

Maslow's Hierarchy...30 years old and Keeps On Ticking Do Maslow's Theories Apply in China?

*By Eileen Broer
President, The Human Dimension
www.humandimension.org*

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Summary: In 1998, a new edition of Maslow's book of thirty years ago, *Enlightened Management*, was published with many additions from Maslow's fastidious notebooks. (John Wiley & Sons, 1998). This article discusses the meaning of Maslow's Hierarchy, how to implement it to motivate employees, and the implementation of Maslow's theories in China.

Abraham Maslow's statement, "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself," appears to resonate as strongly with Chinese managers as it does with Western managers.

Maslow's Hierarchy: Basically, Maslow said that we humans are motivated to behave according to a hierarchy of five categories of needs. Our basic needs must be satisfied before we can engage in behaviors that satisfy needs at the higher levels. Our most basic needs are physiological (our need for air...water...food... shelter...). Once those are satisfied, we can more fully direct our energy toward meeting our needs for safety and security. Then we can better address our social needs (to be part of a community...a family...a team...). Then our needs for esteem (appreciation...praise... recognition...).

Self-Actualization: At the top of the hierarchy is our need for *self-actualization*. our need to be all that we can be...to reach our full potential...to fulfill our destiny...to complete our life's work...to have our inner nature express itself freely...to use all of our capabilities...to grow into our own unique self just as fully as a well-nourished acorn becomes an oak.

Maslow's Prediction: Today Maslow might be called a psychic or a futurist. Thirty years ago he predicted a world in which "human potential will be the primary source of competitive advantage in almost every industry, every organization and every institution." Strong companies in today's global, service economies fully recognize that their human resources are their greatest competitive asset.

Attracting and Motivating Employees: Managers continually ask me, "How can I attract and motivate my employees?" Maslow's answer of thirty years ago is even more apt today. He said to "set up social conditions so that the goals of the individual merge with the goals of the organization." In other words, provide working conditions that enable people to meet their own needs in the process of meeting the company's needs.

Meeting Employees' Needs: A manager can easily get overwhelmed trying to figure out how to meet employees' needs, especially when they are all at many various stages of development. Here's what I suggest. Meet your employees' physiological needs through providing competitive salaries and benefits and fairly administering them. Meet safety needs by providing a clean, healthy and safe working environment and job security. Address social needs by providing a sense of community, social events to which employees' families are invited, a place to be part of a team, and supervisors who build strong, caring relationships

with their employees. Meet employees' esteem needs by developing enlightened and empowered managers who collaboratively develop clear roles and mutual goals. Give employees responsibility, information, accountability, lots of appreciative feedback, on-going coaching and regular rewards and recognition. Satisfy self-actualization needs by providing an environment that encourages and rewards people who strive to continually develop themselves. Be a role model. Continue to develop and grow yourself.

How Does the Enterprise Benefit? How does an enterprise benefit by helping employees to self-actualize? Through the study of systems, we know that improvements at one level of a system impact and tend to make improvements at all the other levels at the same time. So, for example, one can improve a country by making improvements in the systems that comprise it. One way to improve a company is to improve the people in it (and vice versa.)

Chinese Career Choice - Past: Until recently the China government placed people in jobs more or less arbitrarily – without benefit of knowing their innate special talents and interests. And when university students had to choose their major field of study, many based their choice mainly on the field's potential to provide a good income. For example, one Chinese woman I worked with in 1998 had chosen to be an auditor when she really wanted to be a fashion designer. She was a very unhappy auditor, and I doubt that she could have been a very good one – no matter how hard she tried -- because of her lackluster energy for the work.

Chinese Career Choice – Future: People in China increasingly have more flexibility in their choice of career. Many have taken advantage of the new opportunities to move from company to company to increase their job satisfaction. Good harvests and expanded communications and transportation links have helped satisfy more of the population's basic needs. China's technological and managerial competence is growing. More and more people are moving higher on Maslow's Hierarchy. Maslow would say that the Chinese people now have more capacity to become self-actualized. As a result, he would say that China itself is increasing its capacity to become self-actualized.