



Understanding the Six Basic Human Needs - Second in a Series

Need for Certainty and Significance During Transition

My company is growing and I am terrified

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In the last article I introduced the idea that “our needs are never in conflict with another’s needs.” “Really,” you ask, “How can that be?” Well, let’s say that you have unspoken angst in your heart because the company that you work for is crossing an important threshold expanding their small business to a medium sized corporation. It is an exciting time for your company and a deep abyss of fear and doubt for you. Your company has a strong need for growth and expansion, however you were comfortable with the “status quo.” Deep inside you resist the change with trepidation because you have a high need for certainty.

The Six basic human needs have been identified as: Certainty, Uncertainty (Variety), Significance, Connection/Love, Contribution, and Growth. This article is the second in a series of disquisitions laying the foundation for understanding the six basic human needs and their importance to us. When we understand our needs, we can find resolution and peace when those needs appear to be in conflict.

Because many are familiar with *Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*, which is foundational to the work of Cloé Madanes and Tony Robbins, I will use bridge-language for the sake of introduction and familiarity; then provide a brief history preceding these concepts and amplify the understanding of each need and how it might apply in the work environment.

Abraham Maslow was one of the first theorists to create a hypothesis recognizing that human beings are driven by contrasting elements at different times and diverse circumstances during the course of their lives. This was revolutionary in Maslow’s era because it was a departure from Freud who viewed humans as almost entirely driven by primitive urges like sex and aggression. In the behaviorist’s view, feelings were not recognized as valid and therefore should not be attended to. Rather, behaviorists held the position that people were simply programmable machines that could be trained into doing just about anything through a Pavlovian response.

Since needs are universal, those who are in denial regarding their needs are possibly buying into a concept that *having needs* is wrong. The research provides enough support to challenge that thinking and elevate our understanding. When counseling with my clients, some have opposingly said, “I don’t have any needs,” with a tone that indicates it would be a sign of weakness to admit they have them. There is another sector of individuals who are completely unaware of their needs because they have been in denial for so long that they do not know how to identify or attend to their needs. It is my intent to bring self-awareness to the surface so that relationships in all domains of life can improve. Once we begin to identify what particular need is at the root of our anxiety we are able to move toward resolution.



Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs



It is also essential to understand that some of our needs do not surface unless *unsatisfied* lower needs are met. This hierarchical ladder is not meant to imply that those who focus on higher needs are somehow better than those who focus on lower needs; it is not that type of hierarchy. Depending upon what is happening in our lives determines what needs will be triggered at any given moment. The two lowest levels of the pyramid are important to our physical survival and once those basic needs are met, new desire emerges to share ourselves with others and accomplish things. Then, when that need is met, the next need emerges et al. Maslow held to the hypothesis that as our need to accomplish and contribute to others is met another need begins to surface. Keep in mind, this is not necessarily a lock-step process because we have many domains vying to have their needs met and *parts* that simultaneously are at different stages of life. Some *parts* are seemingly in conflict with each other, which explain how we can get stuck in life and experience internal angst. As we identify a particular need we can begin to understand what each need is informing us of and then develop an action plan.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION If you are an individual with a high need for **certainty**, you might feel threatened at many levels that you cannot identify. Nevertheless, you may not be feeling secure for various reasons and that is what we want to begin to understand because it can be self-sabotaging. This is where reports of dwindling employee morale and dissent or fear among the caste is stoked. Judgment and accusation are hurled amongst the ranks toward leaders because of the changes that are being implemented. Unfortunately, if your inner needs are not identified and dealt with, the very thing you fear with your uncertainty might come to pass through a self-fulfilling prophecy and self-defeating cycle. This is not to say your need for certainty is bad, as it may provide the heightened energy to ensure that you have a secure place in the company, especially if you have strong accompanying needs for growth and contribution.

A person with a primary need for **significance** believes their happiness is derived from feeling respected as an important contributor. If you have a high need for **significance**, you could possibly perceive you are under siege as you imagine being lost in the shuffle as additional recruits are added, especially if you draw a significant portion of your personal identity from your position at the company you work for. However, if you allow this need to fuel your strengths you will continue to strive to the respect and admiration that you desire. You will garner a relentless energy to enjoin the transition in a way that your company will recognize your efforts.

As the above examples imply, it is what we do with our needs that matter. Having needs is never the issue, as we all have needs. The goal in discovering our basic human needs is realizing how they impact our lives. When we work in alignment with these needs we find fulfillment and if we work against these needs and diminish them we invite conflict into our lives. This is a profitable approach

to understanding how to *think about* our needs when they are triggered by circumstances or conflict. This approach is called meta-cognition, which means, "think about what you are thinking about."

Remember this important distinction when it feels as if you are in conflict with someone else, "My needs and your needs are never in conflict."



There are many layers and parts to us.
Is it any wonder that it takes a lifetime of discovery to get to know these parts and understand the needs that are within?
Art Credit: Adam Martinakis

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Cal Kripke - Contributing Editor

SIX OF ONE, HALF A DOZEN OF THE OTHER

I don't always need what I want but I always want what I need. If you're like me, (*and I know I am*) you never need anything until you do and then you need it in the worst way. In my near half century of life, I have found my wants, however frivolous, are well defined but my needs are a bit ambiguous. Have you ever said to yourself, "I want the Johnny Red Rider pellet gun with the army grip and super scope" or "I want a sloppy joe, extra sloppy with jalapeños?" Well, of course not, you probably have better taste than I do. My point is I know exactly what it is I want, but ask me what I need and it isn't so easy to explain. I always need something... to do something that will meet some need... though I don't always know what that need is. Aside from confusing our needs with our wants ("I *need* a cherry red Porsche with flames on the fender!") we often do not know what we really need until we find it, and without understanding our need, we strike blindly at the solution with our wants.

I happen to be a pragmatic man, though not severely so, and I hold well-formed archetypes, one of which is the male hero. I am ostensibly a "Protector" in the Greek sense, a Spartan. My needs should be meager, because my needs should be... "Spartan," *i.e. sternly disciplined and rigorously simple, frugal, or austere*. Yet my needs are not so simple, for I am more than what I think I am. The way we see ourselves is an important dimension of our needs. I need what I do not understand, so as I sought out understanding I was surprised to learn there are 6 definable human needs common to all of us. "Ha!" I scoffed with indifference, "Six of one, half a dozen of the other. Good luck finding me in that list."

The idea of a protector conjures images of courage, nobility, sacrifice, audacity, tempest, and tragedy. How do I get those needs met? Am I sure I even want to meet such needs? Probably not in the classical sense for Odysseus was a hero but he did not escape tragedy. I might want a different outcome. So with that in mind, I decided to evaluate my human needs through the eyes of a gifted coach. I was eager to know what fueled my drive and intentions. Was it a need for significance? A Spartan would desire significance in his



role, would he not? Or perhaps it is his contribution... His contribution to society in the role of a defender? Maybe his growth is the number one need... to grow in stature, skill, and knowledge; becoming the sublime warrior. "No," I thought, "that isn't it, it is rather his need for uncertainty!" Yes, the adventure and variety of the Spartan, the warrior mindset! That must be it! So as my evaluation came to a close I felt the warmth on my face as the clouds parted and rays of sunshine fell upon me. I could hear the siren voices of the Valkyries of Valhalla singing a warriors melody... I was ready! With a broad smile my coach exclaimed pertly, "Your number one human need is Love and Connection!" As I stood expressionless (as one stands expressionless when offered a vegetarian burger or unwraps a gift of socks) I said, "I think we should check the data again..." My coach patiently repeated the results and the meaning behind it.

The data checked out, I now knew what my primary human need was, "Love and Connection," but what if the other Men of Sparta discovered this? They'd never invite me on their campaigns again! I might become a mere shield bearer! Some Spartan's caddy! As fear turned to panic, my coach did what coaches do, she coached me, "Don't you see how your number one human need has developed your calling?" I was being cleverly tuned to another channel of thought... It was not the outcome of the protector that this spoke to... the actions of a protector... it was what *made* the protector, what *motivated*, *compelled*, and *gave courage* to the protector.

As I assimilated the information into my simple Spartan mind I acquired an unanticipated shift in my thinking. I began to own the definition of my number one need. I was compelled to protect because of my love and connection with those substantial people in my life. I would want to preserve them, watch over them, stay alert for the danger. Yet my Spartan mind was still thinking one dimensionally. "You don't have just one need," my tenacious coach explained, "You have 6 needs. Love and connection is just your number one."

"Oh." I whispered with some surprise, "I suppose I do need them all." As I pondered on the greater meaning of my needs I became more satisfied in my number one. I was acting upon an intimate calling and it was supported by way of every human need. My calling answered all of them. I understood that if the number one reason for my calling were out of significance it would look very different, like a super hero. If out of contribution, perhaps it would take the form of a peace officer. In the realm of love and connection, I act from a foundation of loyalty, commitment, and endurance; motivated by the source of my strength, those I love and are connected to.

Now I understand the nexus of my needs and wants. I now know what makes me "tick" and while it may not matter to everyone, when the Men of Sparta ask me what my number one human need is I prefer to say, "You know... Six of one, half a dozen of the other" and they nod in agreement, for we Spartans all prefer the ambiguity.

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