

ACTUALIZING MASLOW

How the Neuro-Semantics Models *Actualize* the Self-Actualization Vision

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Mention *self-actualization* and who's name comes to mind? That's right, and *why* does Abraham Maslow's name immediately emerge? It's because Maslow was the creative genius who drove the emphasis and new ideas in psychology that eventually came to be known as *the human potential movement* in the 1960s. Maslow was also the one who tapped into the spirit of that age, namely, that the sense that the future is wide-open, that we have all kinds of potentials yet untapped, and that at the heart of the meaning of life is becoming and expressing all that we can be.

Noble ideas, right? Indeed! Prior to Maslow, psychology was predominantly past-oriented, archeological in nature—digging up the past, seeking the persons responsible for one's problems and traumas, letting clients off the hook from assuming responsibility, thinking that understanding is curative per se, etc. Due to Maslow's influence and that of many others, they initiated a paradigm shift. In the scientific revolution that became known as the human potential movement, Maslow began exploring how to *model the best in human beings*, not the worst and not the most pathological. This enabled him to move away from the psychology of pathology as he and others initiate the *Human Potential Movement* thereby challenging and transforming the basic assumptions of traditional psychology.

Pioneers of the human potential movement offered *a new paradigm* about human nature. Key among their most revolutionary ideas were the following, ideas that governed their new approach:

- C People innately have the resources and drive to grow and fulfill their nature.
- C Self-actualizing is the natural and the ultimate purpose of life.
- C Unlike animals, we don't have hard-wired instincts for knowing how to be human.
- C We have to discover and invent how to live and be by fulfilling our lower and higher needs.
- C People naturally learn and change when interferences are removed and the right environment is provided.
- C Growth through ongoing learning and change is not only natural and innate but our key "instinct" for survival.

- C Pathology is the exception, not the rule, and not the direction of growth but the interference of growth.
- C Trusting the natural process means giving unconditional positive regard.

So What happened to Self-Actualization?

- C Who talks about self-actualization these days in the tradition of the human potential movement?
- C What are the specific patterns, processes, paradigms, etc. that enable us to self-actualize?
- C Does society, schools, business, media, families, or government make it easier or more challenging to self-actualize these days?
- C What organizations are structured to enable employers to find and develop their best talents and become emotionally engaged at work?

The answer is that while most people intellectually accent to the ideas of self-actualization, we seldom actually use them as practical for everyday life. Isn't that strange? Some of the most exciting and revolutionary ideas in the most thirty years, yet we still find them impractical. What explains this?

What if the problem is that Maslow himself needed to actualize this actualization ideas, that is, make them real in practical terms?

- C Suppose the problem with self-actualization being actualized arose in part from some of the original ideas of the human potential movement?
- C *What if the problem is that Maslow himself needed to actualize this actualization ideas, that is, make them real in practical terms?*
- C What if the problem about "being all we can be" and releasing all of our untapped hidden potentials is that there are few, if any, specific processes for actually making that happen?

If we wanted to invent a way to actualize Maslow and his ideas of self-actualization so that we could integrate self-actualization in the way we live and relate and succeed? What would we need to create? So what's the problem? Why did the human potential movement not create more transformation in schools, society, government, companies, and corporations?

Actualizing Maslow

I first studied Maslow in the 1970s and then revisited his writings when I was working on a book on *Motivation* (1987). In my most recent re-visit of Maslow's works and those of the *human potential movement*, looked to see the relevance of self-actualization to coaching. What I discovered is that to effectively use the inspiring ideas in that movement we need to *actualize* Maslow's model.

His concepts about human nature and his distinctions about people, learning, growth, transformation, meaning are inspiring, optimistic, and profound. No wonder his writings spread around the world so quickly and even today are still pervasive in business, sports, psychology, education, spirituality, etc. Yet there's a problem with his writings. Maslow wrote in global concepts, sweeping generalizations, and lacked specifics about how to implement the ideas.

If we are to actualize Maslow, what would we have to do? I'm glad you asked. To actualize Maslow and the great promises of the *human potential movement*, here are four things that we will

need to do:

We will need to —

- 1) Translate the *vision* of self-actualization into a specific *model*.
- 2) Re-model the hierarchy of needs to make it more holistic and systemic.
- 3) Create specific patterns for accessing and managing “peak” experiences.
- 4) Create a synthesis between meaning and performance.

1) Translate the Vision of Self-Actualization into a Specific Model.

I discovered that to effectively use the inspiring ideas in that movement we need to *actualize* Maslow’s model.

Maslow’s vision of his “third force” in psychology was to build a psychology based on studying and modeling *the best examples* of human beings—people at their best, rather than at their worst. He said that the time had come for us to move beyond the psychology of pathology and develop a psychology of tapping into people’s full range of potentials to develop to their highest levels, stimulate peak experiences, and move beyond the lower

deficiency needs (D-needs) to the higher expressive, growth, or *being needs* (B-needs). He noted that these meta-needs create a new dimension of motivation, *Being-motivation*, the higher motivation of self-expression and being-ness.

What do we mean by self-actualization? *Self-actualization* refers to “making real or actual” our innate talents, aptitudes, and possibilities to release our highest potentials. We do this by satisfying our lower needs that drive us (i.e., food, water, sleep, etc., safety, love and affection, and self-esteem) and moving into the highest *being needs* by learning, growing, changing, and transforming. In this we are becoming our best self and becoming “fully functioning” (Carl Rogers).

As this happens we begin to more regularly experience “peak experiences.” These occur at those times and places where we become so engaged and focused that the world and time and self go away and we become completely lost in the moment. Today we call that the “flow” state.

The problem that plagued Maslow and the other pioneers in the human potential movement is that while they inspired a whole generation with *a new vision* of what’s possible for human beings, they failed to create a discreet, specific, and detailed *model*. They were excellent at *awakening*, they were miserable at *actualizing*. Actually, it’s worse than that.

Most of them intentionally resisted creating specific patterns or techniques, considering doing so unacceptable. Carl Rogers thought that any kind of *direct* intervention with even a therapy client was manipulative and invasive. He said that all people needed (even in the context of healing and therapy) was unconditional positive regard, empathy, and personal congruency or authenticity. And, of course, he was the one who popularized the idea of *non-directive* therapy as he created “client centered non-directive therapy.”

Now some people are creative, intuitive, or lucky enough to take a grand idea like the self-actualization vision and make it happen in their lives. They are the fortunate ones, and the exceptions. *Most of us need a process, even numerous processes with specific techniques.* Most of us need *a map* that provides guidance and direction as to where to go, what to do, what beliefs to shift, etc. This becomes even more critical when attempting to assist someone in self-actualizing.

How do we do that? Yet most in the human potential movement looked upon “techniques” (and human technology) as cold, sterile, and depersonalizing. That’s why they resisted inventing patterns and processes. They only sought to inspire the vision and create the inter-personal context of safety and support assuming that the self-actualization would naturally emerge.

Today we know that while that inter-personal context is tremendously important, *it is not enough.* We need *a map* for how to get there, how to navigate the territory on the way to self-actualization, and we need guidance from those who have pioneered the journey. None of this inherently depersonalizes or robs us of our choice, freedom, or responsibility.

In re-visiting of Maslow, Rogers, May, and others, I set out first to collect the central theoretical premises of self-actualization, identify the key component parts and the central guidelines. From that I have put together numerous patterns from NLP and Neuro-Semantics that can translate self-actualization into everyday life. Using some of the formulations in Neuro-Semantics and Developmental Psychology, this has led to the creation of the Neuro-Semantics of Self-Actualization, the Matrix of Self-Actualization, and the Self-Actualization Quadrants.

2) Re-Model the hierarchy of needs so it becomes more systemic and holistic.

Maslow made a revolutionary discovery in his distinction between lower and higher needs. In recognizing that we are motivated, driven, and moved by both *lower* and *higher* needs, he was able to separate two dimensions of life— life lived in *deficiency* and life lived in *abundance*. It is only when we satisfy the lower needs that we can transcend that dimension of life and move to a meta-dimension. In fact, Maslow used the word *meta* (higher) to describe the meta-needs, meta-motivation, even meta-pathology, and the richness of meta-gratifications and peak experiences.

Yet Maslow made a mistake. It wasn’t intentional. He may not have ever been aware of the source of the mistake or that it was a mistake at all. If you’ve read Maslow, you know that he passionately argued that we live in a *process* universe of continual change, movement, and growth and that he sought to describe life in process terms rather than the “reification” of terms that make things static and rigid. To *reify* is to turn a process into *a thing* (same as nominalization in transformational grammar). Yet while he knew this, he accidentally (this is my assumption) picked a static triangle or pyramid to model the hierarchy of needs. Unconsciously this made the model very non-holistic and non-systemic.

To picture our needs and wants as a pyramid suggests that they are strictly hierarchical, which they are not. It also implies that there is no overlap between the drives, which also is not true. And worst, it portrays our dynamic nature of thinking, emoting, framing, speaking, acting, relating, etc. as static, which it is not.

What we need today is to re-model the hierarchy of needs by *tossing out the pyramid* and using some image that's more dynamic and systemic. Since we have already achieved this with the Matrix model using the imagery of the "whirlwind," the spiraling winds of our mind-and-emotions, our thinking-and-emoting. This now allows us to track over the lower needs to the primary states and the higher needs to the meta-levels of our meta-states and embedded frames within frames. This allows us to think and work more systemically with these needs. In Neuro-Semantic we have done this in the Matrix of Self-Actualization (see *The Matrix Model*, 2003).

The point in that model is that once we move up to meaning-making, we never again naively experience even our most biologically driven needs (food, sex, bonding, etc.). From the moment we frame them with *meanings*, we experience them through our meanings. This is so powerful that we can even over-ride our most "instinctive" needs (survival, food, etc.) with our meanings to thereby create such experiences as suicide, anorexia, etc.

3) Create specific patterns for accessing and managing "peak" experiences.

The research and writings of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi about *flow* have given more specificity to what Maslow meant by "peak experiences." Today Martin Seligman, former President of the American Psychological Association, has been mapping out in his "positive psychology" movement. Formerly, William Glasser detailed out some of this in his studies on "positive addition."

In NLP several people, Robert Dilts, Judith DeLozier, and John Grinder very early began modeling geniuses and exploring the prerequisites of genius. When I created the Meta-States model, I stood on their shoulders and began extending the list of prerequisites and then meta-stating them into a pattern that we in Neuro-Semantics call "*the genius pattern*." This has allowed us to model the specific attitudes, frames, emotions, and states that make up the gestalt experience of stepping into a "genius" state of focus where the world, time, self, and others go away empowers us to now take charge of the process so that we can turn it on and off at our command.

With *the genius pattern* we can now have complete access to the state of flow in order to get into "the zone." After all, the peak experience of being in flow, or in a highly focused state is a structured experience which we all experience from time to time. Those who are able to use this "genius" state intentionally can simply step into the state and be *all there*, having complete access to all their resources. We recognize these as the experts, geniuses, and masters of some craft or art. And now we have a way to replicate this experience and enrich it and bring it under our control. In the "accessing personal genius" pattern we use the meta-stating process to set the frames to create this. (This is what the APG training and the book *Secrets of Personal Mastery* is all about.)

Our meanings reign. That is, from there, our meanings transform even our experience of the needs as we semantically load them with meaning or deprive them of meaning.

4) Create a synthesis between meaning and performance.

While Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, and others in the *human potential movement* emphasized meaning, as did Maslow, *meaning* was not only downplayed in the hierarchy of needs, it is almost entirely missing. What Maslow realized that our "needs" at all levels are not absolutes he failed to map this

distinction. They operate relative to the meanings we attribute to them. After we travel up and down the levels of needs the first times, we create our first meanings about them—what a particular “need” is, what it means to us, how the need relates to us, how to fulfill it, etc. After that, *our meanings reign*. From then on, our meanings transform even our experience of the needs as we semantically load them with meaning or deprive them of meaning. In this realm, our human psychologies structure our experience, that is, it is the “logics” of our frames within frames that determine our experience.

It is our nature as meaning-makers and the role that meaning which influences even our experience of our instinctual and instinctoid needs. This makes *meaning* the critical factor in our experiences, drives, and motivations, not the needs. After we move beyond our first simple and naive experience of our needs during childhood, we embed our needs *within* our meanings. Then we see them through the filter of our meanings. Then they become psycho-needs. After that, our responses are performances of meaning, that is, we are acting out, feeling out, and seeking to actualize those meanings.

When our meanings are healthy, appropriate, enhancing, empowering, and expanding our life experience, we often have *peak* experiences. But when the meanings are limited, or worse, when they are toxic and morbid, then our responses (our meanings-in-action) become our toxic habits and self-sabotaging life-styles. We then create semantically loaded meanings that control our lives. This can create a living hell for ourselves, or for others.

If our meanings are that powerful in governing our lives, then we need a model that can track our meanings, the construction of the meanings, the embedded frames of meanings that we build up, etc. In Neuro-Semantics we have done that with the *Meta-States* and the *Matrix* models. This enables us now to work with the synthesis of meaning and performance, which is what the *Self-Actualization Quadrants* distinguishes so that we can diagnose any performance in terms of meaning and activity and discern which is needed most.

In the Meta-States model, we have distinguished eight dimensions or processes by which we create meaning and layer meanings upon meanings to create our entire Matrix of meaning. With this we are thereby enabled to explore the meaning of an experience at multiple layers and to frame, reframe, deframe, or outframe in order to create the richest and most empowering of meanings for unleashing our potentials.

Actualizing Maslow

To Actualize Maslow and the great promises of the *human potential movement*, we need to—

The Task

- 1) Translate the vision of self-actualization into a specific model.
- 2) Re-model the hierarchy of needs so that it is more holistic and systemic.
- 3) Create specific patterns for accessing and managing “peak” experiences
- 4) Create a synthesis between meaning and Performance

The Solution

- Neuro-Semantics of Self-Actualization
- The Matrix of Self-Actualization
- Accessing Personal Genius Pattern
- The Self-Actualization Quadrants

Introducing the Neuro-Semantic Models for Self-Actualization

Neuro-Semantics describes human nature as an *embodied experience of meaning*. That is, we are a class of life that use our nervous systems to transform information “out there” and then process that information as we bring it in and construct, encode, represent, and frame that information. As our neurological equipment (sense receptors, spinal chord, brain, cerebral cortex, etc.) *processes* information we *create meaning*—felt meaning, abstract meanings, and our entire Matrix of meaning frames. All of this is literally *embodied* (in our body) and *semantic* (meaning) in nature and describes our essential nature and how we function in the world.

By the time we receive the signal messages from our sense receptors (e.g., eyes, ears, skin, tongue, nose, etc.) we become aware of that information and begin *representing* it on the theater of our mind. That’s when the reflexivity really kicks in as we mentally-and-emotionally reflect on our previous conclusions, layer upon layer. It is this which creates the psycho-logical levels of our mind as we create a meaning system, a matrix of frames.

So what are the Neuro-Semantic Models that can enable us today to actualize Maslow?

- 1) *The Meta-States model* describes how we layer level upon level thoughts-and-feelings that set a higher frame as interpretative structures for our meaning-making.
- 2) *The Matrix model* uses this as the meaning— intention matrices from which we then load the five most critical content matrices of self, power, others, time, and world.
- 3) *The Neuro-Semantics of Self-Actualization* specifies the theoretic framework of self-actualization along with the variables, guidelines, and patterns.
- 4) *The Matrix of Self-Actualization* uses the Matrix model for creating a robust matrix of

self-actualization.

5) *The Self-Actualization Quadrants* is built on the two axes of *meaning* and *performance* and describes the pathway to self-actualization through E.Q., accessing personal genius, synthesizing meaning and performance, and meta-detailing.

Summary

- C Great ideas without practical models to make them actual and real in our everyday lives can greatly inspire, but not implement the new reality.
- C Today we can *actualize* the self-actualization vision and ideals of Abraham Maslow using the methodology of coaching to synthesize our meanings and performance to create an empowering embodied meaning.
- C The new models in Neuro-Semantics provide specific processes of actualizing our highest and best and for mobilizing the resources needed to unleash those potentials yet untapped.

Author:

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