

#### Introduction

Many fire department leaders are being challenged today to motivate their firefighters. The reason for doing this is simple, a high level of motivation inspires good moral; whereas a lower level of motivation will have just the opposite effect on their members.

Douglas McGregor was a psychologist who focused on leadership considerations dealing with mutual trust, respect, and that of others feelings. You might know his work as “Theory X and Theory Y.”

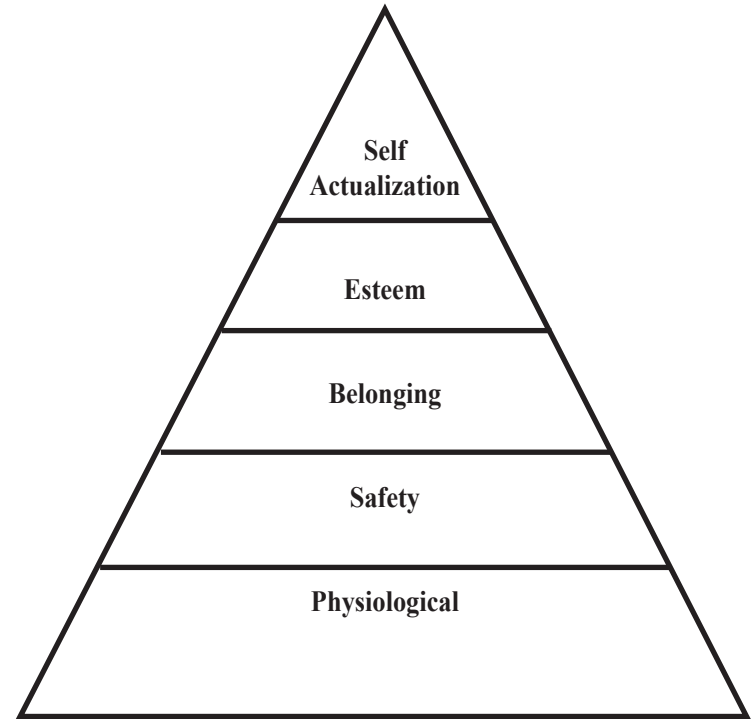
Those individuals classified as Theory X are task oriented. In general, McGregor found that these employees will not accomplish a task without a great deal of supervision. Simply stated, the employee’s first preference is to avoid any work until the supervisor has prioritized which tasks need to be performed.

The Theory Y individuals, however, assume that people will work hard, take on increased responsibilities, and are best supervised by their own domestic controls. Therefore, as an officer in the fire service, using McGregor’s approach one needs to know which of these type individual firefighters are working for you. The Theory X firefighter needs close control and directions to perform, while the Theory Y firefighter seeks support and very little supervision.

The one theory that most individuals have heard of was developed by Abraham Maslow. Maslow identified five levels of needs that all individuals seek: Physiological, Safety, Belonging, Esteem and Self-Actualization; commonly referred to as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. What Maslow did was form these five needs into a pyramid, from the lowest to the highest. The lower needs had to be satisfied, or to some extent satisfied, before an individual could begin working on the next level of the need pyramid.

**Physiological:** In this level, Maslow identifies what basic needs individuals need to provide for life’s basic needs; food, clothing and shelter (a place to live).

**Safety:** The second level involves one’s need for physical safety and job security, as these are generally high priorities for most individuals.



**Maslow's Pyramid of Needs**

**Belonging:** Everyone seeks to be a part of the team and be welcomed by all members.

**Esteem:** This level deals with the need to feel regarded highly favorable with respect or admiration. Be careful as this area deals with your ego and all too often egos can hurt one’s career.

**Self-Actualization:** Self-actualization is the success that comes from personal achievement. This level is generally short lived.

Maslow’s has identified these five levels that employees will move up and down in throughout their employment. One’s work will present challenges while trying to achieve their top level of Self-Actualization. As a company officer or chief officer, you will work hard to provide the resources, planning, guidance, and support needed to motivate your firefighters. Always celebrate success and, when needed, adjust for failures to maintain a highly motivated working environment.

*—Prepared by Russell Merrick*