


# THE SELF-ACTUALIZATION MANIFESTO

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HOW TO START ACTUALIZING YOUR TRUE POTENTIAL  
RIGHT NOW



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Since psychologist Abraham Maslow first coined “self-actualization” in the 1950s, a lot has changed. The work of Maslow and his colleagues—the founders of Humanistic Psychology—inspired the Human Potential Movement in the 1970s. This movement later gave birth to the self-improvement and personal development industry we know today. Since Maslow’s period, however, the term “self-actualization” has become tremendously overused and misunderstood. This manifesto will help clarify the confusion to ensure you’re moving towards what’s most important to you.

*Dedicated to those embarking on their  
unique path to discover their  
personal destinies.*

## What Made Maslow Different

In Maslow's era, psychology had a single-minded focus on mental illness. Neurosis and psychosis were the central themes as psychologists sought to understand and potentially heal mental afflictions.



But Maslow took a different approach. Instead of studying mental illness, he asked a different question:

*"What does positive mental health look like?"*

The summary of his lifelong research into this question yielded an idea that's still popular over 60 years later: *self-actualization*.

# Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow has become well-known for identifying the basic human needs all humans share.



From bottom to top:

**Biological or physiological needs** include air, water, food, homeostasis, and sex.

**Safety needs** include shelter, clothes, routine, and familiarity.

**Belonging & love needs** include affection, connection to family, friends, and colleagues.

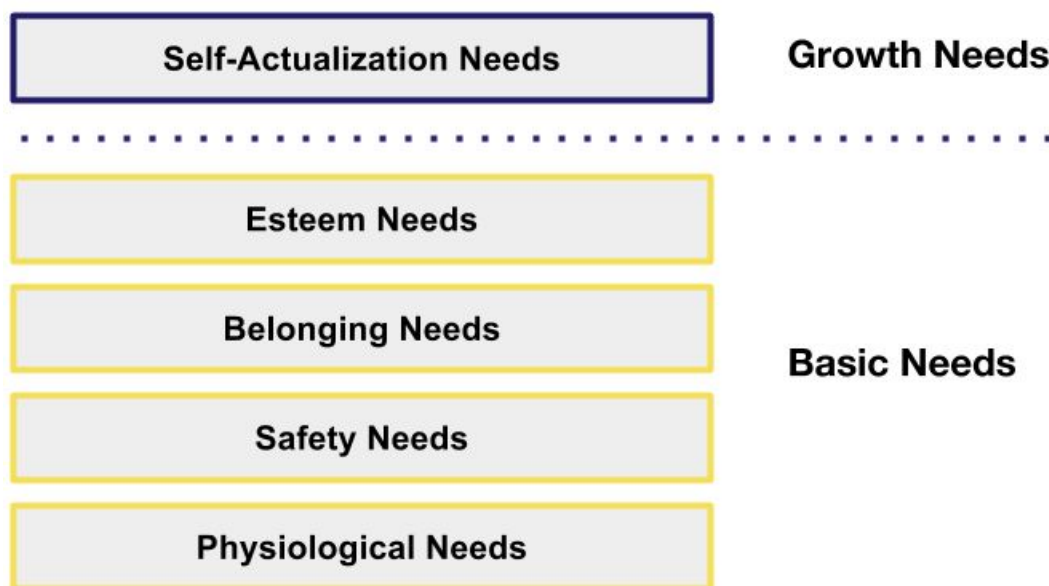
**Esteem needs** include external esteem like respect from others and reputation/prestige as well as internal esteem like self-respect, a high evaluation of oneself, and achievement.

**Self-actualization needs** include self-growth.

Most people associate Maslow's work with this "hierarchy of human needs."

## Growth Needs versus Basic Needs

Maslow drew a line between people motivated by growth needs and those driven by basic needs. All of the needs below self-actualization are basic needs. Maslow also called them *deficiency needs*.



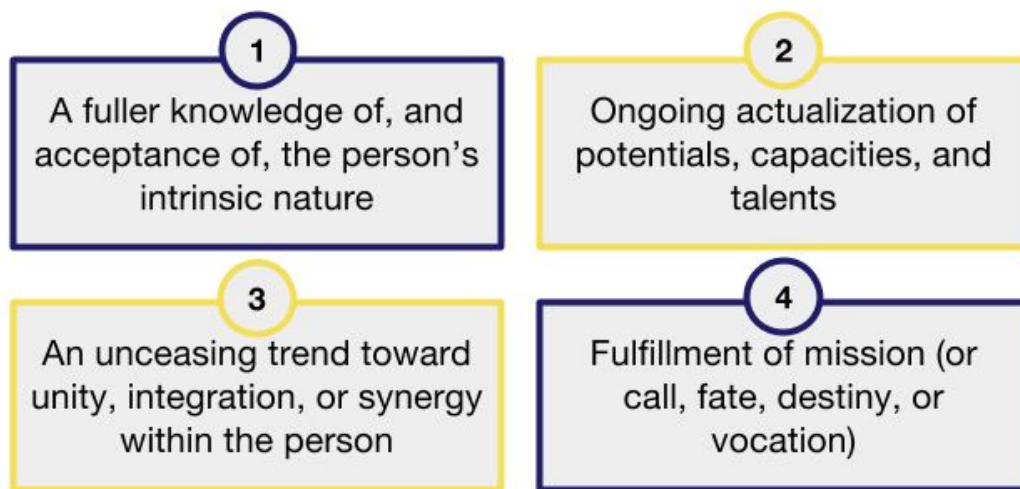
When these needs aren't being met, we feel something is missing in our lives, leading us to experience tension and exhibit neurotic behavior. Without a roof over our heads, for example, our need for security is threatened.

Until we fulfill our basic needs, gratifying them dominates our attention. But once we meet them, we can shift more of our attention to growth needs. Whereas basic needs are external, growth needs are *internal*. With growth needs, we're no longer motivated by what other people think—family, friends, colleagues, or anyone else. Instead, we're driven by something *more profound* inside of us.

## What is Self-Actualization?

In his book, *Motivation and Personality* and later work, Maslow called those driven by growth motivation self-actualizing individuals.

He defined *self-actualization* as:



Think of self-actualization as the *need to become what one has the potential to be*.

We realize this potential for its own gratification—not for any external gain or concern of what others will think or say (because external esteem needs drive these motivations).

*Note:* There are specific skills that support the actualization of our potential amidst our busy lives. You can learn powerful methods that will give you an edge in [this e-course](#).

## Who is Self-Actualizing?

When Maslow set out to study self-actualizing individuals, he ran into a problem: *He couldn't find enough individuals that met his criteria.*

Consider this for a moment: Maslow wanted to study what positive mental health looks like, and he couldn't find enough psychologically healthy people!

Sixty years of research later in the fields of humanistic psychology, developmental psychology, and transpersonal psychology confirm Maslow's experience.

Self-actualization or mature psychological development is *incredibly rare*. How rare? The statistic you'll often find in the literature is *less than 2 percent*. That is, more than 98 percent of us are not reaching close to our potential as mature adults.

While this is a sobering statistic, if you observe those around you, the interests of most people, and the media we consume, this percentage isn't surprising.



# What Blocks People from Self-Actualization?

If self-actualization is a natural process—the birthright of every human being—then why is it so rare? From what I can observe, there are four fundamental interrelated factors:

- 1** *Societal programming.* [Research shows](#) that 98% of children can be classified as creative geniuses. Creativity is a key attribute of self-actualization. But by age 15—after a decade in the school system—that number drops to 10%. And for adults, that percentage drops to 2. Yup, there's that 2% statistic again.
- 2** *Cultural programming.* The values of a particular culture influence the development of its people. And most modern cultures are driven by image and consumerism. The cultural pressures related to these drives suppress developmental processes in our adolescence and tends to carry over into adulthood.
- 3** *Psychological trauma.* Past trauma, mostly unrecognized, is the main reason individuals avoid actualizing their potential. Through unconscious cues from parents during childhood, most of us develop deeply-rooted feelings of being insecure, unloved, and unworthy.
- 4** *Neurological problems.* All of the above, combined with inadequate nutrition that influences the brain's development, leads to neurological issues. Our brains operate at suboptimal levels, leading us to engage in unsupportive, compulsive behaviors.

## What Hijacks Individuals from Changing Their Course?

To understand why most of us struggle to adopt life-supporting habits and walk the path toward self-mastery, we need only look to the human needs that come *before* self-actualization. When these needs aren't met within us, we can't focus our attention on growth needs yet.

Now, physiological needs are obvious. Everyone needs clean air, food, and water. We need shelter too (which is part of "safety needs.") But these represents socio-economic concerns beyond the scope of this manifesto. Instead, let's examine what's blocking the average individual in the modern world from self-actualization.

Human Need	Psychological Wound
Esteem Needs	Feeling Unworthy
Belonging Needs	Feeling Unloved
Safety Needs	Feeling Unsafe

Deeply-rooted feelings of being unsafe, unloved, and/or unworthy drive our neurotic behavior and block the natural course of our development. These basic needs are often insufficiently met in childhood. And now, we are still attempting to meet them. The challenge is that as adults, psychological needs cannot be met by anything outside of ourselves.

## 13 Characteristics of Self-Actualization

But let us not dwell too long on the problem. Part of the challenge is that we don't have a *collective vision for self-actualization and human potential*.

Instead, we unconsciously take cues of what's desirable by watching celebrities, famous people, and self-promoting individuals.

Without having an internal vision of what's possible, we look to the media and our social circles for clues of how we're supposed to be—of what humans are capable of when we're at our best.

Thankfully, in *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow highlighted the characteristics of self-actualization he eventually uncovered through his life quest.

Consider the following traits as a part of a vision for human potential. As you review the characteristics that follow, do a brief internal assessment of your character and behavior.

## **1 Superior perception of reality and ability to detect deception**

Self-actualizing people possess an unusual ability to judge others accurately and detect dishonesty in their personality. They have this capacity because they are radically aware of their darker side. With superior perception comes the capacity to determine what's good for the person and make effective decisions.

## **2 Increased acceptance of self, of others, and of nature**

Maslow found that mentally healthy people had less overriding guilt, crippling shame, and severe anxiety. Self-actualizing people can accept their nature, including their shortcomings and contradictions, without feeling real concern.

## **3 Increased spontaneity and naturalness**

They are more spontaneous in their behavior as well as in their lives, thoughts, and impulses. Naturalness and simplicity mark their behavior.

## **4 Increase in problem-centering**

They are more focused on problems outside themselves as opposed to personal issues (ego-centered). They often have missions in life and tasks to fulfill that demand much of their energies. (Many people involved in activism and social causes, however, use these endeavors to escape their problems and feel better about themselves.)

## 5 Increased detachment and desire for privacy

They are comfortable being by themselves without the neurotic need to always be around people. They positively *like* solitude and privacy to a higher degree than the average person.

## 6 Increased autonomy and resistance to enculturation

They are relatively independent of their social environment. Motivated by a drive for internal growth, self-actualizers are more focused on the development of their potentialities. In contrast, the average person is dependent on and motivated by social or cultural forces.

## 7 Greater freshness of appreciation and a richness of emotional reaction

They can appreciate, freshly and innocently, the natural elements of life with awe, wonder, and pleasure long after these things become stale to others. For example, they can gaze at a tree or a sunset for a long time without getting bored (they don't require additional stimulation).

## 8 Higher frequency of peak experiences

In his book [Religion, Values and Peak Experience](#), Maslow called this a mystic experience or oceanic feeling. He found that with these mystical experiences, there's a loss of self or transcendence of it. According to Maslow (and other developmental researchers), everyone has access to these peak experiences, but self-actualizing individuals have them more often.

## **9 Increased identification with the human species**

Later research in developmental psychology confirms Maslow's observations: Humans develop from being identified exclusively with themselves (egocentric) to identification to a group, whether it be family, religious, or political (sociocentric) to identification with all of humanity (worldcentric).

## **10 Improved interpersonal relations and deeper bonds**

Capable of greater love and more obliteration of ego boundaries, they have deeper relationships than other adults. But they may only form deep bonds with a select few individuals, maintaining a relatively small circle of friends.

## **11 More democratic character structure (less judgemental)**

They are friendly with anyone of suitable character regardless of class, education, political belief, race, or color. Identifying more closely with the human species, they are less determined by (and often unaware of) any of these classifications.

## **12 Increased creativeness and self-expression**

A universal characteristic of all self-actualizing people Maslow studied was an increase in creative expression. This creativeness is not a "special talent" creativity that takes years of constant practice to cultivate, but rather a more innocent, playful, and spontaneous creative expression found in young children.

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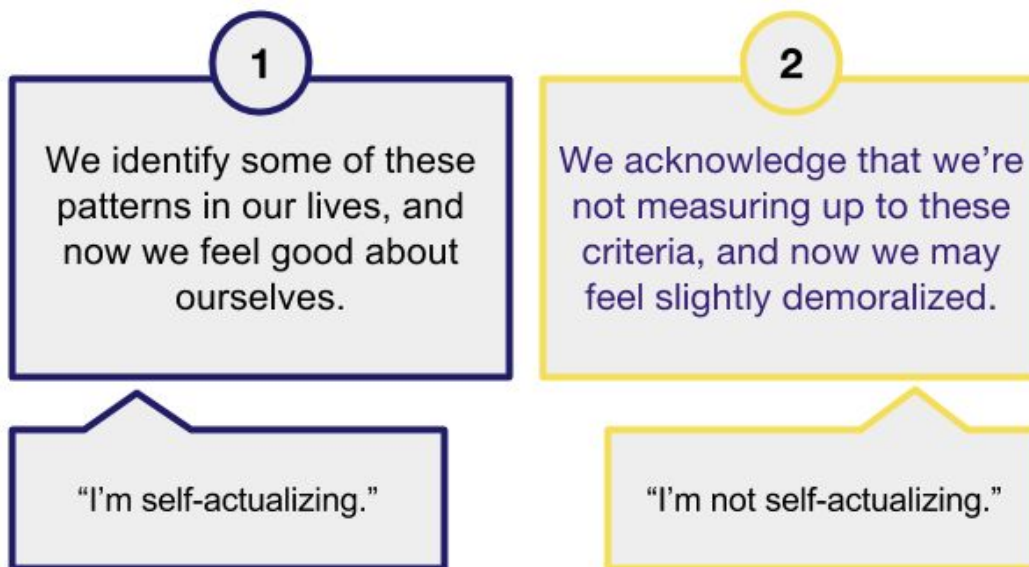
## Establish changes in their value system

With their philosophic acceptance of the nature of their selves, of human nature, and of physical reality, they establish a firm [value structure](#). With appreciation and acceptance of human nature, many of our so-called “problems” are seen as gratuitous and fade out of existence.

Maslow did his best to isolate the characteristics he observed in his self-actualizing subjects, but he was quick to point out how interconnected these qualities are.

## So Where Are You At Now?

Now, in reviewing the above characteristics, our minds generally take in one of two directions:



So here's the tricky thing about our psychology: whether we're feeling good about ourselves (inflation) or bad about ourselves (deflation), we're stuck in an unmet esteem need. That is, our primary motivation is still basic, deficient needs, not self-actualization.

Regarding self-actualization, it doesn't matter how you feel about yourself. What is important is your overall direction.

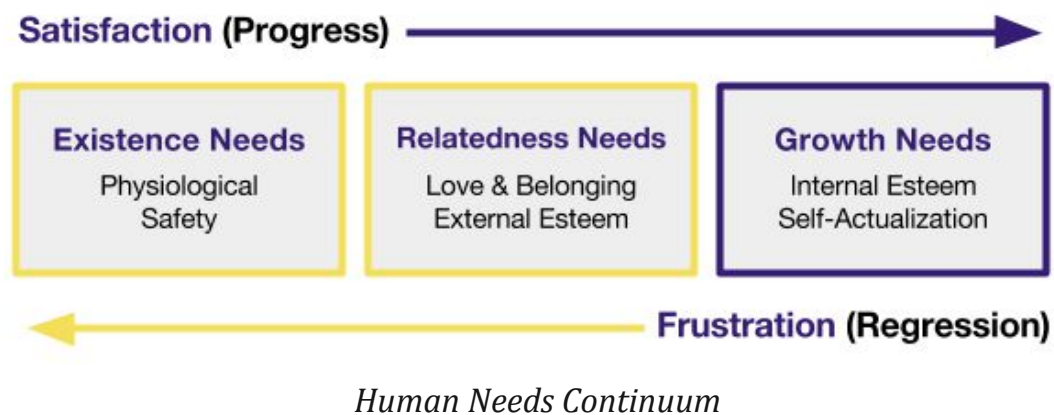
Allow me to explain...



## Human Needs Continuum

The reality is that in daily life, most of us are trying to meet all of our human needs simultaneously to varying degrees. Instead of focusing on whether or not you're self-actualizing, consider the overall emphasis and momentum of your actions.

Psychologist Clayton Alderfer illustrated Maslow's human needs on a horizontal continuum:



If you're investing an increasing effort in your growth, you probably feel more satisfied. And this satisfaction will likely fuel your growth efforts further.

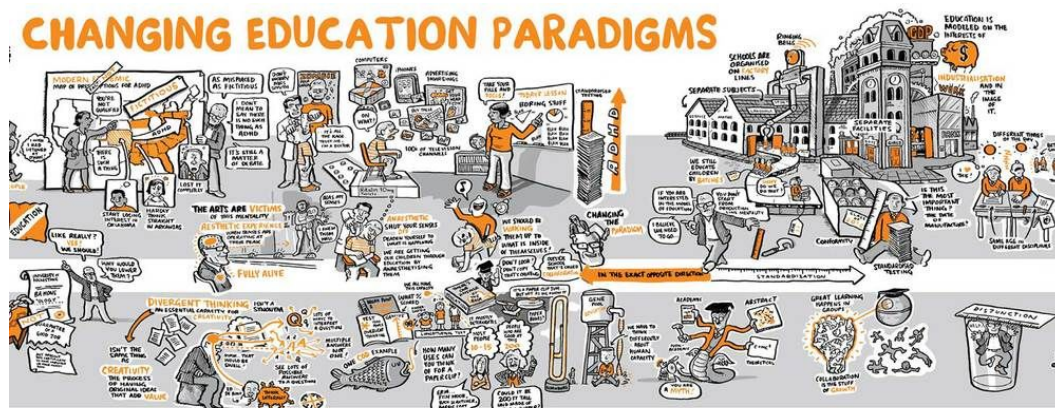
Research by psychologist Martin Seligman confirms this experience. Seligman, the founder of positive psychology and author of [Authentic Happiness](#), finds that people feel more gratification (lasting happiness) when they are pursuing personal growth.

If, however, your emphasis is turning to unmet relatedness and existence needs, your frustration is building. Frustration diminishes your motivation to grow.

# How to Approach Self-Actualization

It's important to remember that self-actualization is a *spontaneous and natural process*. When a child isn't psychologically blocked by their parents and others in their environment, the path to self-actualization begins early with a sense of curiosity and an exploratory spirit.

But for most of us (myself included), this curiosity wasn't cultivated in youth. In fact, many forces unknowingly squashed it. See Sir Ken Robinson's talk on [Changing Education Paradigms](#) for an enlightening look at how our school systems destroy creativity in children.



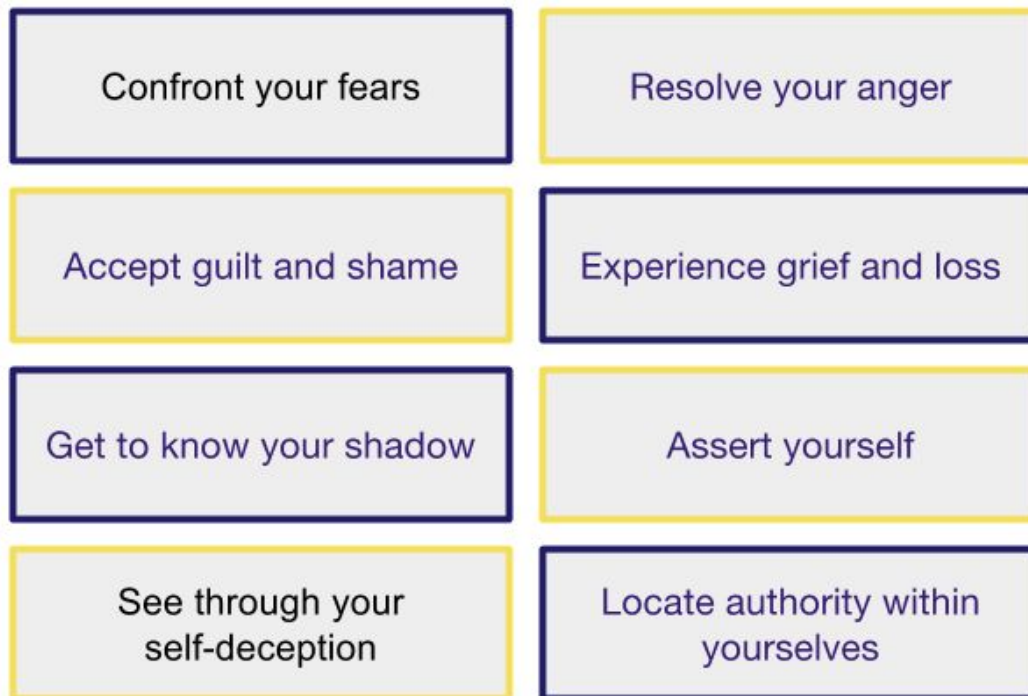
For most adults, the drive toward self-actualization comes out of a sense of dissatisfaction with how they are living or who they are becoming. An inner acknowledgment arises that we are capable of more. (Perhaps that's why you're reading this guide?)

Once you rekindle the self-actualization fire within you, your adventure begins. It often starts with [a lot of reading](#) and eventually ripens into practice. You start to see that there is an infinite number of ways you can develop your gifts, abilities, passions, and intelligence. You might [dive deep into specific practices](#) right away or skim the surface in a lot of ponds first. Everyone is different.

## This is What Happens As You Self-Actualize ...

The process of self-actualization is synonymous with the [hero's journey](#). It's the developmental path from adolescence to mature adulthood, which takes heroic persistence, courage, and will.

On this journey you learn to:



As all of this continuously unfolds, we come closer and closer to ourselves, accessing more internal power and innate ability. That is, we access and integrate more of our potential.

## Self-Actualization is Your Birthright

Our external environment does not support our self-actualization. The external world, in fact, is designed to reinforce unmet basic needs. For this reason, few people actualize their potential.

Self-actualization, however, isn't for a gifted few. It's everyone's birthright. Many of us resist our self-actualization because of fear. Maslow called this *aborted self-actualization*. We do this without knowing it. When we're spending most of your time consuming different forms of media, for example, we've walked off our path.

As Maslow used to tell his students:

*“If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you’ll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capacities, your own possibilities.”*

The good news is that as soon as we realize it, we can start anew, right here and now. Follow what you love—those things that light your fire and ignite your curiosity—and see where it will take you. It's an [awesome adventure of discovery and growth](#).

## What You Can Do To Support Your Self-Actualization Needs Right Now

Remember, self-actualization is a *natural process*. “Trying” to focus on your growth when you fundamentally don’t want to is often counter-productive. Instead, become more aware of your internal resistance to growth. Then, you’ll be in a position to work with it, let it go, or transcend it.

Actualizing various dimensions of my potential has been an interest and focus for over twenty years. Along the way, I’ve also been supporting the self-actualization process of many others as a [personal coach](#) and growth strategist for high-achieving entrepreneurs.

Dozens of in-depth personal development guides on [my website](#) offer many of the insights I’ve uncovered through this work. But if you’re interested in jumpstarting your self-actualization, I have something for you. [Some specific skills and activities support self-actualization](#) for *any* individual. I outline these skills and effective methods you can use to master them in a fast and easy course you can access *right now*.

Enroll in this course now and start developing key habits for self-actualization.

**GET STARTED**