

# motd



by **Rob Kolstad**

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## Needs

In the late 1960s, when the psychological world embraced behaviorism and psychoanalysis as its twin grails, Abraham Maslow proposed a hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy was brought to mind because I am hosting the Polish computing champion for a short visit, and he often asks questions of the sort, "Why would anyone need such a large car?"

Maslow listed, in order:

- Physiological needs, including air, food, water, warmth, shelter, etc. Lack of these things can cause death.
- Safety needs, for coping with emergencies, chaos (e.g., rioting), and other periods of disorganization.
- Needs for giving and receiving love, affection, and belonging, as well as the ability to escape loneliness/alienation.
- Esteem needs, centering on a stable, high level of self-respect and respect from others, in order to gain satisfaction and self-confidence. Lack of esteem causes feelings of inferiority, weakness, helplessness, and worthlessness.

"Self-actualization" needs were the big gun of the thesis. They exemplified the behavior of non-selfish adults and are, regrettably, beyond the scope of this short article.

As I think about the context of "needs" vs. "wants" or "desires" in our culture, economy, and particularly among the group of readers of this publication, it seems that we're doing quite well for the easy needs (physiological needs and safety). I know many of my acquaintances (and myself!) are doing just super in their quest for better gadgetry, toys, and "stuff" ("whoever dies with the most toys wins").

As I try to answer my visitor's sincere questions, I find myself trying to differentiate between "needs" and "neat stuff that's fun to have." I'm delighted that I am in a position to focus purchasing power and time on "neat stuff" instead of my next meal.

But he's not the only one to say, "Why would anyone need three refrigerators?" (The answer is: one for the kitchen/food, one for drinks and entertaining, one for film and paper in the darkroom.) I think the answer to the question lies more in the question than in the answer. I think that in our well-compensated part of the economy, we often don't focus on needs like food and safety (and I'm sure some of us don't focus on the needs for love, esteem, and self-actualization) when it is so simple to trade money for time and convenience. I like reclaiming time (the true nonrenewable resource from each person's point of view) and making my life easier (e.g., a self-propelled lawn mower, an attachment to the TV that enables me to press pause to take a phone call and then un-pause to resume a real-time program where it left off).

This causes me to reflect. Gadgets and toys are fun. What about love, esteem, and the elusive self-actualization? These are harder (and dramatically more difficult to purchase in any sincere way)!

I haven't looked at this list for years. Now that I've performed the research for this article, I'm going to think about it a bit to see how my life is doing for those other needs. I think it's OK but I want to make sure that I don't fail to seize the day.