What's in It for Me?
or
Motivation and Communication

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W HAT'S IN IT for me? What stake do I have in this? Sound like selfish, self-centered questions? Indeed they may be, but they are questions we must answer for our audiences as we communicate as scientists, educators, communications specialists.

Or let's put these questions in another form. Why do people—youth and adults—act as they do? What motivates them? What can we do as communicators to provide that push, that stimulus, that will move (motivation is derived from the Latin, *movere,* to move) our audiences to learn, act, buy, or change?

There are no easy answers. Those who think understanding motivation is easy are doomed to failure. In fact, the more one studies motivation the more he realizes that it is terribly complex and perhaps unfathomable.

This article is intended for **purposive educational communicators** (writers, radio and TV producers, visual specialists, editors, teachers) such as those in AAACE. In saying this, I assume that most messages we send have an educational purpose which we hope will change people's knowledge, skills, or attitudes. Unlike propaganda, which is largely concerned with the sender's purpose, our educational messages are concerned with the receiver's purpose or needs (motives). In fact, to be successful we must **meet** or **appeal** to people's needs and usually we must do so clearly and deliberately. That simply means we must tie "what's in it for the reader, listener, or viewer" into our messages.

In this article I'll do two things: review motivation principles and theory, and then suggest ways communicators can fashion their messages to focus more clearly on the audience's needs and motives.

History Gives Us Clues

Let's look first at motivation and its history.

Socrates, in the days of early Greece, said that no one ever does anything except to pursue pleasure or to avoid pain. This idea later grew into hedonism—the pleasure-seeking theory. Much later, Epicurus—from whom the word "epicurean" is derived—emphasized the basic motive of achieving happiness or pleasure.

Thomas Moore, in the 16th century, felt that motivation could be controlled by rewards for socially desirable conduct and by punishment for undesirable conduct. A few years later, Niccolo Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, described two motives: fear and love. He used these to control people.

Many others thought they could control man by associating events, awards, and punishments. And we can still do this in our communications efforts. However, Charles Darwin partially upset this idea with his theory of evolution. Evolution required understanding man's "mainsprings" of action.

Seeking these "mainsprings" early in the 20th century, Freud, Adler, and others tried to explain behavior as an innate physiological instinct or as several instincts, drives, id, and so on. Today many of their ideas are useful in communications.

Later, other students of motivation agreed there are primary (instinctive) and secondary (learned or social) motives governing man. Thus, the environment and situation as well as instincts are important.

Motive Lists Help Communicators

Today we can look at motivation in many ways. There are many motivation classification systems, each giving us a clue to appeals we can use.

W. I. Thomas, an early sociologist, maintained that man's desires revolve around: (1) security, (2) new experience, (3) recognition, and (4) response.

The *AAACE Communications Handbook* follows the Thomas classification.

Security has many interpretations. It may be protection and adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Or it may be a spiritual hereafter or security in a group.

Response may be the need for others to like us, be appreciated, be accepted, be part of the group.

Recognition may call for keeping up with the Jones or leadership in a group or winning a prize.

New experiences are especially important to those who want to try new things, see new lands, pioneer new ideas.

There are many other ways of looking at or classifying motives.

An unknown source has said that people are motivated by the 4P's: pride, profit, pleasure, and protection.

Why Read?

Wilbur Schramm, in an article, "Why Adults Read," has said that a grouping of motives, usually with one motive dominating the combination, lies behind every act of reading. He lists in order of importance these reading motivations: ritualistic (habit), respite, personal security, social security, vicarious experience, social contact, aesthetic experience, values of society (prestige value), tool of daily living, self-improvement, scanning horizon for dangers and opportunities, and aid to understanding (interpretation).

In our TV efforts we constantly face the problem that TV is sought for recreation and entertainment, not information and education.

Why Buy?

In the business world some say there are six buying motives: pleasure, fear of loss, profit or loss, pride, desire for approval, and avoidance of pain.

Vance Packard in *Hidden Persuaders* quoted Dr. Ernest Dichter of Motivation Inc. as listing marketing's eight hidden needs as: (1) emotional security, (2) reassurance of worth, (3) ego gratification, (4) creative outlets, (5) sense of power, (6) sense of roots, (7) immortality, and (8) love objects.

James Bayton, a psychologist at Howard University, several years ago made a marketing study for the American Dairy Association. He studied food (especially dairy products) motivation. He suggested that dairy food advertising be directed around one of seven appeals. Even today most of these appeals are widely used. His appeals, paraphrased, were that dairy products could provide the user:

1. Good nutrition and ready energy.
2. Economical food.
3. Aesthetic enjoyment. (Note the cheese and other food ads.)
4. Greater personableness as people play the masculine or feminine role.
5. Appropriate food considering religious and cultural factors.
6. Convenience and ease of preparation.
7. Weight control, especially with skim milk and other low fat products.

In speaking to home economicsts Bayton, perhaps a bit tongue-in-check, said homemakers were motivated by affection, autonomy, rejection of chores, exhibitionism (show off house, e.g.), and achievement.

Sales or advertising appeals have been studied extensively. For example, the late H. T. Longstaff, University of Minnesota psychologist, listed man's desires as: food and drink or comfort, freedom from fear, superiority, social approval, companionship of the opposite sex, welfare of loved ones, and a long life. Others say you don't sell steak, you sell the sizzle, that you don't sell women's shoes, you sell pretty feet. In fact, today many marketing people are exploring the new field of psychographics to supplement the older demographics.

Hierarchy of Needs Guides Many

One of the more frequently discussed descriptions of motivation or needs is that of the late Abraham Maslow and his *"Hierarchy of Needs."* Several comprehensive studies, including my own, have been made in Extension based on this hierarchy and much of our communication effort is now based on Maslow's hierarchy.

Maslow says that, as a person develops, he or she satisfies this hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy can be related to audiences in both formal and informal learning situations. In other words, we have to analyze where our audience is in the hierarchy and adjust our message accordingly. Unfortunately different members of our audience could be at all different levels.

This diagram illustrates his theory.
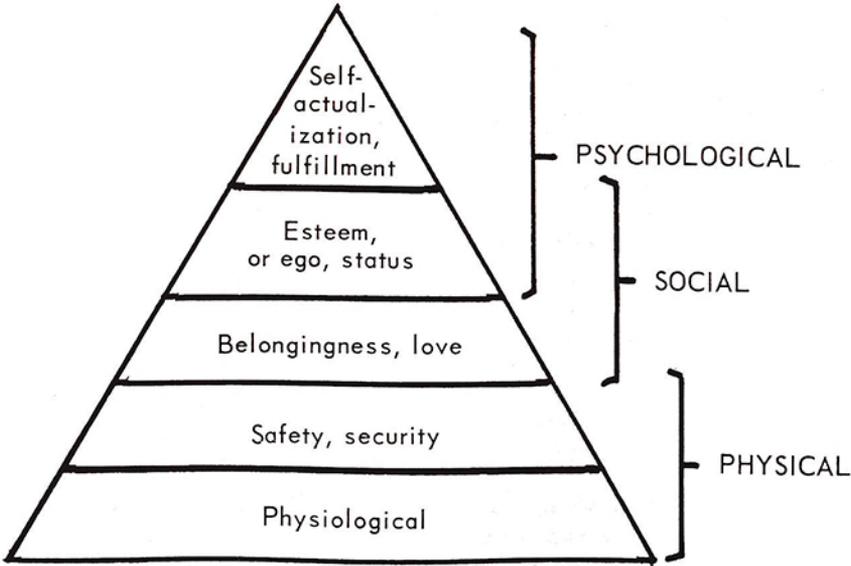
At the base of Maslow's hierarchy are needs such as food, clothing, water and sex. When these are met, a person seeks safety and security. Then he seeks to belong, to become part of a group and feel accepted and loved. Once he has achieved these, he seeks prestige, achievement, and status. Finally, he seeks self-actualization, the feeling he is making the best possible use of his competencies. Note the many parallels with other classifications.

Some people may accept the challenge of self-actualization. Others may not have reached this point and need status or recognition. Still others feel the need to belong or even to feel safe. Each person, then, requires different treatment.

Motives Vary With Age, Development

Developmental tasks or needs are another way of looking at motives. Here, psychiatrist Erik Erikson *(Childhood and Society)* and educationist Robert Havighurst *(Developmental Tasks and Education)* have contributed major ideas.

Erikson, in describing the "eight stages of man," shows how motives change as an individual's personality or ego develops. Four of these stages are of particular importance in our work with youth and adults.

Identity stage—Here the youth seeks identity and an answer to the question "Who am I?" He works on the problems or roles he is to play, the peer group identity he is to achieve, the career he is to follow. Erikson's book, *Identity Crisis,* deals exclusively with this stage and is a guide to many 4-H appeals.

Intimacy vs. isolation stage—The young adult emerges from the search for identity. He is ready to fuse his identity with others. Consequently, the appeals or stimuli to his learning are different. The need to relate is important, for example.

Generativity stage—The adult takes an active interest in establishing and guiding the next generation. Perhaps this explains why the practical, how-to-do-it adult education efforts are often more popular than are esthetic adult offerings. As academicians, we may decry this, but research in adult education indicates that adults have the greatest interest in education helping them make a living for themselves and their families.

Ego integrity stage—This is where the more mature adult accepts his life cycle. Motives which prompt him to learn may often be those which give him more satisfaction.

Havighurst, considering cultural and sociological influences as well as psychological and physiological ones, also divides man's life into periods that become the basis for motivation. His developmental periods are: (1)

infancy and early childhood; (2) middle childhood, 6-12; (3) adolescence, 12-18; (4) early adulthood, 18-30; (5) middle age, 30-55; and (6) later maturity. At each stage, motives differ. What appeals to middle-aged audiences will not necessarily appeal to young adults. He sees the tasks or motives as:

1. **Adolescence**—mature relationships, masculine-feminine roles, independence from parents, economic considerations, and preparation for work.
2. **Early Adulthood**—(Age of storm and stress)—mates, family, social group, livelihood.
3. **Middle Age**—civic responsibility, assisting teenagers, making a better living.
4. **Later maturity**—retirement, new affiliations, both social and civic.

Of course, we could go back to "psychologist" William Shakespeare who wrote about human development in *As You Like It* as follows:

> . . . one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
> Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
> Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel,
> And shining morning face, creeping like snail
> Unwilling to school; and then, the lover,
> Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
> Made to his mistress' eyebrow: Then a soldier;
> Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the bard,
> Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
> Seeking the bubble reputation
> Even in the cannon's mouth: and then, the justice;
> In fair round belly, with good capon lin'd,
> With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
> Full of wise saws, and modern instances,
> And so he plays his part: The sixth age shifts
> Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon;
> With spectables on nose, and pouch on side;
> His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide,
> For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
> Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
> And whistles in his sound: Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness, and mere oblivion;
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Leon Festinger, in his theory of cognitive dissonance, says man is always seeking a balance to keep his stability, that he is searching for consistency. This grows out of the biological idea of homeostasis. Thus, a communicator may seek to throw a situation out of balance to prompt the audience to make adjustments and reach another level.

Anthropologist Allison Davis puts great emphasis on culture in communication. Thus, we recognize that small town and rural culture differs from that of suburban and urban culture, even though these differences are fading. Too often we lack tolerance for those who come from inner-city cultures. We criticize them for not reacting to the same rewards or punishments we do. Perhaps our appeals should be different to meet their needs, not ours.

Recently, I conducted several seminars with county extension staff on "Motivation in Extension." During the process I asked them to list the motives, the appeals they made to people. The list soon grew to well over 100, a good basis on which to build our communications.

Your Message Can be Motivational

But how do we do this? Of course, there is no one way or right way.

The scientific method is one way. This is the "work-up-to-it," or inductive, method in which we present the facts and then make our pitch or conclusion at the end. This is the climactic or suspense story approach. Unfortunately in our work there may not be much suspense and the climax may not be that great. Psychologists say however, that this may be the approach for the unconvinced or even those opposed.

Even here, however, we need to relate to people's needs quickly and early or we lose them in our communications battle for attention.

For the busy reader or listener or viewer or participant the more direct approach (or deductive approach) may be better. Here are a few suggestions.

News Stories—Stress one of the many feature-type leads where possible. Of course, we do often have to use the old summary lead, and it's good in its place. But let's try reworking many of our opening statements to relate to people's needs or motives. It takes extra time, but it's worth it. In addition, it will often get you past that "gatekeeper" or editor or manager or to the pages or airwaves of the media.

We should consciously and continually ask ourselves if our stories do relate to people's needs, motives. How can we make our stories relate better to these needs not only in the lead but also in the body?

Letters—Here's a simple procedure or idea I've found useful in writing letters.

Make the first sentence for the reader, relating to something of interest or importance to him or her. For example you'll read a letter that starts "Here's how you can make an extra five thousand dollars using your skill as a communicator" or more simply, "your ideas helped make our recent meeting a real success." These are motivational openings.

Devote the body to the message.

Then use the final sentence or two (and possibly the P.S.) for your own pitch or appeal. Ask the reader to do something concrete.

Radio—Remember the old saying about radio, ''Tell 'Em What You're Going to Tell Them, Tell Them, and Then Tell 'Em Again.'' Change that a bit to relate your opening to people's needs and motives and you have a motivational message whether it's a 30-second spot, or a long interview program.

TV—Again many of the same radio ideas for a strong, motivational opening and closing apply to TV.

Publications—It is in publications where we may pay the least attention to motivational and other learning principles. Since we're not the authors, we may revert to correcting grammar and sentence construction, simplifying approaches, and applying instincts to dominate in preparing publications that look good but have little relationship to the over-all message and educational objective.

Our publication titles, especially in Extension, often can be made more audience need-oriented. For example, why not ''More Money for Eggs' rather than the label title, ''Egg Marketing''?

And why not relate that first paragraph or first page or opening box to the needs of the reader, giving him a clue as to the benefits the publication offers him?

Or couldn't the heads be more than labels scattered for typographic interest? Why not a few display items pointing to highlights or benefits?

Giving that extra motivational twist, that extra relationship to the reader may be the distinguishing feature of a top editor.

Visuals—Like publications, visuals are among our top teaching aids. What was said about publications could be said about art for slide sets, movies, exhibits. Good visual-education specialists have long preached the value of direct approaches to people's needs and motives and meeting well-stated educational objectives.

Every good communicator could add many more ways to give additional motivational impact to our messages. It requires added effort, an ability to empathize with our audiences, an understanding of people's needs and motives, and a broad appreciation of not only the narrow skills of our specialized area but also of the entire field of educational and behavioral sciences.

Simply stated we need to emphasize ''What's In It For Our Audience?'' to make our communications more effective.