

Chapter 13 Understanding Motives

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PUBLIC SPEAKING: AN IDEA PERSPECTIVE
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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:

1. appreciate the need to get to know people.
2. understand motives and how they interrelate within the cognitive mix.
3. help others to reach their goals.

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. explain ways of learning the motives within an audience.
2. define and provide examples within the single-motive approach.
3. list, define, identify and/or give examples of the seven impelling motives.

The observation that people think deductively should not be taken to mean that they are valid (or even reasonable) in their thinking. Recognizing that there are three areas (at least) in our cognitive system, unto itself, underscores the complexity of our brains.

There are logical inconsistencies in each area and between them. These contradictions are often going to come to our awareness. We are going to want to do something that someone important to us (parent/wife/friend/employer) doesn't want us to do. We are going to want something that we can't afford. We are going to believe something that doesn't seem to be true at the particular time. In most of these cases we resolve the issue in a way that permits us to make minimum, if any change (like concluding that we simply misunderstood the other person) or by figuring out a way to do what we want to (we can put the item on Visa and pay that off a little at a time).

Our ways of resolving intrapersonal conflicts often involve what McGuire called a "wishful thinking" component. We distort our logic in the direction of what we want to be true, i.e. consistent with our goals and motives.

Often, we as ethical communicators need to help others (and allow them to help us) reduce the wishful thinking component. It is easier to help them if we can act before the distortion occurs to align appropriate behaviors with individual goals. Once wishful thinking occurs, the alignment is more difficult. Either process demands a working knowledge of motives.

To understanding motivation we must study how emotional arousal interacts with the goal area of people's cognitions. On an individual basis, this isn't easy. Surprisingly, it may be easier when considering audiences.

Speeches are generally given to groups that have some history and, often, some public record. For example, if your purposes require you to speak to a Lion's Club, you probably already know that it is a service club and its members collect eye glasses to distribute to people who need them. If you want to know more about the Lions, you could easily find the information at their web site. There, you'd learn that they have a commitment to being "knights of the blind." You'd learn that they want to improve, "our community and world." You'd see that they provide leadership training for their members and that, obviously, they want to increase their own membership. Already you have a fair knowledge of their goals.

In the majority of cases, even as in a public-speaking class, you will have direct contact with the members of the group. You will know first hand its history, its purpose and its commitments. If you are now in a class, as diverse as its members may be, something brought them to attend. Being aware of the group as well as knowing the individuals is a key to being an effective communicator. Many times, to learn about others, the first step is for you to ask and to listen.

Motivation

It is meaningless to attempt to list all possible motives. Existing lists are enormous. Indeed, a single-motive approach makes more sense. A single-motive approach works to explain a substantial amount of behavior in terms of one central motive.

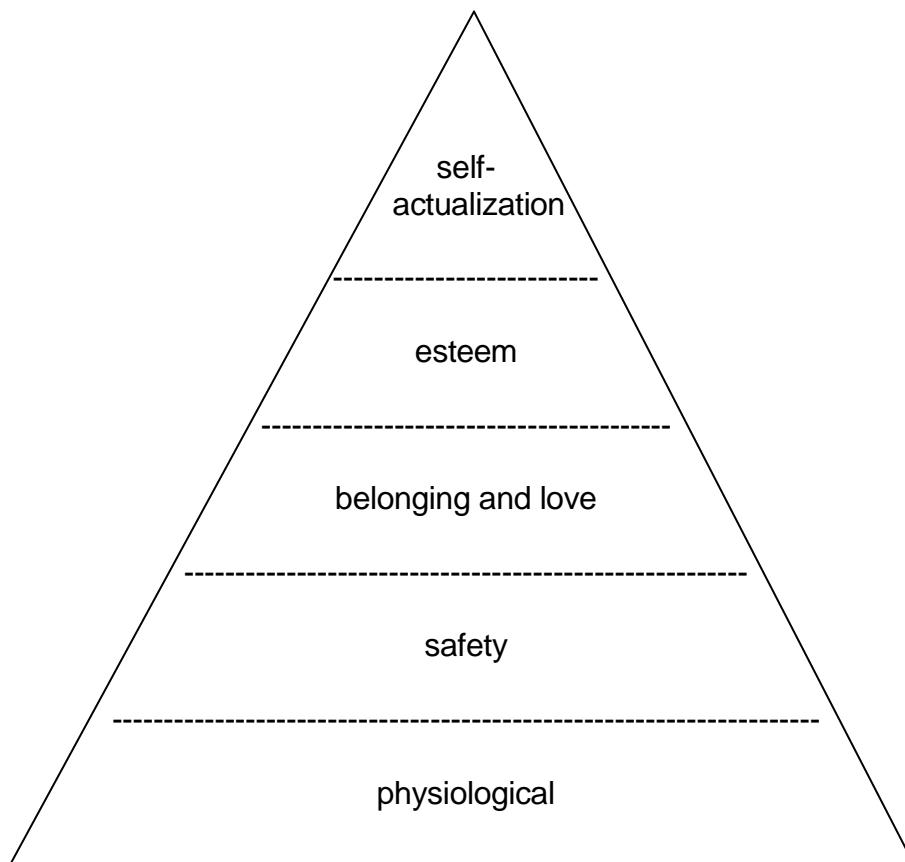
Of course, the single-motive approaches have more depth than their application might suggest. For example, Freud's conceptualizations are usually reduced to "sex sells," the apparent mantra of the modern world of advertising.

Single-motive approaches generally subsume other motives. For example, our drive for self-actualization, according to Maslow, demands the satisfaction of a tier of other motives. His system is illustrated in Figure 13-1, Maslow's Hierarchy of Motives. As suggested by the pyramid, the individual must establish ways of fulfilling the needs of the first level, before she or he can operate at the next level. The ultimate goal for everyone is to be self actualized. At the peak level, we are able to be most creative, productive and happiest because we have managed to meet the need of the previous levels in the most energy efficient way.

Single-motive approaches can help us establish a basic flowchart of the workings of a motive. Take for example a theory that postulates a central drive for comfort, as in Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory. Anything that makes us feel uncomfortable generates within us a need for change to bring back the sense of comfort. Generally this starts with a message, step one (see Figure 13-2). That message generates unpleasant feelings, step two. These feeling generate energy, step three. The energy may be experienced as a positive sense of excitement and purpose or/and as a fear and drive to escape. Directing this energy to produce change, step four, may be completed quickly or over a period of time depending on

the complexities of possible options. The constructive use of this energy to effect beneficial change is a challenge for the persuader as well as the listeners.

Figure 13-1
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

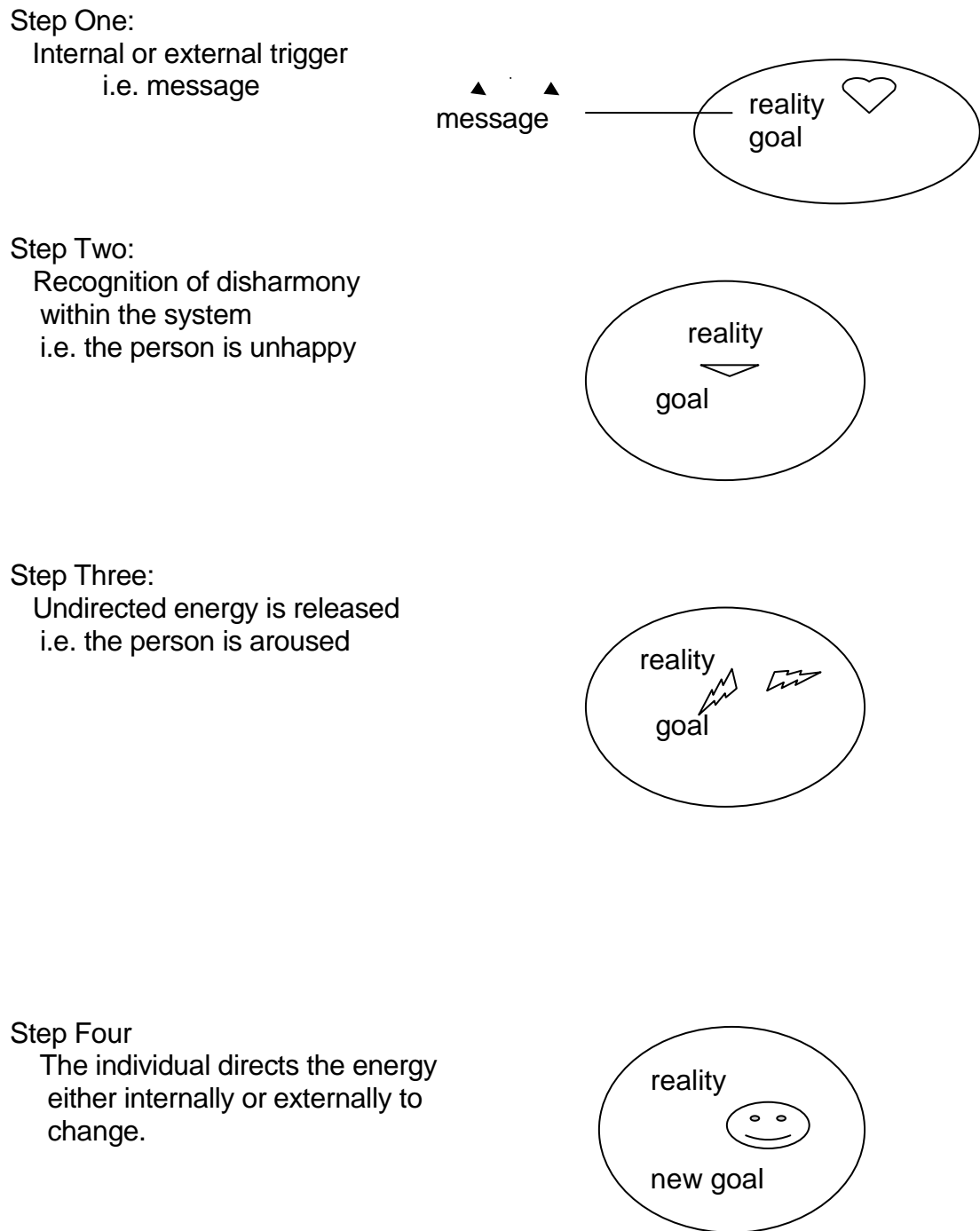


These four steps are a fair, if very generalized, model of the motivation process. The public communicator needs to understand the functioning at both step one and step four. In the first step, the speaker needs to present effectively the motivational appeal. Then, before the final step, the speaker needs to ensure that the listeners not only know the required behavior but also aren't likely to misuse the energy. Specifics on being effective in these regards will be discussed in the following chapters.

Many of the single-motive approaches deserve close consideration by the serious student of communication. Although an in-depth examination of even one

of them is beyond the scope of this text, I would recommend the three mentioned above for later study.

Figure 13-2
The General Motivation Model



Phillips' Seven Impelling Motives

A system of motivation that is both easy to manage and sufficiently comprehensive is the seven impelling motives. The underlying position is that any or some combination of these seven motives could be the driving force, positive or negative, in anyone's behavior at anytime. However, we vary as individuals as to which is the most powerful in our life and which is least powerful. They could, then, be presented in any order. I present them in the same order as did their originator, Phillips. If you do study Maslow's system more, you'll find the order closely approximate his, which was published many years after Phillips' classic *Effective Speaking*. The seven follow:

1. *Life preservation* is the desire to extend one's own life. We do much and avoid doing other things so as to keep breathing, literally. Hopefully, you buckle your seat belts before driving because you know that, in many accidents, the seat belt could save your life. If so, in that case, you're acting according to the life-preservation motive. You may also eat wisely and exercise because you know these factors contribute to longevity,

People also act to extend their lives beyond the physical realm. Many insurance policies are sold so that the person can "be there" for their children once the person is dead. We tend to believe that as long as our influence is being felt or our name being said, we still exist in a symbolic way. People have children and name them, sometimes, so as to extend the parents' lives. Individuals strive to have their names in record books and as authors of books, at least in part, for this same reason. Furthermore, many acts are done so that the individual may live in a spiritual afterlife.

While the life-preservation motive is sufficiently strong to keep most people alive, its power tends to increase with age during the adult years. Young people are generally the risk takers. Senior citizens are more concerned with their health and what will happen once they die.

2. *Property* is the desire to control material objects. It's good if we own the clothes, china, CD's, and car, but renting and leasing also work. The item may well be given to us for a time or be under our control as part of a job or an organization of which we are associated. We feel the necessity for a certain amount of stuff just to survive. Then, there are other things that we want for the way they make us feel. Then, they're some things that we just want; they are not special, we just want them. Money is generally associated with this motive since most of us think in terms of what things we can buy with money. So, the association is correct in general; however, the drive to obtain money may be fueled by any motive.

There are some things that each of us wants, but the motive does have a wide deviation in its impact. Some of us want very little, others seem to want everything. You may observe differences in gender in how this motive is manifest. The tendency, again, is for the power of the motive to increase with age, at least to a certain age or achievement level.

3. *Power* is the desire to have influence over others. The reasons people want power varies greatly. Most individuals with a strong power motive say they

want power for the good they can do for others and society. Indeed, history is replete with examples of where individuals have used power to advance civilization. Obviously, history also has the counter examples, like Hitler, where the power was misused. Often heard is the saying, "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely." However, we shouldn't cast this motive in an absolutely negative light.

We all want, indeed, need some power. When the person next to us makes too much noise, we want to have enough influence that he or she will respond nicely to our request for understanding. We want an audience to listen attentively when we walk to the front of the room. Perhaps, you recognize with some pride that you are a role model to some younger person. Whatever your present desire for power, again, you can expect it to increase as you get older.

4. *Reputation* is our desire for others to say good, not bad, things about us. Receiving praise, especially indirectly, can be exhilarating. Avoiding the negative labels can be even more compelling. Employers have found that being named "employee of the month," even when it carries no other benefits can be more motivating than nominal bonuses. Other leaders use undesirable terms, like "loser," with which to control the team. When either technique is used, because the consequences come directly from the speaker, it falls beyond the methods that we are teaching. However, the public communicator may well use his/her knowledge of such techniques to influence people by telling them how their behaviors can affect what others say about them. They can advise others so as to help them be able best to act in their self interest, i.e., to act so as others should say good things about them.

Finally, we have a motive the influence of which decreases with age, at least to adulthood. Reasonably, babies, being highly dependent on the care of others, must be sensitive to what is being said (both verbally and nonverbally) about them. At some point in adolescence, the individual becomes rebellious. At that point, reputation may, at least to the individual, seem unimportant. However, the person remains sensitive to some group, probably of peers. Even in the rebellion, the opinions of those being rebelled against probably remain important to the individual. As adults, we may become even more restrictive as to which opinions have impact on us. As communicators, we need to know what groups are important and serve as reference groups for our audience.

5. *Affection* is our desire to have a loving, one to one, relationship with another person. For many of us, this motive extends to our relationship with our pets. As Lee tells us, love takes many forms. However, true to all of them is a special bond between the two individuals. In some cases, that love may manifest itself in a sexual relationship. So, to most of us, sexual appeals belong with this motive; however, we are forced to recognize that sex may be manifested as an offshoot of other motives. In any regard, affection, in one or more of its various forms, influences everyone's behavior in one way or another. Its influence does not seem to be affected by age.

6. *Sentiment* is the desire to have something of special importance. This special thing may well be an object. In which case, on an intellectual level, we have to take care to distinguish the motive from that of property. Letters become an easy example, whether the letter is something sent through the mail or something worn

on a jacket. The person treasures them not because of their worth as property but because they are special to him/her individually. Harder to distinguish is a piece of art. It may be impossible to determine which motive is driving the ownership as long as no one asks to buy the art.

The “something special” may be an institution. Most of us have a special feeling for our high school. Most people adopt a sports team. Many identify with a service club. Some even form strong allegiances to the company for which they work.

Concepts also become special to us. These strong beliefs in concepts reflect our values and can exert influence on everything we believe and how we behave. For example, most of us place special importance on *life*. We learn CPR, not to save our own lives, but to save the lives of others.

Our personal identity, or self concept, is special to each of us. As with our other special concepts, we will work to build our self concept and to protect it. Obviously, this means that we sometimes work to protect our own negative views of aspects of ourselves and even seek out means to reinforce those negative views.

As in the case of the other motives, the more you understand the motive of sentiment the better you can be at helping others to do what is in their and our best interest.

7. *Taste* is the desire to have the best in life. Many of us associate a jet-setters life, the life of the rich and famous, with the motive of taste. The desire to have the best food, drink and entertainment, then, is propelled by the motive of taste. However, dare I say it? What is the best in life is a matter of taste. To the monk, the serene life of the monastery may represent the best that life has to offer. To another person, casting her line onto a quiet country pond, feeling at one with nature may be life’s best. Taste is a matter of personal preference. Knowing the generalized taste of the audience can be very helpful in knowing how to relate to them and what to avoid.

Inset 13-1



I have the best that life has to offer. I have gusto.

Inset 13-2

SELF INSTRUCTION BLOCK ON THE SEVEN IMPELLING
MOTIVES

Which motive is illustrated by each of the following examples?

Answers are below

- a. The teenager doesn't smoke so as to encourage his little brother not to smoke.
- b. The mother quits smoking for fear she'll get cancer.
- c. The father saves money he would have spent on cigarettes to buy electronic equipment for the family to use.
- d. The uncle smokes outside to prevent second-hand smoke.
- e. The aunt takes a first-aid class in case her husband has a heart attack.
- f. The mother buys the very best steak, and the husband grills it to perfection as a reward to everyone for not smoking.
- g. Unfortunately, the little brother smokes a cigarette to prevent his friends calling him a sissy.
- h. You regret that I included item g in this list.
- i. I hope you forgive us of item g, and don't complain about it.

Answers

- a. Power.
- b. Life preservation
- c. Property
- d. Sentiment
- e. Affection/Sentiment
- f. Taste
- g. Reputation
- h. Sentiment
- i. Reputation

As we examine the total list, it seems to divide itself roughly between the fifth and sixth motive. While the first five may be cast as unselfish, they are focused on one's own self. While the last two are ultimately selfish because they seek to protect ideas or phenomena that are important to the individual, the thing of value or life style itself may have significance beyond the individual. While sometimes we must trade a loss in one of the first five for a gain in another of them, these tradeoffs are the exception. If a person gains in one area covered by the first five, that person is generally going to gain in others, if not in all, of the first five. In contrast, it is much more usual for people to act out of a sentiment or taste motive in ways that cost them in other ways. People give their lives for their country or their religion. They also quit well-paying jobs in order to spend more time with their family. These life style changes often trade power, reputation and property for taste and/or sentiment.

When everything is said, motivation is based on what moves the individual toward his or her perceived goal; so, at their base is the self. Actually, being selfish isn't bad as long as we accept the enlightened self-interest position that what is best for others is ultimately best for us also. Still, we don't want to think of our selves as being selfish, at least not entirely so. Thus, the wise speaker considers both motives from the last two in the list and from the first five.

A person usually has two reasons for doing something: a good reason and the real reason.

--- Thomas Carlyle

A question worth pondering is the concept of *freedom*. From a definitional analysis, a drive for freedom clearly is a sentiment. However, if we look at freedom as a possibility in reality, not as a concept, our consideration may have value. From this analysis, one clear, and likely correct, conclusion is that all motives are antithesis to freedom. We must permit a certain amount of control from others in order to fulfill each motive. Again, that's not a bad thing; since our survival depends on our mutual cooperation. Another likely correct conclusion is that freedom is the result of our being able to select what motives we wish to fulfill at any moment in time.

Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed how our motives affect the logic in our thinking. In an attempt to better understand motivation, we looked at three single-motives approaches to see how a further study of such motives could benefit you as you move beyond this course. Finally, I presented a simple, but very practical system of motives, Phillips' seven impelling motives. I encourage you to seek a better understanding of people by listening to them and understanding what is important

to them and why they behave as they do.

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