

THE BIG IDEAS

The Self-Actualizer

Become what thou art!

Growth or Safety?

Which way you headed?

No One's Perfect

Not even us. :)

Thank You!

Good practice.

Your (Extended) Family

Time for a reunion!

Counting Our Blessings

One, two, three... infinity!!!

Know Thyself!

Ten questions for you.

Plunge In!

Now good? Good. :)

19 Characteristics

Of the Self-Actualizer: A Portrait of Psychological Health.

Motivation and Personality

With a focus on the chapter: Self-Actualizing People - A Study of Psychological Health

BY ABRAHAM MASLOW · HARPER COLLINS © 1987 · 193 PAGES

“What human beings can be, they must be.”

~ Abraham Maslow from *Motivation and Personality*

Abraham Maslow. The guy's a rock star.

A 20th century humanistic psychologist to whom we owe thanks for the advent of the modern trend in Positive Psychology, Maslow coined the phrase “the self-actualizing individual” and developed his framework of a “hierarchy of needs” we ascend as we evolve in our hero's journeys.

In my spiritual family tree, he occupies the great-grandfather slot (with [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) in the Great-Great+ Grandfather slot and Joseph Campbell as the Granddaddy and a host of brilliant guys occupying the spiritual daddy seat :).

I love the guy. In fact, his phrase “What one *can* be, one *must* be!” captures my ethos in life more than any other.

Think about that: What you CAN be, you MUST be. There is, in Maslow's language, a NEED you have to self-actualize—to live at your highest potential and to express your latent potentialities. If you don't fulfill this need, it's like depriving your soul of oxygen. Although you (may not) gasp as noticeably as you would if your more basic need of physical oxygen were deprived, you WILL experience equally (albeit more subtle) painful symptoms of angst, anxiety, depression and all that (which, of course, are often medicated with pills, TV, alcohol, complaining, asinine conversations, etc. :).

Alrighty. So, in this Note, we're going to focus on one particular chapter in Maslow's academic-ish book, *Motivation and Personality*—the chapter called “Self-Actualizing People: A Study of Psychological Health” in which he identifies the 19 characteristics of his self-actualizing individual. We'll briefly look at ALL 19 of these characteristics at the end of this Note. If you'd like a more thorough look at all 19, check out the book or the quotes on the site.

For now, let's dive into some Big Ideas!

THE SELF-ACTUALIZER

“Musicians must make music, artists must paint, poets must write if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves. What human beings can be, they must be. They must be true to their own nature. This need we may call self-actualization... It refers to man's desire for self-fulfillment, namely to the tendency for him to become actually in what he is potentially: to become everything one is capable of becoming.”

As I mentioned (it's *definitely* worth repeating :), Maslow believed that the need to grow, to reach our potential, and to self-actualize is an absolutely fundamental need.

According to Maslow, this need to actualize is not a “wish” or a “desire” or a “sure would be nice to have” kind of thing. It's a NEED (like that need we have for oxygen).

“They have become strong enough to be independent of the good opinion of other people, or even of their affection. The honors, the status, the rewards, the popularity, the prestige, and the love they can bestow must have become less important than self-development and inner growth.”

~ Abraham Maslow

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obvious and so important."*

Yes, that includes you. And me. And, well, everyone. :)

Anthony de Mello ([see Notes on Awareness](#)) has a great line that helped me here. He said something along the lines of: "I'm screwed up, you're screwed up. Now, let's talk!"

Isn't that awesome!??

There's something magical that happens when we quit pretending that we are—or need to be—perfect. The facades can come down and we can have a *real* interaction with someone. Powerful stuff.

How can you embrace your imperfection a little more today?

Can you relax a little more? Let go of the tight grip on the impulse to always-need-to-come-across-as-perfect-b/c-if-someone-sees-you're-not-perfect-then-OMG-what-will-happen? :)

Schew. Me, too.

We allllll can afford to laugh a little more and take ourselves just a little less seriously, eh?

(Again, let's relax and remember: There are *no* perfect human beings.

THANK YOU!

Maslow believed that "life could be vastly improved if we could count our blessings as self-actualizing people can and do, and if we could retain their constant sense of good fortune and gratitude for it."

Practical example for the next time you're stuck in traffic: Rather than allow your frustration to grow, why not pause for a moment and appreciate the fact that you're even sitting in a car?

It's quite a wonderful invention that allows you to move at remarkable speeds (when not in traffic, of course :) without any effort on your part and certainly worthy of gratitude, eh?!? :)

So, as you get tempted to complain about the traffic, why not think about the genius and hard work that went into creating the first automobiles and the labor that went into building your car and the road you're driving on...

Or, get upset.

Your call.

Here's to a little more gratitude for the little things that are so easy to take for granted.

(And never forget that the wealthiest king only a few centuries ago didn't have half the material pleasures and luxuries that we enjoy!)

YOUR (EXTENDED) FAMILY

"Self-actualizing people have a deep feeling of identification, sympathy, and affection for human beings in general. They feel kinship and connection, as if all people were members of a single family."

How's your family?

Not *that* one.

The BIG one.

Yah, that one. :)

... And, while we're enjoying that great big shiny happy family of ours, let's take a moment to reflect on the inter-connectedness of everyone in the world:

"For them, motivation is just character growth, character expression, maturation, and development; in a word self-actualization."
~ Abraham Maslow

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

"Getting used to our blessings is one of the most important nonevil generators of human evil, tragedy and suffering."

Here's a ritual of mine: Often when I pay a bill or buy something or enjoy a meal, I pause for a moment to appreciate the incredible array of people who made that experience possible.

Think about it the next time you sit down for a meal. Look at the spoon or fork or knife you're using. How did it get there on that table of yours? (And how did the table get there? And the floor? And...) Contemplate for a minute or two just WHO was involved in getting that spoon to you. Imagine the interconnected web of cooperating people who produced the raw materials, then those who shipped them to the manufacturer then those who created it (and all those who financed all that activity to begin with). Then, of course, we need to get it from the manufacturer to the store where you bought it. (Who built the trucks and boats and planes and trains that were used to ship it?) And on and on and on and on. It is truly STAGGERING when we see just how fortunate we are to have SO many people supporting us in EVERY moment of our lives.

We are so incredibly blessed. And it is so incredibly easy to forget how fortunate we are and just how much we depend on the love and service of others to do the most basic things in life.

Einstein said: *"A human being is part of the whole, called by us 'Universe'; a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison."*

While Marcus Aurelius, the 2nd Century Roman Stoic Philosopher and Roman Emperor, said (see Notes on [Meditations](#)): *"Think often of the bond that unites all things in the universe, and their dependence on one another."*

I echo Aurelius' mojo: Let's think often of the bond that unites ALL things in the universe, and their dependence on one another. How can you do that a little (a lot?) more today?!? :)

KNOW THYSELF!

Whereas the average individuals "often have not the slightest idea of what they are, of what they want, of what their own opinions are," self-actualizing individuals have "superior awareness of their own impulses, desires, opinions, and subjective reactions in general."

There's that self-awareness again!

We hit this again and again and again. From [Martin Seligman](#) to [James Allen](#) to [Marcus Aurelius](#) to the [Buddha](#) and [Krishna](#) and every other great teacher we profile.

How about Ten Questions for a special date between you and your journal?

- If you were absolutely guaranteed to succeed, what would you dare to do?
- What are you most passionate about?
- What are your greatest strengths?
- How can you get paid doing what you love?
- When do you feel most alive? What circumstances? Around what people?
- What were your 5 greatest accomplishments over the last 5 years?
- Your 5 greatest accomplishments over the next 5 years? The next 25 years?
- How can you best share your gifts with the world?
- What would you do if you weren't afraid?
- What other questions should you be asking yourself?!?

"Self-actualizing individuals
have a genuine desire to help
the human race."

~ Abraham Maslow

PLUNGE IN!

"It seems that the necessary thing to do is not to fear mistakes, to plunge in, to do the best that one can, hoping to learn enough from blunders to correct them eventually."

Ah! I love that.

So... Uhhhh... What are you waiting for?

* nudge * * puuuusssshhhhhhh *

Plunge in!!!! (Pretty please.)



Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

P.S. Friendly self-actualizer travel warning: Dr. Maslow also advises: "If you deliberately plan on being less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you'll be unhappy for the rest of your life."

P.P.S. So... GO FOR IT! :)

P.P.P.S. Here, very briefly, are the 19 Characteristics of the Self-Actualizer (check out our collection of Maslow quotes on the site or get the book for more love):

1. *Perception of Reality*: These individuals tend to have a "superior relationship with reality" and are "generally unthreatened and unfrightened by the unknown." In fact, "They accept it, are comfortable with it, and, often are even more attracted by it than by the known. They not only tolerate the ambiguous and unstructured—they like it."
2. *Acceptance*: "Even the normal member of our culture feels unnecessarily guilty or ashamed about too many things and has anxiety in too many situations. Our healthy individuals find it possible to accept themselves and their own nature without chagrin or complaint or, for that matter, without even thinking about the matter that much."
3. *Spontaneity*: The behavior of the self-actualizing individual is "marked by simplicity and naturalness, and by lack of artificiality or straining for effect."
4. *Problem Centering*: Self-actualizers customarily have some "mission in life."
5. *Solitude*: Self-actualizing individuals "positively like solitude and privacy to a definitely greater degree than the average person."
6. *Autonomy*: "They have become strong enough to be independent of the good opinion of other people, or even of their affection. The honors, the status, the rewards, the popularity, the prestige, and the love they can bestow must have become less important than self-development and inner growth."
7. *Fresh Appreciation*: "Self-actualizing people have the wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may have become to others."
8. *Peak Experiences*: It's been called "flow" or "being in the zone." Whatever you want to call it, self-actualizers tend to experience it more often than average.
9. *Human Kinship*: "Self-actualizing people have a deep feeling of identification, sympathy, and affection for human beings in general. They feel kinship and connection, as if all people were members of a single family." ... "Self-actualizing individuals have a genuine desire to help the human race."
10. *Humility and Respect*: All of Maslow's subjects "may be said to be democratic people in the deepest sense... they can be friendly with anyone of suitable character, regardless of class,

education, political belief, race or color. As a matter of fact it often seems as if they are not aware of these differences, which are for the average person so obvious and so important.”

11. *Interpersonal Relationships*: “Self-actualizing people have these especially deep ties with rather few individuals. Their circle of friends is rather small. The ones that they love profoundly are few in number.”
12. *Ethics*: “They do right and do not do wrong. Needless to say, their notions of right and wrong and of good and evil are often not the conventional ones.”
13. *Means and Ends*: “They are fixed on ends rather than on means, and means are quite definitely subordinated to these ends.”
14. *Humor*: “They do not consider funny what the average person considers to be funny. Thus they do not laugh at hostile humor (making people laugh by hurting someone) or superiority humor (laughing at someone else’s inferiority) or authority-rebellion humor (the unfunny, Oedipal, or smutty joke).”
15. *Creativity*: “This is a universal characteristic of all the people studied or observed. There is no exception.”
16. *Resistance to Enculturation*: “Of all of them it may be said that in a certain profound and meaningful sense they resist enculturation and maintain a certain inner detachment from the culture in which they are immersed.”
17. *Imperfections*: Actualizers “show many of the lesser human failings. They too are equipped with silly, wasteful, or thoughtless habits. They can be boring, stubborn, irritating. They are by no means free from a rather superficial vanity, pride, partiality to their own productions, family, friends, and children. Temper outbursts are not rare.”
18. *Values*: “A firm foundation for a value system is automatically furnished to self-actualizers by their philosophic acceptance of the nature of self, of human nature, of much of social life, and of nature and physical reality.”
19. *Resolution of Dichotomies*: “The dichotomy between selfishness and unselfishness disappears altogether in healthy people because in principle every act is both selfish and unselfish.”

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He’s spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.