

Self-actualization Finally, once these physiological, security, social, and esteem needs are satisfied, people begin to explore and extend the bounds of their potential—to become what they are capable of being. This is the need for **self-actualization**—the need to realize one’s true potential. To quote Maslow, “Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What humans *can* be, they *must* be.”⁷

Indeed, the self-actualization motive is what drives many adults to go back to school and acquire a new set of skills. And many marketers appeal to consumers’ ambitions. (A recent ad from Monster.com poked fun at people who were content with their current mediocre jobs.) Many not-for-profit agencies appeal to the consumer’s sense of being a good citizen. The U.S. Army’s long-running slogan “Be All You Can Be” and, later, “The Army of One” are calls to a person’s need for self-actualization.

In Eastern philosophy, many see their self-actualization as meeting their Creator, becoming what they are supposed to be in a cosmic sense. They spend endless hours meditating and reflecting on the nature of life and its purpose. And in Eastern and Western societies alike, religious messages such as “God is within you” are designed to appeal to a believer’s need for self-actualization.⁸

How the hierarchy works

The storm inside the Pyramid

If this pyramid were a five-story building, there would have to be an elevator that only went upwards and only one floor at a time—or at least that is how the foregoing description of Maslow’s hierarchy reads. But that description was for starters, designed to explain the basic pattern. We can now move beyond and look more closely at the hierarchy. Rather than being a five-story building served by an upward-only elevator stopping at each floor, perhaps a more apt analogy is an ocean with five “layers” of water, being navigated by a submarine. The submarine moves relatively effortlessly between the top and bottom layers of water, causing many cross currents. These cross-currents occur because our needs at any one level of hierarchy recur. They occur, also, because we don’t have to satisfy the needs at one level fully before moving on to the next level. Rather, we need to satisfy them only to a good degree. Thus, if we need a place to live, we can rent an apartment in whatever condition it is in and move in. Then we can attend to the task of studying for our classes. After the first test is done, we can attend to making the apartment more livable and buying the essential furniture we need.

The point of the hierarchy is that consumers have to feel at least some modicum of comfort at one level of their needs before they become concerned about the next “higher” level of needs. We can’t sell someone a necktie if his throat is desert-dry with thirst.

There is another fascinating fact about our motivation to acquire things as it relates to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Consider the three chairs shown here.

What motivates a particular consumer to buy one rather than the other of these three chairs? Their basic function is the same: to satisfy our physiological need to be seated. And that need is well-satisfied by the Hand Chair, for example, which costs only \$90. The other two chairs also satisfy that need; but, in addition, they might meet higher-level needs as well. The Lips Chair would probably appeal to a consumer who thinks that it might be an icebreaker and that friends might hang out at his or her place more often. It will meet,

FIGURE 2.2 Maslow’s Model of Hierarchy of Needs



**SAVVY
MARKETER**