a sense of order and safety. With her lower needs met to **her** satisfaction, she is able to focus on her Ultimate Fulfillment pursuits.*

*Once I made this discovery, I was able to find all the joy, enthusiasm, and vitality in my need-based objective pursuits. My director was pleased with the results and I was liberated in my portrayal of this unique role.*

If you base the character's objectives in clearly identified basic needs, interpreted and justified by the character's given circumstances, you will have a strong, active basis for your acting throughout the story. Although there are other human needs theories besides Maslow's Hierarchy, his model clearly demonstrates how humans may prioritize one need over the other. Basic human needs are universal, regardless of variations in theoretical models, and provide a reliable strategy for an actor to use in detecting and developing strong objectives.

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## *Exercise*

### **Personal Statement Exploration to Help Determine Needs**

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Consider a character you are playing, or could play in the future. Read the entire script, looking for any expressive words or behaviors that might provide you with clues to your character's perceptions of these eight needs. Is your character exhibiting behaviors that reveal comfort and satisfaction with some of the needs? Does your character make statements about being unfulfilled by one or two needs? Imagine yourself "in the shoes of your character," and then read the following statements and check the box next to the ones you feel could be true for your character.

- A** I feel self-reliant, competent, and independent. I am satisfied with the amount of recognition and respect I receive from others. I do feel proud of my accomplishments and abilities.
- B** I feel I belong to, and am loved by, a supportive, affectionate group or family. I have good relationships with co-workers and friends and feel accepted for who I am.
- C** I value and actively collect beautiful things that bring comfort and pleasure to my life. An environment in balanced harmony, which is pleasing to my senses, is important to me and provides a feeling that all is right in my world.
- D** It is important for me to pursue knowledge of things beyond what is necessary for my work. I am curious and enjoy investigating and discussing various topics and beliefs with people. By doing so, I feel I learn more about myself and am better able to connect and understand other people's values.
- E** I feel that my body is reasonably satisfied with regular meals, sleep, and comfortable living conditions. I have sufficient and reliable comforts when it comes to my home environment.
- F** I actively participate and relish in peak experiences. I feel this engagement helps me stretch and reach my ultimate potential. I do tend to set very high standards for myself, as well as for others, and pride myself on having good taste.

- G** I generally feel safe and secure and do not feel as if I need to protect myself from threat or danger. I am rarely, if ever, exposed to uncontrolled circumstances where chaos or violent behaviors would threaten my sense of peace or productivity.
- H** I regularly have feelings of emotional exaltation and ecstasy and often pursue mystic experiences. I define myself as spiritual. I enjoy helping others achieve this state of being, and will put great effort into encouraging others to join this self-actualized way of life.

The boxes checked represent the needs you feel are currently satisfied. The boxes left un-checked represent the needs you feel are currently unsatisfied. A person is most likely going to pursue satisfaction of any low-level needs before going after the higher-level needs.<sup>13</sup>

To interpret which statements match to the needs in the hierarchy, refer to the list of Maslow's Hierarchy below, beginning with the matching letter from the statements listed previously.

- E** 1. **Body Needs** - Feelings of sated hunger, thirst, sleep, sex, physical comfort, well-being, health, energy, and euphoria
- G** 2. **Security Needs** - Feelings of safety, security, protection, peace, lack of danger and threat
- B** 3. **Social Needs** - Feelings of belongingness, love and being love-worthy, acceptance, and affection—and identifying with a group, family, co-workers, friends
- A** 4. **Ego Needs** - Feelings of self-reliance, self respect, self-esteem, achievement, competence, independence, recognition, prestige, success
- D** 5. **Cognitive Needs** - Feelings of growth, self-realization, maturity, curiosity, learning, knowing, logic, philosophical and/or religious satisfaction; and feelings of unified connections and values
- C** 6. **Beauty Needs** - Feelings of valuing aesthetics, beauty, thrills, delight,

13. Ibid.

comforts, pleasing the senses, perfection, symmetry, rightness, suitability

**F** 7. **Ultimate Fulfillment Needs** - Feelings of self-fulfillment, self-actualization, peak experiences, high values and taste, reaching one's ultimate potential

**H** 8. **Spiritual Needs** - Feelings of exaltation, mystic experiences, orgasmic emotion, ecstasy, spirituality, nirvana, helping others achieve self-actualization

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