

Maslow's Bullseye Concept

A novel view and implementation for small-unit leaders

by Capt Jeremy Carter

As seen in Figure 1, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs consists of five stages: (1) Physiological; (2) Safety; (3) Love/Belonging; (4) Esteem; (5) Self-Actualization. In the original accepted model created by Maslow, one must progress from a lower tier unit, such as *Physiological*, to the next sequential stage, which would be *Safety* in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Model. However, regarding warfighters who are placed in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) situations, this model has an innate gap that limits the thinking and framework of our small-unit leaders, since Marines would not be able to progress to higher stages.

In the book *Limitless*, Jim Kwik discusses how we consistently limit our abilities by applying limiting frameworks, thought processes, and ideas. As defined by Kwik, unlimiting is "the act or process of casting aside inaccurate and restrictive perceptions of one's potential and embracing the reality that, with the right mindset, motivation, and methods, there are no limitations."¹ Thus, the author proposes a new concept using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model to elicit and facilitate the most out of our Marines and their small-unit leaders. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide small-unit leaders with a working concept of how to best develop, train, and sustain their Marines' lethality and survivability using *Maslow's Bullseye Concept*.

Maslow's Bullseye

As seen in Figure 2, when using the concept proposed by Maslow via a bullseye, we never get past the *Physiological*

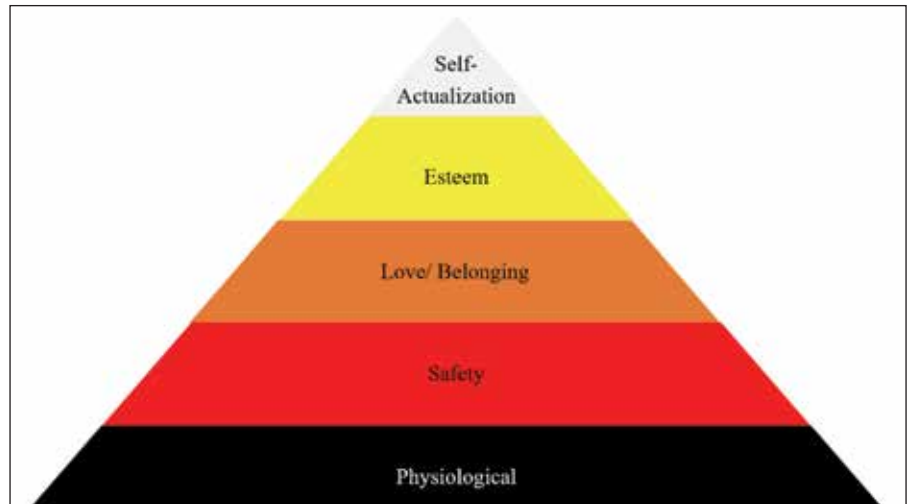


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. *Physiological:* Essentials that are needed for humans to survive (i.e., water, food, clothing, sleep, warmth). *Safety:* Involves security to include physical, emotional, interpersonal, environmental, spiritual, and financial. *Love and Belonging:* The need of humans to have a sense of belonging and acceptance. *Esteem:* Characterized by the confidence, respect, and value of oneself. *Self-Actualization:* Centric to heighten creativity, morality, spontaneity, experience, and purpose. (Figure provided by author.)

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Physiological stage. This is depicted by a single round making an impact in the outermost ring, which is equivalent to a score of 4 out of a possible 50 points. The other four rounds are off the target and therefore do not increase our overall score. Thus, this concept is limiting in nature for our Marines and our small-unit leaders. Especially, since we know our purpose is to win our Nation's battles; thus, our purpose is to

deploy to VUCA environments with the intent to impose our will on our enemies.

A more resilient, effective, and enhancing concept is to view Maslow's stages not as sequential but rather as individual facets of the entire Marine (See Figure 3), like rounds fired on a range. In Figure 2, we see that if deployed to a VUCA environment, we never advance past the *Physiological* and/or *Safety* stages (depicted by a score of 4). However, in Figure 3, using Maslow's Hierarchy via the bullseye concept, we can see that with optimal leadership and the correct culture, our overall score increases to 34 out of 50 by the Marine achieving gains in Stages 3 (Love/Belonging), 4 (Esteem), and 5 (Self-Actualization).

Since the fifth stage (Self-Actualization) is correlated to heightened creativity, morality, and spontaneity, we see that by facilitating this state, our Marines can enhance their abilities to solve complex problems, including tactical, moral, and ethical.

“Our potential is one thing. What we do with it is quite another.”
—Dr. Duckworth

How to Apply Maslow’s Bullseye
 There are numerous ways in which to enable Figure 3 to facilitate the most out of our Marines (i.e., Table 1). The Commandant’s Professional Reading List is full of relevant books that describe leadership. Furthermore, our Marine Corps professional courses emphasize small-unit leadership. Thus, to remain succinct, the author will briefly review three books that he believes will best arm the small-unit leader for applying Maslow’s Bullseye in VUCA environments by allowing their Marines to elevate past Stages 1 and 2 of Maslow’s original construct.

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance

In the book *Grit*,² Dr. Duckworth, describes what four factors her research has led her to conclude will facilitate a person to increase their grit (i.e., perseverance and passion for long-term goals).³ Dr. Duckworth states that for a person to have a high amount of grit, they need (1) hope, (2) interest, (3) purpose, and (4) practice. In training and combat, small-unit leaders should provide their Marines with hope. Note that Dr. Duckworth repeatedly cites research that shows suffering does not lead to hopelessness. Rather, it is suffering that one cannot control that leads to hopelessness. What this means for our small-unit leaders is that they can be hard (justly) on their Marines and place high expectations on them while enforcing

external disciplines on those who do not execute to standard. However, there must be a standard/condition in which the Marine is awarded for their efforts, output, and accomplishments.

Regarding interest, good leaders are like good coaches in the sense that they

stimulate interest in their subordinates for their role in the team. Thus, small-unit leaders should spark interest and sustained passion in their Marines. As a small-unit leader, you should create a culture of interest. “The reader should note that there is a difference between

THROUGHOUT ALL STAGES:	
Sustain and/or Start Implementing	1) Praise one’s effort over their current abilities, but ensure they are trying various tactics and strategies to improve. 2) Convey and emphasize that the unit values learning, perseverance, and failing forward. 3) Ensure superiors represent and embody a resource for learning, leadership, and are worth emulation. 4) Immediately address deficiencies. 5) Instill a culture of trust, learning, and mistakes of commission. 6) Believe Marines can improve in all aspects (physical, intellectual, interpersonal, emotional, etc.). 7) Provide as much autonomy and ownership within the unit as possible.
Stop and/or Do Not Implement	1) Do not praise one’s innate gifts, which can facilitate a fixed mindset. 2) Do not award and/ or provide false praise a Marine(s) when they have not earned the praise/ acknowledgement. 3) Do not lower standards. 4) Do not create personal, implied, or explicit limiting beliefs about your subordinates. 5) Do not allow and/ or tolerate mistakes of omission (i.e., apathy, lack of effort, not trying, etc.).
COUNSELING(S):	
Sustain and/or Start Implementing	1) Understand the Marine’s purpose for joining the Marine Corps, future goals, etc. 2) Provide a clear understanding of the purpose of the training, education, assessment, unit, etc. 3) Provide a clear understanding of the standard(s).
Stop and/or Do Not Implement	1) Do not solely talk at the Marine while not learning anything about the Marine. 2) Do not solely read the Marine’s billet description.
TRAINING AND EDUCATION:	
Sustain and/or Start Implementing	1) Present skills, knowledge, and capabilities as learnable and able to be progressed/ achievable. 2) Present skills, knowledge, and capabilities at the appropriate level. 3) Advance skills, knowledge, and capabilities in a logical sequence and progression.
Stop and/or Do Not Implement	1) Do not correlate a Marine’s current capabilities with their future potential. 2) Do not allow past positive performance, rank, and/ or experience to trump continued progression.
ASSESSMENT(S):	
Sustain and/or Start Implementing	1) Have as many assessments as possible, which are recorded and tracked. 2) Have assessments within the normal battle rhythm. 3) Ensure there is a standard that elicits positive feedback. 4) Ensure there is a collective understanding of the purpose and standard of the assessment.
Stop and/or Do Not Implement	1) Do not protect the Marine(s) from failure; allow Marines to fail. 2) Do not have a higher standard for common/ shared tasks for your subordinates than what the leader can achieve.
IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK:	
Sustain and/or Start Implementing	1) Give feedback in a manner that facilitates learning, comprehension, and future success. 2) Have a few key, critical points for improvement rather than a long list. 3) Feedback should include both sustains and improves.
Stop and/or Do Not Implement	1) Stop providing general negative feedback (i.e., you are not good enough) with no guidance for improvement. 2) Stop only focusing on the negative aspects of the assessment.

Table 1. The application and culture needed for Maslow’s Bullseye Concept.

a philosophy and a culture. A philosophy is merely words, but a culture is what truly matters since the culture is the unwritten norms and rules of an organization.”⁴

Regarding purpose, most authors and researchers include purpose into the models for increasing resiliency, follow-through, and effort. Often, the difference between an individual who succeeds or fails—preservers or quits—is their purpose for the objective. With a strong purpose, humans can accomplish great feats. As stated by Simon Sinek, “[A]chievement comes when pursue and attain WHAT you want. Success comes when you clear in pursuit of WHY you want it ... Success comes when we wake up every day in that never-ending pursuit of WHY we do WHAT we do.”⁵

Lastly, according to Dr. Duckworth, practice increases grit. She states, “one form of perseverance is the daily discipline of trying to do things better than we did yesterday. So, after you’ve discovered and developed interests in a particular area, you must devote yourself to the sort of focused, full-hearted, challenge-exceeding-skill practice that leads to mastery.”⁶

“If you want to be grittier, find a gritty culture and join it. If you’re a leader, and want the people in your organization to be grittier, create a grittier culture.”
—Dr. Duckworth

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us

In the book *Drive*, Daniel Pink provides three insights on what “drives” people in the 21st century; specifically, (1) purpose, (2) autonomy, and (3) mastery.⁷ Pink categorizes human motivation into three historical segments, with Motivation 1.0 being our need to survive, Motivation 2.0 being simply categorized as “carrots and sticks” (i.e.,

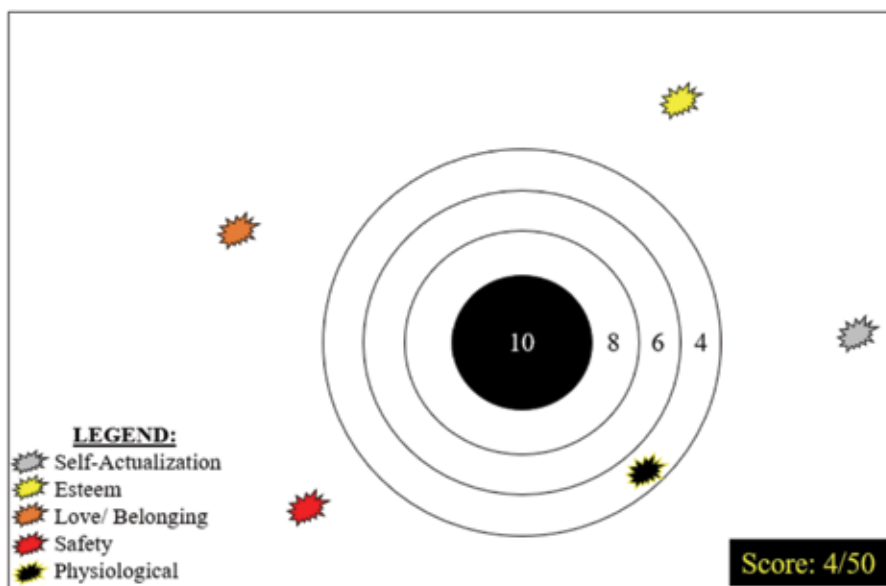


Figure 2. Maslow’s Limiting Model. (Figure provided by author.)

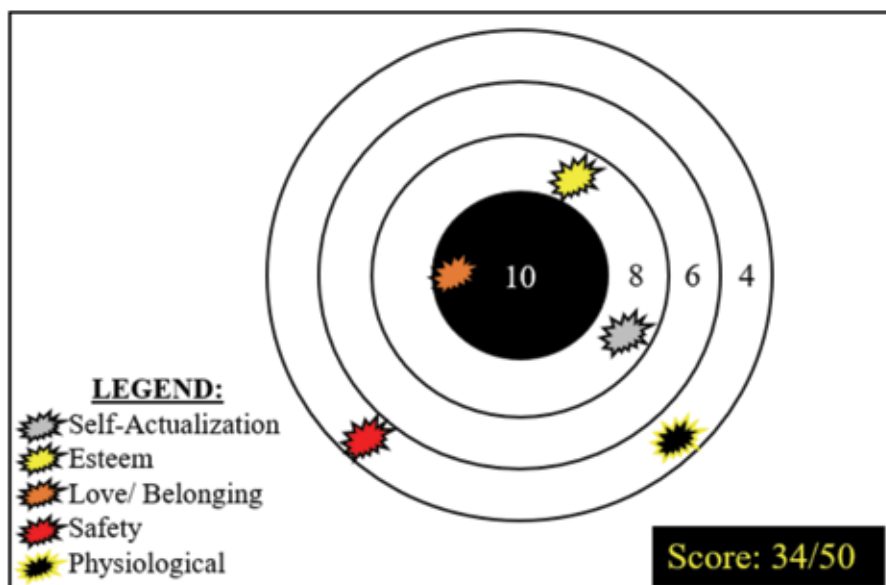


Figure 3. Maslow’s Bullseye. (Figure provided by author.)

awards and punishment) extrinsic model, and Motivation 3.0 being an intrinsic model, with Motivation 3.0 model being the ideal mode to elicit the highest drive out of people. According to Pink, the three factors (purpose, autonomy, and mastery) for Motivation 3.0 lead to increased intrinsic motivation (i.e., the internal drive to accomplish tasks).

As mentioned, purpose is centric to most theories regarding resiliency, drive, grit, perseverance, etc. Pink dedicates Chapter 6 of his book to the need for

purpose.⁸ As stated by Kwik, “Purpose can guide life decisions, influence behavior, shape goals, offer a sense of direction, and create meaning.”⁹ Thus, for the small-unit leader, we must not only provide a purpose to our Marines but also know their individual purpose(s), such as, for joining the Marine Corps, selection of their military occupational specialty, desired goals, and so forth. As stated in previous works, leadership is “the ability to inspire and influence those around you to perform at a high-

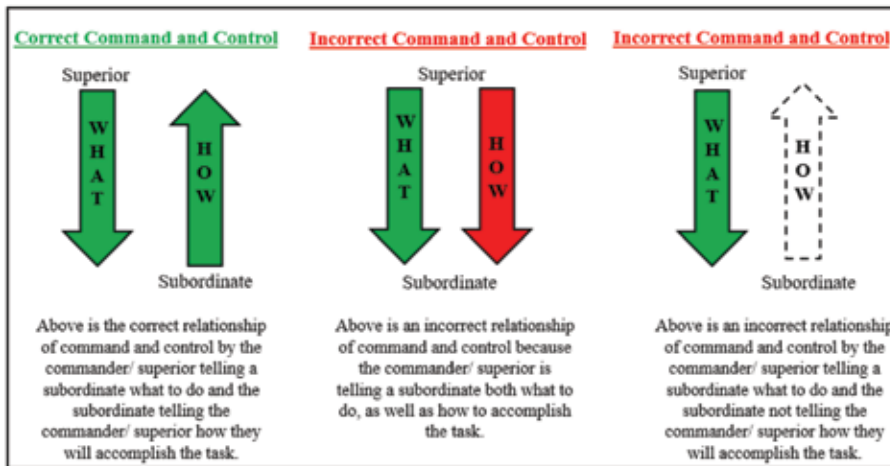


Figure 4. Command and control provides autonomy. (Figure provided by author.)

er level and become better versions of themselves. By this definition, leadership requires a relationship.”¹⁰

Regarding autonomy, this concept fits perfectly in our command philosophy (i.e., command and control). *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, emphasizes the need for a proper command and control culture, where a commander/superior provides the subordinate with *what* is to be accomplished, and the subordinate provides the commander/superior on *how* the task will be accomplished (Figure 4).¹¹ Marines at all ranks

in more and more effort to get less and less in their overall improvement. Lastly, to become a master requires the correct mindset. As stated by Pink, “The pursuit of mastery is all in our head.”¹²

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success—How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential

Dr. Dweck describes in her book two prevailing mindsets that people have: specifically, fixed mindsets and growth mindsets.¹³ Individuals with a fixed mindset believe that their ca-

fixed mindset can have just as much confidence as people with growth mindset-before anything happens, that is. But as you can imagine, their confidence is more fragile since setbacks and even effort can undermine it.”¹⁶

Of note, Dr. Dweck states that “people in a growth mindset don’t just seek challenge, they thrive on it.”¹⁷ Since Marine leaders are tasked with getting the most out of our Marines, which is only possible via a growth mindset, we must create a culture to instill a growth mindset (Table 1). Dr. Dweck has discovered that those with a fixed mindset: (1) avoid challenges; (2) get defensive or give up easily; (3) see effort as fruitless or worse; (4) ignore useful negative feedback; (5) feel threatened by the success of others; and ultimately (6) may plateau early and achieve less than their full potential. Whereas those with a growth mindset: (1) embrace challenges; (2) persist in the face of setbacks; (3) see efforts as the path to mastery; (4) learn from criticism; (5) find lessons and inspiration in the success of others; and as a result, (6) reach higher levels of achievement.¹⁸ “Mindsets are an important part of your personality, but you can change them.”¹⁹

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“So before you go to sleep each night, ask yourself the small question: Was I a little better today than yesterday?”

—Daniel Pink

want autonomy. Marines want to be provided with intent and be allowed to execute as they see fit for the situation.

Lastly, Pink writes that the ability to achieve mastery in a domain inspires individuals of the 21st century. Pink breaks down mastery into three essential components needed, which are (1) pain, (2) asymptotic, and (3) mindset. To become a master is painful, which is why so few individuals become masters in their field. Asymptotic refers to the concept that as one increases their ability in a certain task, they must put

pabilities are set, which is limiting in nature, and leads to a sense of “urgency to prove yourself over and over.”¹⁴ Individuals with a growth mindset believe that their “basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others ... They believe that a person’s true potential is unknown (and unknowable); that it’s impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil, and training.”¹⁵ Dr. Dweck states that people can be successful with a fixed mindset; however, “people with the

Conclusion

Figure 5 (on following page) shows a cycle that if implemented correctly, could facilitate a culture that leads to the Maslow Bullseye Concept being feasible in training and combat. Figure 5 displays a cycle of formal counseling(s) [written or verbal], training and education, assessment, and immediate feedback. While this cycle is probably being implemented by many small-unit leaders and units similarly, the author

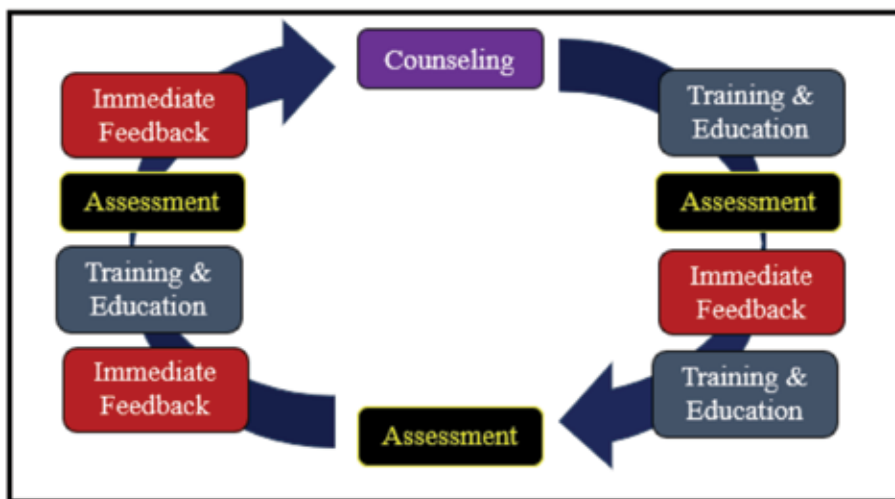


Figure 5. Training, education, assessment, feedback, counseling cycle. (Figure provided by author.)

“Remember, test scores and measures of achievement tell you where a student is, but they don’t tell you where a student could end up.”
—Dr. Carol Dweck

provides specific tactics for eliciting purpose, resiliency, commitment, and drive for Marines (Table 1). In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins states that great organizations not only focus on what they should start doing but also emphasize what should they stop doing.²⁰ Therefore, Table 1 displays rec-

ommendations for small-unit leaders on what they should implement, and just as importantly, should not implement when developing a resilient culture capable of achieving the foundational principle of Maslow’s Bullseye Concept. The purpose of the small-unit leader is not to limit their Marines’ potential. Rather, the purpose of the small-unit leader is to facilitate, enable, enhance, and develop their Marines and their

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The purpose of the small-unit leader is not to limit their Marines’ potential. Rather, the purpose of the small-unit leader is to facilitate, enable, enhance, and develop their Marines and their

our Marines’ overall resiliency, effectiveness, and lethality by elevating Stages 3–5 in Maslow’s original concept.

Notes

1. Jim Kwik, *Limitless: Upgrade Your Brain, Learn Anything Faster, and Unlock Your Exceptional Life* (New York: Hay House, Inc., 2020).

2. Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016).

3. Angela L. Duckworth, Christopher Peterson, Michael D. Matthews, and Dennis R. Kelly, “Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92 (2007).

4. Jeremy Carter and Thomas Ochoa, “The Relationship Between Enlisted and Officers Part 2: Developing the T-Shape Culture,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 107, No. 7 (2023).

5. Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Portfolio/ Penguin, 2009).

6. *Grit*.

7. Daniel H. Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009).

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Limitless*.

10. Jeremy Carter and Thomas Ochoa. “The Relationship Between Enlisted and Officers Part 1: The T-shape philosophy,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 107, No. 7 (2023).

11. Headquarters Marine Corps, *MCDP 6, Command and Control*, (Washington, D.C.: 2018).

12. *Drive*.

13. Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success- How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2016).

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don’t* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001).

