

“Seeing is better than being blind, even when seeing hurts. - Abraham H. Maslow

In 1943 Abraham Maslow proposed his psychological theory on the hierarchy of needs as part of his paper titled “The Theory of Human Motivation”. His idea is that humans inherently pass through stages of behavioural motivation; physiological needs, safety needs, the need to belong, esteem needs and self-actualisation. Each stage represents the growth of the individual and progress up the pyramid cannot be achieved until the needs of the previous levels are satisfied. The stages represent the very basic requirements of food, health, water, sleep, shelter and safety, through love, relationships and recognition before attaining intellectual and spiritual transcendence.

Maslow openly admitted that transcendence is a rare state. Still, many employees operate in a space of growth mind-set and personal development (B-needs) and are able to do so through the achievement of a great job role, satisfaction with the company culture and healthy, stable relationships outside of work.

Individually and collectively Maslow’s Triangle is being shaken to the core by the Coronavirus pandemic in many different ways. A colleague placed on furlough may have wrestled with feelings of guilt or lower self-esteem. Working from home may have left an employee feeling isolated, therefore diminishing the sense of belonging. These various negative emotions are a potential gateway to stress, anxiety and mental health issues. The Covid-19 crisis also threatens the core physiological and safety needs of the individual, either through the potential of contracting the virus or the potential to lose income and financial security due to the economic crisis. An immediate threat to the core hierarchical needs could result in a siege mentality (protection of D-needs) which although not necessarily a negative mind-set, would still result in a general inability to operate with a growth mind-set until the risk has been successfully averted.

The job of the manager is to recognise any movement downwards through the triangle that may exist for an employee and to empathise on that level in the short, to medium term. Is the colleague eating and sleeping properly? Are they in good health? What are their concerns about their situation? How have they been impacted financially? It is important to be open and honest about how the crisis is affecting work, but some fears may be unfounded and the manager can provide piece of mind and reduce anxiety for the employee, if appropriate to do so. Working through any fears about the future will have a significant positive impact on the mental health of the employee.

Nobody likes to feel left out, so if remote working plays a major part in your COVID strategy it is imperative to find creative ways to stay connected. This is much more than a Team Zoom call; think about all the smaller interactions and conversations that would happen in the office and how these might be replicated using phone or text.

If the business is working through significant challenges, be wary of growth mind-set activities, when the audience are potentially not in a state of mind to receive this type of information or training. Instead, consider plenty of praise and recognition for colleagues that are performing well in the face of adversity and change; helping to increase feelings of safety and security. Create stronger bonds within your teams and make sure everyone knows that there is ample support and that you are “in it together”.

Most importantly, managers are human too. To deliver this piece of work effectively it is imperative that they are acutely aware of their own need for support during this time in order to manage their teams from a position of positivity and strength. This may require the help of an external mentor or business coach to address any challenges.

There are many complex scenarios arising from the COVID crisis and Chadwick Lawrence can advise on any of the unique problems faced. All situations are different on the facts, so please call 01924 379 078 in the first instance to discuss.