

Deciding what you want from life is not an easy task. What you want today is probably quite different from what you wanted 10 years ago. And, in another 10 years, your wants may well have changed again. That's to be expected. What you want usually depends on who you think you are at the time. As you change, so do your needs and desires.

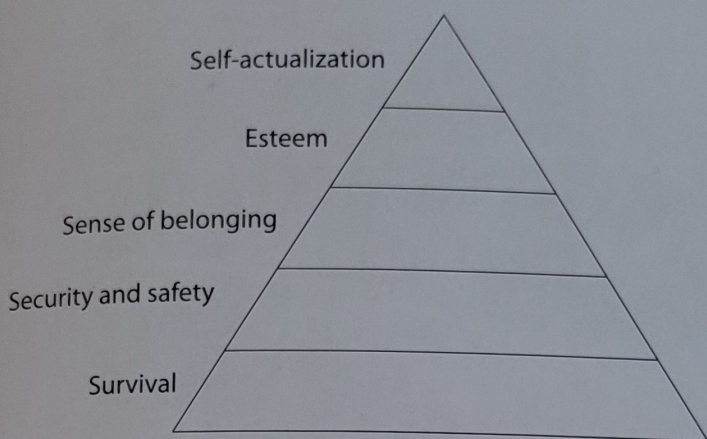
In general, though, most people want happiness, peace, and life satisfaction. However, the things that will *give* them these feelings vary greatly. Contrary to popular opinion, money and outward signs of success don't have much to do with life satisfaction. That comes from *inside*, from your own unique achievements and sense of self.

Again, though, these will change. Perhaps this section of the book should be titled "What Do I Want *Now*?" This is something you need to re-evaluate on a regular basis. The processes you'll learn in the following chapters should help. To paraphrase Mick Jagger, "You can't get what you want 'til you get what you need." Fortunately for us, someone has already determined the things we all need in order to be fully satisfied — and the order in which we must have them. The psychologist Abraham Maslow developed what has come to be called the Maslow Triangle. It graphically illustrates this hierarchy of human needs.

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It's important to become familiar with this diagram. Deciding what you want from life is difficult. If you can place yourself on a particular level of the triangle, you will have a better understanding of what you need to do next.

Think of the triangle as a ladder, with the bottom rung at the triangle's base. You cannot jump over a rung or two. You must take each step in order if you want to reach the top. (It's quite possible to slip down the rungs, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.) Let's look at the triangle.

According to Dr. Maslow, our first need is simply to survive. We must have food, water, clothing, and shelter. Until we have these basic necessities, we cannot move on to consider our next need, which is for safety and security. The first two rungs deal only with physical and emotional survival — not a very satisfying way to live for most people.

When you hit the third level of the triangle, your need for other people becomes apparent. Some people are more dependent on relationships than others, but we all need to feel connected to other human beings. We all need to have a sense of belonging.

As we near the top of the triangle, we find that we have a need for esteem. We want other people to feel that we are worthy of respect. We also want to respect ourselves. At this point, we become capable of thinking about what we want, rather than simply about what we need.

Finally, at the peak of the triangle is the need for what Maslow calls "self-actualization." Self-actualized people are those who have done what they set out to accomplish, who have reached their goals. Not many people reach this point (only about 10 percent), and not everyone who gets there stays there. Some people continue to set new goals every time they reach their old ones.

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Other people can quickly slide back to a lower rung. For example, people who lose their jobs or their health may find themselves back seeking survival and safety. Until they re-achieve these needs, they cannot approach — or probably even give much thought to — their higher needs.

As you think about your current place in the hierarchy of needs, it is important to remember that achieving life satisfaction is a *process*. It can only be accomplished one step at a time.

So be patient with yourself. It may be years before you can say exactly what you want from life. Even then, you may change your mind. The world is full of middle-aged people who are still trying to decide what they want to be when they grow up.

The process of thinking about your identity and your future can be rewarding in itself. It can get you headed in the right direction. It can help you realize that you have some control over your life.

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SELF-ACTUALIZATION

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Where Are You Now?

Answer the following questions to determine your present location on the Maslow Triangle. If you answer yes to the questions in each section, color in the corresponding section on the triangle below.

SURVIVAL

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| Do you have enough food and water to survive? | Yes | No |
| Do you have a place to live? | Yes | No |
| Do you have enough clothes to keep you warm? | Yes | No |

SECURITY AND SAFETY

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----|----|
| Do you feel safe? | Yes | No |
| Do you feel secure? | Yes | No |

SENSE OF BELONGING

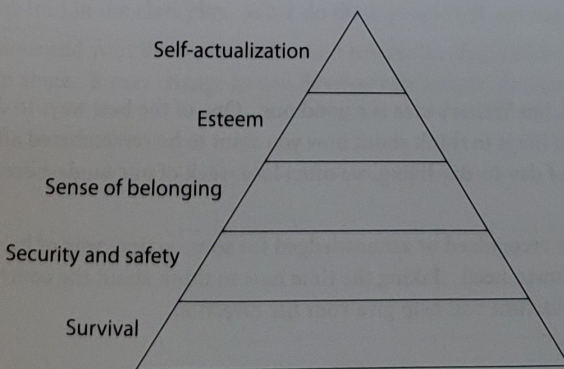
- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|----|
| Do you feel you belong somewhere? | Yes | No |
| Do you feel loved? | Yes | No |

SELF-ESTEEM

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| Do you feel good about yourself? | Yes | No |
| Do you feel worthwhile or valuable as a human being? | Yes | No |

SELF-ACTUALIZATION

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Do you feel accomplished? | Yes | No |
| Do you feel mature? | Yes | No |
| Do you trust your judgment? | Yes | No |
| Do you feel in control of your life? | Yes | No |



How Do You Want to be Remembered?

Walter Johnson always seemed to be three steps ahead of everyone else. When other children his age were learning to crawl, Walter was learning to in-line skate. "A much more efficient means of transportation," he explained to his mother. At five, Walter was memorizing Homer's *Odyssey*—in Greek. "Such a musical language," he said. Few people were surprised when Walter graduated at the top of his college class at age 14.

However, even his mother was shocked to find 16-year-old Walter carving his own tombstone in the family basement. "What are you doing?" she exclaimed. "Are you sick? What's going on? You have to tell me!"

"I'm fine, Mom," he said. "No sense putting this off until the last minute. Besides, I have a use for it now. I need it to show me how to live."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I've carved it right here—what I want to be remembered for. For now, it will be my guide. It will help me make decisions and make the best use of my time."

He held up the stone. WALTER JOHNSON, it said. HE GAVE IT HIS BEST SHOT.

The goal is not to live forever, but to create something that will.

— Chuck Palahniuk

It may seem odd, but Walter's idea is a good one. One of the best ways to determine what you really want out of life is to think about how you want to be remembered after death. Caught up in the demands of day-to-day living, we often lose track of our fondest dreams, our mission in life, our legacy.

We all want to be recognized or acknowledged for some action, way of being, or accomplishment. This is a basic human need. Taking the time now to think about the contribution you would like to make in your lifetime will help give your life direction.

How would you like to be remembered? Do any of these epitaphs strike a chord?

- JACK LITTLE: BEST COOK IN CHICAGO
- SARITA PATEL: EVERYBODY LOVED HER
- FARID MANSOUR: A NEW CAR EVERY YEAR
- BERTA SANTINI: CRUSADER FOR JUSTICE
- MAURICIO PEREZ: HE MADE PEOPLE LAUGH
- AN NGUYEN: FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
- SAMUEL STEVENS: TEACHER OF THE YEAR
- LUCY BARTON: PROUD OWNER OF 139 PAIRS OF SHOES
- CONNIE FITZPATRICK: WORLD TRAVELER
- LEWIS JONES: PEACEMAKER
- ROBERTA ZIMMER: SUPERSTAR
- HAROLD CLAUSSEN: FAMILY MAN
- MARGARET GONZALES: PHILANTHROPIST
- LEE CHUNG: POET

In the space below, write your own epitaph. How do you want to be remembered? At the end of your life, what would you have to have done in order to be thought of that way? You don't have to limit your answer to a single line, but keep it brief.

Try not to get hung up on external forms of success, such as making a million dollars. You are more likely to be remembered — and to feel good about yourself — because of what you do with the money. If you must have that million, consider how you would use it. Would you set up a scholarship fund? Build a wing of a hospital? Assure the future security of your family? Save the whales? Retire and become a community volunteer?

Consider your personal heroes. These might be world figures like Anne Frank or Mohandas Gandhi, or they might be known only to a few, such as the coach who made you believe in yourself or the stutterer who landed the lead in the class play. What do these people tell you about your values?

Think about your passions and your dreams as well. And remember that, unlike Walter's, *your* mission is not carved in stone. It may change as you develop new beliefs, dreams, and goals.

_____ : _____
Your Name

Your Lifestyle

As you may be beginning to see, your career choice will affect more than the 40 hours a week you'll spend on the job. A job title often suggests a whole way of life. Rock star, scientist, farmer, carpenter — when we think of people in these occupations, we immediately visualize what they wear, where they live, who their friends are, perhaps even the person they voted for in the last election. (We may be *wrong*, mind you. However, in general, you won't find too many farmers in Manhattan, and most scientists are not close personal friends of Beyoncé.) In short, your career will help define your lifestyle.

What do we mean when we talk about lifestyle? Until recently, the word didn't even appear in the dictionary. Sociologists and psychologists have, however, come to realize that the way people live, the way they think and feel, what's important to them, and how they spend their time, money, and energy help explain not only individual lives, but how and why our society works the way it does. The term *lifestyle* is a composite of your income and education, your attitudes, your political and spiritual beliefs, where you choose to live, how you earn and spend your money, what is most important to you — even how secure and happy you are likely to be.

Before you begin researching possible careers, it is important to try to determine what type of lifestyle you want. Your career choice will have a great impact on the type of lifestyle you will lead.

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COMPONENTS OF LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle has many components. Think about your ideal future life and then complete this questionnaire.

RELATIONSHIPS

Are you or do you want to be married, in a committed relationship, or remain single? _____

Have children? _____ If so, how many? _____

What kinds of people would you like to be your friends? _____

How much time (hours per week) will you want to spend with your family? Your friends? _____

WORK

How much time do you want to spend at your chosen profession? Less than 20 hours per week? 20-40 hours per week? 40-50 hours? As long as it takes? _____

What is your mission in life? What sort of commitment do you want or need to make to some larger goal? _____

What are your other priorities that require time and attention? _____

PERSONAL

How much time each week would you like to spend on:

Recreation _____ Individual pursuits _____ Contemplation and relaxation _____

How much flexibility do you want in your life? _____

What will be the "pace" of your life? Are you a high-energy person who always needs to have many projects at once, or are you a person who likes to tackle one thing at a time? _____

How will you meet your spiritual needs? _____

MATERIAL ITEMS

Where do you want to live? Describe the location and housing. _____

What income level would you like to reach? _____

Describe the possessions you want most. _____

Happiness Is a Balanced Lifestyle

Emma is a stockbroker who is totally dedicated to her work. She seldom gets home before 10 at night, and is back at her desk by 7:00 A.M. She devotes her weekends to reading annual reports and books and articles dealing with her job. She hasn't taken a vacation in five years and has no close friends or outside interests.

I've learned that you can't have everything and do everything at the same time.

—Oprah Winfrey

Isaac is a police officer in a small town. He and his wife have two children. He volunteers at a homeless shelter two nights a week and coaches his daughters' softball team. In order to save money, Isaac and his wife are renovating their house by themselves. He attends night school, working toward a degree in criminology. Isaac is also a guitarist with a small band that plays for local social events. He tries to do his share of the housework and thinks it's important to spend time with his children each day. Isaac and his wife go out alone at least once a week. His parents are getting older, and he likes to see them often. He enjoys going out with his friends.

Emma and Isaac have little in common — except that both have problems balancing their lives. Emma's life is incomplete. There are times when it is necessary to center your attention on one part of your life (finishing a project at work or recuperating from an illness, for example). However, Emma may never be truly happy if she keeps up her current pattern indefinitely. She needs to look at Maslow's Triangle.

Isaac is probably already aware that his life is *too* full. Some people have enormous amounts of energy and are able to juggle a wide variety of interests, activities, and responsibilities, but there are only 24 hours in a day and everyone has to sleep *sometime*. Isaac needs to decide which activities are most important to him and which ones he can most easily give up.

The exact makeup of a balanced lifestyle will be different for everyone. Some people want to give most of their attention to their work. For others, family is most important. Some people want or need to give priority to health concerns. But, in general, an emotionally and physically healthy life will include time for the following:

Physical health: Time to sleep and eat wisely must be built into every balanced lifestyle. Healthy people need time for both exercise and relaxation. Other health needs vary.

Work: Work is a central activity and source of identity for most adults. How important is it for you? Will you work part-time? Full-time? More than 40 hours a week? Would you like to be able to take time out when you have small children?

Family/relationships: Are you married or will you marry and have children? Marry and *not* have children? Surround yourself with a group of close friends? Today, there is a wide range of acceptable ways to meet your needs for close relationships with others. Your best choice might depend on the weight you assign other parts of your life. For example, Emma would almost certainly be happier if she had good friends and a circle of acquaintances she could socialize with regularly. Whether she would be happy being married with three children is questionable.

Do you want to have children? They take time and attention, especially when they are young. How would you adjust your lifestyle to accommodate them? For example, could you earn enough money working part-time? Could you work at home?

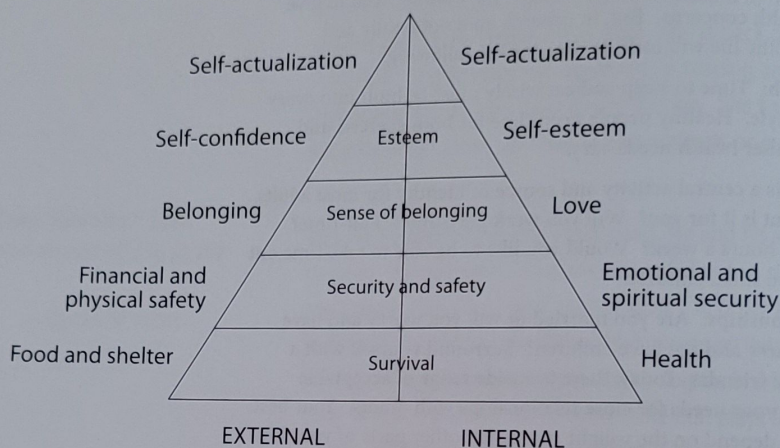
Leisure and recreation: Your balanced lifestyle should include time for hobbies, avocations, and the leisure activities that add so much to life. Will you travel? Have a garden? Follow your favorite sport or athletic team? Read or go to the movies?

Spiritual life: The dictionary defines spirit as "that which constitutes one's unseen, intangible being" or "the essential and activating principle of a person." Many people realize their spiritual needs through their religion. Others choose to "give something back" to the world by working as a volunteer or getting involved with organizations that promote conservation, peace, or human rights. Some people meet their spiritual needs privately, through meditation, reading, walking, and the like.

With all these considerations, it's easy to see how a life can get off balance!

*The key to keeping
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The Modified Maslow Triangle



To make it easier to visualize a balanced lifestyle, we have divided Maslow's Triangle down the middle. Although the hierarchy of needs remains the same, *our* triangle differentiates professional, or external, needs (shown on the left side) from personal, or internal, needs (diagrammed on the right).

Our external lives include such things as careers, the tasks we do, the possessions we accumulate, the roles we play, and the way others see us. Our social and educational systems teach us to deal almost exclusively with this side of life.

By internal lives, we mean our physical and spiritual well-being, our values, and our personal relationships. This is the side of life society tends to ignore. This may account for the increased use of drugs, depression, divorce, and general discontent we are experiencing today.

If either side is given too much emphasis, our lives become unbalanced. Life satisfaction decreases. It is possible on our double triangle to achieve one level of fulfillment in career life and quite another in personal matters. The happiest people are those who engage in both aspects of life. They are less willing to sacrifice one part for the sake of the other.

However, it's often a difficult balancing act. Today, especially, people attempting to mix career and family are having problems finding the time for all the important activities in their lives. It takes careful and creative planning to balance all of the areas of your life.

Let's go through our divided triangle, level by level. It's necessary to repeat ourselves somewhat, so please be patient.

Just as the most basic external need is for food and shelter (left), good health is the most basic personal need (right). Until we have these, we are unable to satisfy the next level of needs — financial and physical safety on the left side, spiritual and emotional security on the right side. It is impossible for most people to experience life satisfaction unless they reach these first two levels of fulfillment. Yet many people begin to make trade-offs here. They sacrifice their health in order to make more money even though, without good health, they cannot hope to enjoy their lives.

Those who feel confident of the ability to support themselves — without giving up physical or emotional health — can move on to the next level of need: love (on the right or personal side) and belonging (on the left or professional side). Although it is important to “belong,” to have a circle of acquaintances and casual friends, it is also necessary to have at least one deeper relationship. This might be with a spouse, a best friend, or someone else to whom you feel particularly close and committed.

People who do not have satisfying relationships with others cannot move on to achieve self-confidence and achievement (on the external side) and self-esteem (an internal need). At this level, you like yourself and feel good about what you are doing. Again, we see the necessity to consider the needs on both sides of the triangle. You might feel confident of your ability to succeed by cheating, lying, or manipulating, but if success comes at the expense of your self-esteem, it is not likely to make you happy. Shortcuts, even when successful, carry costs that will lessen good feelings.

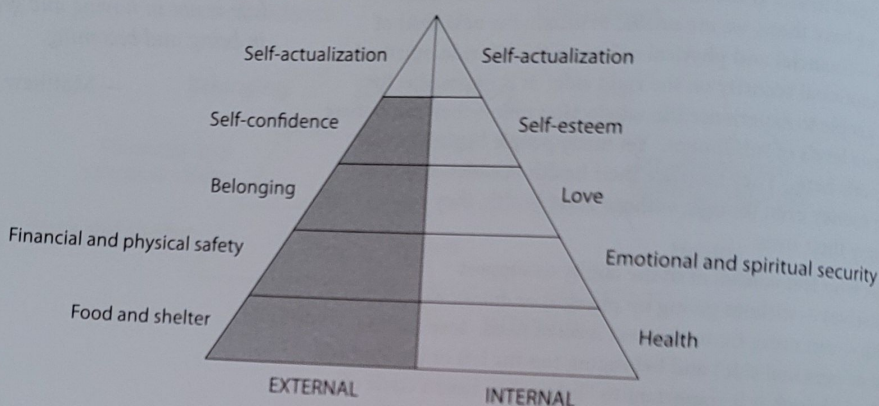
Once you have attained both confidence and self-esteem, you are on your way to becoming one of those rare self-actualizers, someone who is satisfied and happy with her or his life.

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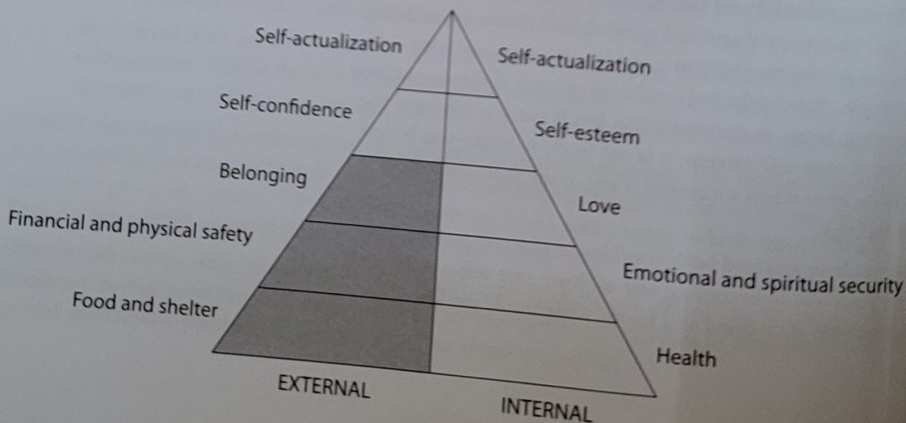
How can you tell if you are neglecting one side of your life? Besides the obvious ways — losing your health, your job, your close relationship — listen to your inner voice. Be aware of your feelings. Do you ever begin sentences with phrases such as “if only,” “I wish,” “I should but I can’t,” or “If I had the time I would?” These are clues that your life is not as satisfying as it might be. It’s time to take a closer look and make some changes.

Let’s see what Emma’s and Isaac’s diagrams might look like:

Emma has a good job and the respect of her colleagues and superiors. She thinks her work is of value, and loves what she does. Because she puts in so many hours, however, she has no time for personal relationships or private interests, and the stress of her job has placed her health in jeopardy. Emma’s triangle looks like this:

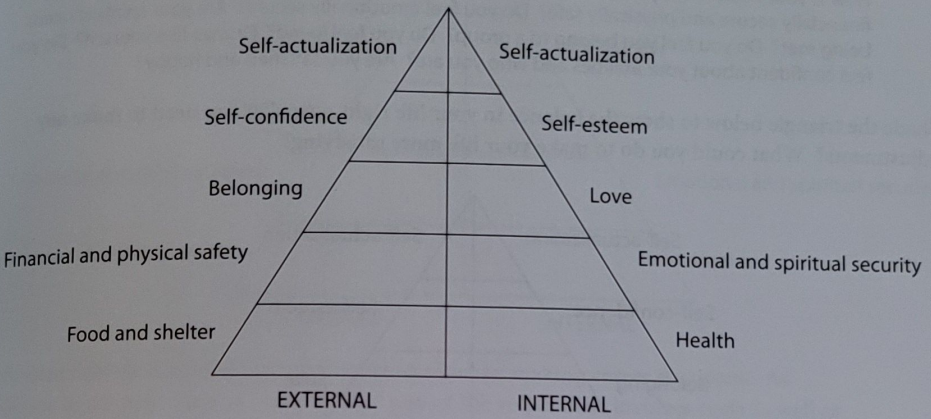


Isaac, too, has a good job and the respect of his community. He feels good about working toward his degree in criminology. He loves his wife and children and has many friends. Unfortunately, he seems to be exhausted all the time because of all he does, and he gets down on himself because he can’t always do what he’s promised. Many of his projects are done haphazardly or not completed. Isaac’s triangle looks like this:

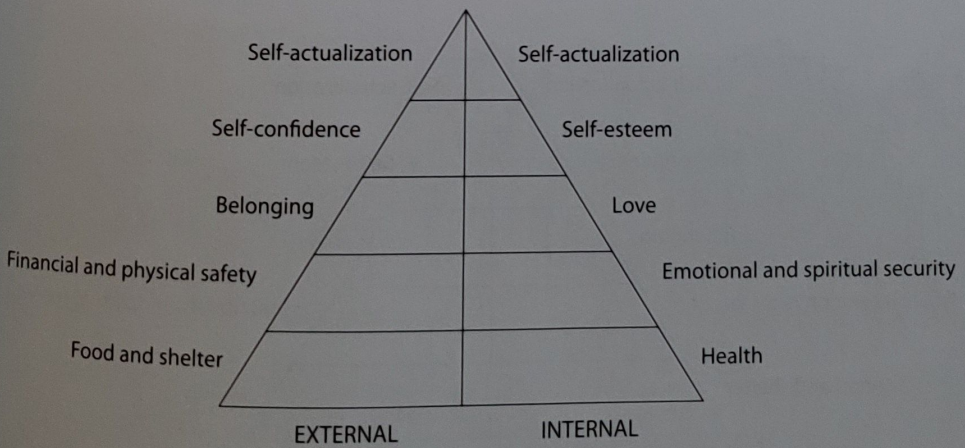


Especially when you don’t make conscious changes in your life, things can get off kilter over time. That’s why it is important to re-evaluate your situation regularly and try to become more aware of your feelings.

When Joanie was 25, she had a financially secure job that she loved, the respect of her fellow workers, and a circle of devoted and loving friends. Shade the triangle below to represent the levels Joanie had attained in both her professional and personal life.



By the time she was 30, things had changed. Her job seemed less satisfying, though she put in many hours. The resulting stress caused health problems. Many of her friends had married and started families or moved away to take new jobs, and Joanie's social life dramatically changed. She thought she might like to have a family of her own, but she wasn't dating anyone at the moment. Shade this triangle to show how Joanie's life had changed.



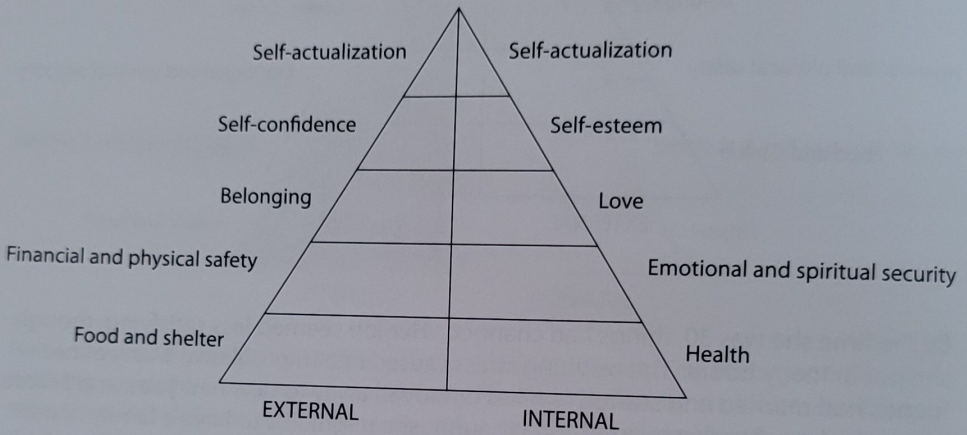
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What About Your Life?

Describe your life right now:

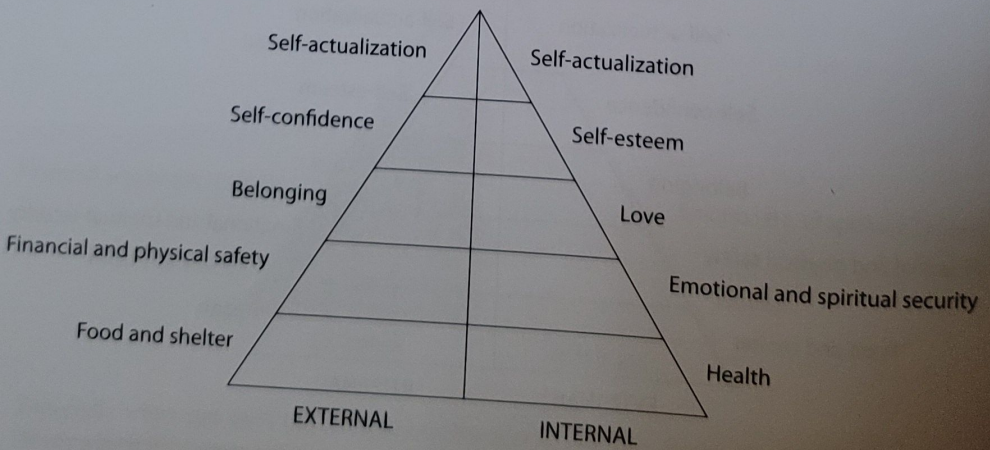
How is your health? Do you get enough to eat? Do you have adequate housing? Do you feel financially secure and physically safe? Do you feel emotionally secure? Are your spiritual needs being met? Do you feel you belong to a group? Do you feel loved? Do you like yourself? Do you feel confident about your abilities and who you are? Are you satisfied and happy?

Shade the triangle below to show the balance in your life right now. Do you need to make any adjustments? What could you do to make your life more satisfying?

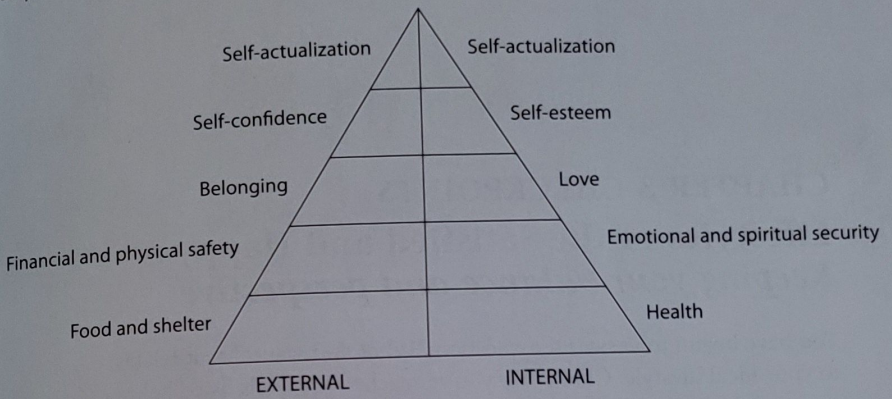


Now ask these same questions of one of your parents or older friends and interpret his or her responses.

Shade the triangle below to show his or her balance.



What do you think the triangle of a homeless person living alone would look like?



Your desired lifestyle is something to be considered when making career decisions. As you will see in the next chapter, however, any way of life you choose involves costs as well as rewards. These might relate to finances, psychological rewards or sacrifices, or the degree of commitment required.

