

A Maslovian Approach to PPA District and International Photographic Competition

by

Christine Walsh-Newton, M. Photog. Cr., CPP

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

ASP Educational Associate

American Society of Photographers

September 2015

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*“A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write,
if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself.*

What a man can be, he must be”

-Abraham Maslow

Be More.

Simply, a motivational advertising campaign used by the Professional Photographers of America (PPA) since late 2013 (Romaguera Sr. 135) but more complexly, a challenge to members to strive for self-actualization.

Since 2010, this author has participated in PPA photographic competition on both the district and international levels. Over the course of this involvement, a number of behaviors towards and approaches to it have been observed, leading to research and exploration into the reason(s) why photographic competition is appealing to PPA members in such a broad manner.

Although the reasons for participating in photographic competition are as numerous as the competitors, themselves. The PPA offers a first reason as “Be More (ppa.com).” This author believes that the “Be More” campaign closely mimics Abraham Maslow's concept of self-actualization, suggesting that photographic competition is a benefit that meets the needs of its members through close parallels to the five stages of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

To achieve this goal, I have organized my paper into five main sections. In the first section, I will discuss the literature review of the needs of the individual as described by Maslow's theory and how those needs may be met through participation in associations and organizations. In the second

section, I will provide an overview of PPA photographic competition. In the third section, I will review the extrinsic motivating factors of photographic competition and in the fourth section I will discuss the literature review of some common intrinsic motivating factors given by competitors for their participation in PPA Photographic Competition. I end the the thesis with a fifth section that identifies the parallels between the needs of the individual according to Maslow, as identified in the first section and the extrinsic and intrinsic motivators of PPA Photographic Competition identified in the third and fourth sections.

THE NEEDS OF THE INDIVIDUAL

The needs of the individual are most often assessed through one of four major motivation theories; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Motivation/Hygiene Theory, McGregor's XY Theories and McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory. For the purpose of this thesis, only Maslow's theory will be discussed as it is the only theory that identifies self-actualization as one of it's components.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Instead of focusing on psychopathology and what goes wrong with people, Maslow (1943) formulated a more positive account of human behavior which focused on what goes right. He was interested in human potential, and how we fulfill that potential.

The Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a five-stage model of structure and terminology, although Maslow did not incorporate the pyramid diagram itself, that is the common form of representation (see figure 1). There were later versions of the theory proposed by other people after Maslow's death in 1970, but for the purpose of this thesis, the original five-stage model will be used.

Maslow's model was based on five needs, the first four of which are deficit needs. Their lack is felt, and once the need is met, it is no longer motivating. These needs are not necessarily in tight order and may overlap. Higher needs emerge only once the lower needs have been partially satisfied (Maslow 1943, 375).

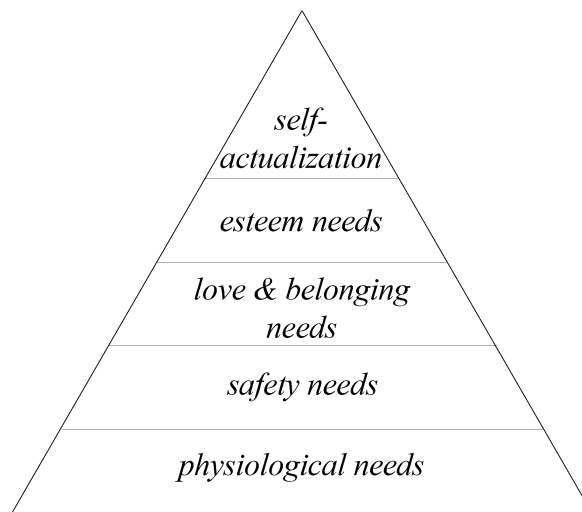


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The five levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs are sometimes subdivided into “low-level needs” (physiological and safety) and “higher-level needs” (love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization).

Physiological needs. Physiological needs are the basic needs required by humans in order to sustain life. These needs encompass food, water, air, sleep and other needs integral to survival.

Safety needs. Safety needs are the needs necessary for an individual to feel secure and comfortable within any given environment (Young). Some safety needs may be a preference for a job with tenure and security, the desire for a savings account or the ability to procure benefits like medical, dental and disability insurance (Schafritz 2011:174).

Love and belonging needs. Once a healthy individual feels secure in any given workplace they must try to be a part of the workplace culture and earn their acceptance and gain acknowledgment of their peers that they are now officially part of the workplace society (Young).

Esteem needs. Esteem needs can be internal (self respect, an increase in self-confidence, learning new skills) or external (recognition, attention, admiration from others, esteem from colleagues and clients) (Young).

Esteem needs also include a desire for strength through achievement, confidence, adequacy and independence and a desire for reputation through prestige, recognition, attention and appreciation (Rexhaj).

Self-actualization needs. According to Maslow, self-actualization is the “being” need. It is never fully satisfied and drives us to real innovation and satisfaction. He stated that human motivation is based on people seeking fulfillment and change through personal growth (Maslow 1943, 1954). Self-actualized people are those who were fulfilled and doing all they were capable of. The peak of the hierarchy can never be satisfied and the ultimate motivation for each and every individual is to try and strive for self-improvement (Young). Self-actualization merely involves achieving ones potential.

It is necessary to note that self-actualization includes the process of more knowledge, creativity and self-expression, which are intrinsic rewards in nature; thereby of questionable relevance to those that are driven by extrinsic reward (Young).

In an overall review of Maslow's theory, it is the basic belief that the most powerful unsatisfied need provides the most motivation. Sometimes the needs are not fulfilled in chronological order and basic needs may not need to be satisfied in order to acknowledge higher needs. For example, in the “starving artist” scenario, one will forego basic needs in order to strive for recognition.

Those in pursuit of self-actualization may exhibit “meta-motivation,” a term coined by Maslow to describe the motivation of people who go beyond the scope of the basic needs and strive for constant betterment.

It is important to note that self-actualization is a continual process of becoming rather than a perfect state one reaches of a 'happy ever after' (Hoffman).

The growth of self-actualization refers to the need for personal growth and discovery that is present throughout a person's life. For Maslow, a person is always 'becoming' and never remains static in these terms. In self-actualization a person comes to find a meaning to life that is important to them.

Maslow offers the following description of self-actualization:

“It refers to the person's desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. The specific form that these needs will take will of course vary greatly from person to person. In one individual it may take the form of the desire to be an ideal mother, in another it may be expressed athletically, and in still another it may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventions (Maslow, 1943, p. 382–383)”.

The individual, alone is unable to fulfill all of his or her needs and wishes, however, they find that they can more readily achieve their goals through organizations in a coordination of efforts.

Miriam Webster defines an association as “an organized group of people who have the same interest, job, etc. and an organization as “a company, business, club, etc., that is formed for a particular purpose.” This definition implies that associations are also organizations and for the purpose of this thesis the author draws the conclusion that organizational psychology paradigms are applicable to associations when considering topics of member/employee satisfaction and retention.

Larry Seibert, PH.D., of the Center for Association Leadership states that “Needs satisfaction is

the primary motivator for why individuals spend their money and their time to join an association, and to participate in the experiences the association has to offer.”

It is generally acknowledged that a leading concern of organizations are to meet member needs while encouraging increased levels of performance. An organization that satisfies Maslow's principles can feature high member satisfaction, excellent retention and cohesive teams. An organization merely has to provide the opportunity to fulfill such needs by offering appropriate work and its structure encourages its members to reach their full potential. While loose organization sometimes fails to acknowledge employee achievements, a successful organization will meet its members' needs while encouraging increased levels of performance (Marckgraf).

According to their website, “Professional Photographers of America (PPA) is the world's largest non-profit photography association organized for professional photographers, by professional photographers ... mission is to create a vibrant community of successful professional photographers by providing education, resources and industry standards of excellence.”

The task becomes, then, to determine the needs of the individual within the larger group and how that group may offer opportunities for needs fulfillment. To apply Maslow's concepts effectively, an organization has to specifically support fulfillment of the high-level needs.

- 1 – allow social interactions – forms the basis of belonging
- 2 – acknowledges accomplishments to engender self-esteem
- 3 – provide opportunities for employees to fulfill potential (Marckgraf).

AN OVERVIEW OF PPA PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Since 1906, the PPA¹ has held some type of image exhibit, first as a photographic salon of twenty five

¹ Originally, the Photographic Association of America (PAA), renamed the Professional Photographers of America (PPA) in 1958;

images at the annual convention to what is now the general and loan collections exhibited at Imaging USA. Images are chosen for the general and loan collections through PPA's photographic competitions. PPA photographic competition falls within the parameters of member benefits, specifically as a component of the professional development subset, within the merit and degree program. As described in its video "The History of the PPA" The PPA instituted the Merit and Degree program in 1937 and awarded its first Masters Degree in 1939.

Although other member benefits, degrees and merits are available from the PPA, successful entries into photographic competition are rewarded with exhibition merits (a term which also includes artist exhibition merits) earned through PPA's International Photographic Competition, which assist members in their pursuit of the related Master of Photography and Master Artist Degrees.

There are two levels of competition within the PPA structure which differ slightly in regards to extrinsic rewards and recognition:

PPA District Competition. All PPA members are eligible to participate in PPA District competitions, held annually. There are five districts and the member's address on file with the PPA indicates their primary district where they may compete for scores, seals and awards. Additionally, they may participate in any of the remaining four districts at their discretion, for scores, only (and critiques, if purchased).

PPA International Photographic Competition (IPC). All PPA members are eligible to participate in IPC, held annually. They may enter one or both of the two competitions (Open Photographic or Artist), with a maximum of four entries in each competition.

THE EXTRINSIC MOTIVATORS OF PPA PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Scores. Entries into the PPA District Photographic Competitions are scored on a scale of 65-100. The scoring scale is subdivided into Below exhibition Standards (65-69), Average (70-74), Above Average

(75-79), Deserving of a Merit (80-84), Excellent (85-89), Superior (90-94) and Exceptional (95-100).

By the nature of the titles of the scoring subdivisions, the competitor can draw preliminary conclusions as to the quality of their entry.

IPC ... “entries will not be given a numerical score. The judging will be done by a majority vote on an “in” or “out” basis. If accepted, the entry will be judged for the Loan Collection and Showcase Book. (PEC 70).”

Critiques. Recorded critiques are available for purchase at both levels of competition. Critiques are recorded by PPA Affiliated Jurors that participated in the photographic competition in which the entry was presented.

Seals. Seals are awarded at the PPA District Photographic Competition level only, and indicate that an image received a score of 80 or above and may move directly to the IPC Loan judging component, bypassing the Merit judging.

Merits, Showcase and Loans. PPA International Photographic Competition entries are evaluated under a system of “no merit,” “merit” or “loan,” as determined by a panel of judges, and “showcase/general book,” as determined by individual jurors in a limited capacity. Loan images are eligible for Grand Imaging Awards (GIA) and the resultant top placements within the GIA voting eventually progress to the highest level of competition; the *World Photographic Cup*.

District Photographic Competition Recognition. The PPA provides the following awards at each District: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in each category: General Portrait, Senior Portrait, Children’s Portrait, Animal Portrait, Wedding, Illustrative/Commercial, Landscape/Nature, Event Album, Non Event Album, and Artist (PEC 84-85).

International Photographic Competition Recognition. “International Photographic Competition Diamond level photographers will earn the distinction of Photographer of the year. Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum level photographers will be designated as medalist, and will be awarded a pin. (PEC 66).”

Imaging IUSA Exhibit. “At the discretion of PEC, all the accepted entries in the General and Loan Collection are on display at that year’s International Convention with the exception of the Albums. (PEC 71).”

Master of Photography/Master Artist Degrees. Continued successful participation in PPA photographic competition earn exhibition merits, which are applied towards the requirements of PPA's Master of Photography and Master Artist degrees.

Imaging Excellence Award/Bars. “The Imaging Excellence Award is an award that is to be hung on a Master’s ribbon, and is to be awarded when a Master has had 13 entries accepted in the PPA Loan Collection in any expertise (PEC 84).” Imaging Excellence bars are awarded for each successive set of 13 additional entries accepted in the Loan Collection.

Merit Bars. Continued participation in PPA activities reward the member with merits. Those merits accumulate in quantities of 25 or 50 and are recognized with the appropriate merit bars for inclusion on PPA degree ribbons.

Elite/Elite Plus status. Continued successful photographic competition participation after the issuance of PPA credentials and degrees translates into an annual status of Elite or Elite Plus, depending on the quantity and type of achievement.

ASP Elite & ASP Medallions. The American Society of Photographers utilizes the entries into PPA's International Photographic Competition to determine their own member awards on both the District and International Level with the awarding of the ASP Elite Award (District) and the ASP Bronze, Silver and Gold Medallions on the IPC level.

Grand Imaging Awards. Further evaluations of IPC entries occur with the selection of the Grand Imaging Award (GIA) finalists, determined by all jurors in a majority vote. The top ten entries in each category serve as finalists and the top three entries in each category are announced at Imaging USA as GIA winners.

World Photographic Cup. The World Photographic Cup was introduced to the PPA membership at the end of 2013 and was first held in 2014. It is a world-wide photographic competition between teams from participating countries. The top three images in each GIA category comprise the entries of the United States team. Gold, Silver and Bronze medals are awarded to the makers of the top images in six categories and specific point valuations are given to the team whenever one of their members is awarded a medal. The team with the highest score is pronounced the winner of the World Cup. The United States was named the World Cup winner in both 2014 and 2015 (Owens 137-138).

THE INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

The personal, non-tangible reasons, or intrinsic motivations behind photographic competition participation are many. Sometimes the motivation is to repeat an advantageous result already obtained, other times it is to achieve a skill level that remains unmet. A literature review to collect the most common reasons for photographic competition participation was performed and resulted in the following collection of comments, motivators and reasons:

Foremost in the reasons given is that photographic competition takes the quality of an individual's photography higher; "By assimilating the lessons of print competition into your every day work, you will bring your photography to a higher level (Newell, McNeilly, and Huntsman 43)."

Kalen Henderson describes print competition as "a path that taught me to make images that would not only sell on a regular basis, but would pass the judgment of my peers" (Henderson 38). Jeff Kent reports that photographic competition is for professionals that have "worked diligently to excel at their craft" and Dennis Craft describes it as a "way to determine how your images measure against good, quality photography. It's a way to make yourself better (Kent 92-93)."

Ralph Romaguera Sr. describes photographic competition as a vital part of continuing education and says "I believe that I am a better photographer because I worked to earn my credentials and my

clients have received a more professional product as a result. (Romaguera Sr. 103).” He also states that “the best way to improve is to place your work in front of folks that are more seasoned than you and learn from them (Romaguera Sr. 127).” For Tim Walden, it's to exercise skills and accomplish more for clients and for Dan Frievalt it “holds you accountable for pushing yourself and your art” (Owens 120).

DRAWING PARALLELS: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS AND PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Why enter photographic competition? According to the Professional Photographers of America

“Participating in PPA's photographic competitions gives you the opportunity to:

- Engage with the passionate and supportive photographic competition community
- Improve upon your finest work
- Earn recognition and admiration from your peers
- As a result, improve your business (ppa.com)”

A comparison of these opportunities to Maslow's hierarchy indicates that “engage with the passionate and supportive photographic competition community” may be classified as a love and belonging need, “improve upon your finest work” can simultaneously be classified as both a safety need as well as an exercise in self-actualization, “earn recognition and admiration from your peers” fulfills the individuals esteem needs and “... improve your business” is reflected within the safety category as part of stable employment, but could very well be interpreted as the ability to secure biological and physical needs more readily, thereby satisfying physiological needs.

Through this approach, the reasons given to entice members to participate in photographic competition, line up quite nicely with Maslow's need descriptors. To appeal to the largest number of members, it only makes sense to provide the opportunity for as many individual needs to be met as possible.

Physiological needs. As noted in the literature review for the met needs of competitors, some common motivators for entering photographic competition is an increased skill level, resulting in a higher level quality of product available to our photographic clients. Indirectly, this meets the physiological needs of the competitors by providing a stable skill set, which in turn, improves their business and gives them the ability to procure what is needed to meet their physiological needs.

Safety needs. Without a comfortable learning environment, learners will never even have a chance to reach the highest level of self-actualization. PPA Photographic Competition meets this need through its utilization of rules via the International Photographic Competition Manual and the Jury Chair Manual, assuring that the process and participants involved with photographic competition support a comfortable learning environment.

Competition judges are required to meet specific prerequisites, obtain education and experience relative and important to the challenges of judging, and undergo specific follow-up training and requirements to be PPA Affiliated Jurors. Both competition levels partially meet an individual's safety needs by providing an organized framework within which to participate. Entrants and entries are governed by rules and the process of competition is held to specific procedures as outlined in PPA's Jury Chair Manual.

Love and belonging needs. Social interactions specifically speak to the fulfillment of Maslow's lowest of the higher-level needs, love and belonging. Through the process of photographic competition, the participants align themselves within groups and bond through the experience, whether they be print handlers, volunteers, judges, students or competitors. Further bonding takes place in the virtual communities created by the live-streaming during both the District and IPC events and the IPC-Live centered activities in real-time.

Social interactions are also encouraged through the utilization of PPA's Loop as well as the variety of formal and informal social media groups on Facebook, Google+, and interacting via Twitter

and Instagram. Additionally, these communities are given the opportunity to come together at IUSA for further social integration and bonding. These groups may be as competitors, medalists, degree recipients, GIA finalists, GIA award winners and Team USA World Photographic Cup finalists, as well as virtual social groups formed during the actual competitions.

A recent review of social media indicated groups of competitors referring to members of their social groups as “fellow diamond photographers” and “fellow medalists” and several with exceptional success have labeled themselves as “double diamond photographers.” Some successful competitors have even utilized screen shots from IPC live stream judging or photographs of their Photographer of the Year medals as profile photos on social media. Photographic Competition has assuredly provided a sense of inclusion among its participants, thereby satisfying the love and belonging needs described by Maslow.

Belonging is also encouraged with the awarding of medallions and pins that indicate various accomplishments. Just by virtue of others having similar level of achievements, we identify with each other as fellow successful competitors.

Esteem Needs. Recognition, given correctly, for the right reasons have been identified as one of the most powerful tools a manager has available to motivate employees (Cohen 2006) and recognition programs speak to the esteem level of the Maslow pyramid (Jurgle). The PPA offers the following outputs to meet the esteem needs of the competitor: Merits, Showcase and Loan designations, publication in the Showcase and Loan Collection books, awarding of the Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum and Diamond Medalist/Photographer of the Year designations, honoring those recipients at their annual convention, Imaging USA, and providing press release templates to enable self esteem bolstering at the client and colleague level. They not only congratulate you, they provide you the means to allow others to congratulate you, as well.

Higher level achievements are afforded esteem need satisfaction in the form of Grand Imaging

Awards and inclusion in the USA World Photographic Cup team. Long-term accomplishments are recognized in the form of the Master of Photography and Master Artist Degrees and the Imaging Excellence Medallion and bars. Continued photographic competition participation success is also recognized through the Elite and Elite Plus designations as well as merit and photo merit bars.

Self-actualization. The process involved with PPA photographic competition constantly guides and leads its competitors through the process of improvement and education. As noted in the literature review of reasons for competition is a common thread of “becoming the best photographer I can be,” and “challenging myself and my art.” The Loan Collection is often referred to as the “Best of the Best” and the American Society of Photography's (ASP) member loan collection is called “The Best of the Best of the Best,” an obvious nod to Maslow's level of self-actualization.

Maslow (1962) believed self-actualization could be measured through the concept of peak experiences. This occurs when a person experiences the world totally for what it is, and there are feelings of euphoria, joy and wonder. As self actualization evolves and continues, it only stands to reason that continuing and evolving within photographic competition is a worthy activity/goal that provides these peak experiences.

PPA Photographic Competition not only serves as a benefit for its members, it provides a vehicle for personal growth, discovery and self-actualization.

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