

Considering the needs vs. wants of others

by BROCK WEIR

Any of us who went through school in Ontario most likely knows the basics of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, but sometimes it feels like a refresher might be needed.

The pyramid model developed by psychologist Abraham Maslow in the middle of the Second World War was intended to break down, in easily digestible categories, what humans need to lead and maintain an ideal existence. Or, at least one where all their most pressing needs are met.

The Pyramid is often dusted off in school courses under the broad business umbrella, but if it's been a while, here's a capsule refresher.

At the bottom of the pyramid is our most integral need ? the Physiological ? which includes the necessities of air, water, food and shelter. It's foundational place on the model is, of course, a testament to its unnegotiable place for humans the world-over.

The next level encompasses safety needs such as health and security when it comes to the personal, emotional and financial.

Love and social needs come next, and this entails family, friendship, trust and acceptance, among other factors.

This level is followed by Self-Esteem which, of course, relates to confidence, respect of others and, when it's boiled down, the tools the individual needs to be unique in themselves.

At the top of most models of this pyramid lies Self-Actualization, which includes creativity, purpose, and an inner moral compass.

As much as this was drummed into us from reasonably early ages, I wonder if this structure is still relevant today. I very much doubt anyone would dispute the foundational needs of air, water, food, shelter, and rest as the very cornerstones of our survival, but it seems that some of these lines are now blurred; that the once seemingly clear line between needs and wants are being bulldozed together for many reasons, practical and sometimes political.

Each day, whether it's an idea that has been floated in a Council Chamber, provincial legislature, or the House of Commons, or even a community initiative with a dollar value assigned to it, we hear the hue and cry of ?Do we really need this?? or ?Who asked for this?? Some groups might readily raise their hands to the last question, while others might answer the former with a resounding ?Yes!? leaving still more scratching their heads ? often in show rather than genuine puzzlement. And this performative act is often accompanied by innuendo subtle and not-so-subtle that clearly indicates they know the answer to their queries.

This approach was underscored to me in a reasonably benign way over the weekend during a family gathering where one acquaintance lit upon the subject of a number of provincial and federal investments that have been made on matters to our self-sufficiency as a country.

One bone that was not of contention was the need to preserve our farmland so we can rely on ourselves, as Canadians, to feed one another. But the conversation sharply turned in another direction when it came to efforts on vaccine production here at home, the merits of investments allocated for made-in-Canada EV batteries, as well as the merits of Canada tackling climate change solutions when some countries that are larger producers of pollution are moving full speed ahead damn the environmental consequences.

?Why should we need to do Z if Y is not doing Z?? was the essence of the question, apparently setting the stage for the ol' ?If you can't beat ?em, join ?em? spirit of resignation.

Throughout the conversation, however, it struck me that what we need to collectively do to tackle any of these problems and, in turn, offer solutions, can be seen through some lenses as a 'want' rather than a 'need,' with very little room allowed to consider other perspectives.

In many ways, it reminded me of a couple of exchanges I had last week. One such missive, tendered via email, asked when 'we' (and I can only presume that was the 'royal we?') would be holding a 'straight pride' extravaganza as, apparently, the 2SLGBTQIA+ edition was a mere frill and spectacle rather than something that tackled a basic need.

A couple of days later, another missive came my way questioning the need to recognize our Indigenous people through this week's National Indigenous Peoples' Day and similar observances related to Truth & Reconciliation in the autumn. The suggestion being that the news is saturated in this particular topic?apparently in a way that stirred discomfort for some.

In both cases, as far as I could surmise from their introductory remarks, neither individual was a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, nor did they identify in any way as Indigenous.

In some ways, it was unsurprising that persons belonging to neither community would see observances like these as wants versus needs. However, if they took some time to walk in each demographic's respective shoes, I feel the need would probably have been quite evident.

Back in 2015, Amnesty International produced a fairly succinct list of reasons why Pride events, such as the York Region Pride Parade that took place in Newmarket this past Saturday, are relevant and needed.

First, 'people are still attacked because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.' Second, 'Prides are an opportunity to challenge homophobic and transphobic legislation.' Third, 'Rights can never be taken for granted.' Fourth, 'Prides contribute to changing hearts and minds.' Fifth and finally, 'Prides are empowering.'

In a similar vein, Indigenous people, particularly women and girls, are still being attacked for their identity; discriminatory legislation still exists; treaty rights are still tenuous and sadly contentious; events to commemorate the day contribute to valuable cultural exchanges and lay down bricks on the road to true reconciliation.

There is no doubt in my mind that these observances are empowering not just to the communities being recognized, but all of us who are interested in fostering a stronger and more united country.

If you haven't walked the walk, these events and observances might not hit home with you. They might seem irrelevant, unrelatable, or nice-to-haves rather than need-to-haves, but it must be remembered that is only your lived experience. For many others, they are essential from perspectives cultural, historical and inclusive.

Physiological, safety, love and social, self-esteem - all of Maslow's boxes are ticked, as would so many further boxes if Maslow was still around to tinker with his pyramid 80 years later.

These celebrations, times of remembrance, and initiatives might not appeal to you, but for countless others they are a vital way of expressing one's self, imparting new perspectives on shared history and could very well, at the end of the day, save the lives of people who are 'othered' in so many spheres of life.