

COACH *Notes*



Volume III, No. 5

Newsletter

What Drives You? Understanding Our Motivations

Do you really understand what motivates you? Everyone knows how important it is to “know yourself,” yet few people do.

Motivations are subconscious, so deeply embedded that we don’t get a good look at them. They are experienced as instinctive, as part of who we are.

Are there basic drives that are common to all human beings? Which ones are driving us in our daily lives? How are they influencing the choices you make?

It used to be that people looked to Freud’s psychodynamic theory for explanations: we are driven by sex and power. But surely there is more than that. More recently, Maslow helped us to understand our basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, ego and belonging. Yet he told us that only a few of us would become “self-actualized.”

David McClelland outlined three basic motivations in the 50s: the drive to achieve, the drive for power, and the drive to affiliate with others. His theory has been widely applied to understanding motivations at work.

Another psychologist in the 30s, Edouard Spranger, proposed that we seek to satisfy our interests in six areas: theoretical, utilitarian, aesthetic, social, individualistic, and traditional or religious. While this helps explain our areas of interests, it doesn’t address the underlying drives or motivations.

Here is a new theory that proposes all humans have four basic drives in common. These four drives have been present since the beginnings of our species and have help in our survival. These four basic drives are embedded in our genetic DNA and remain very much active in us today.

Four Basic Human Drives

The four basic drives are:

1. The drive to acquire
2. The drive to bond
3. The drive to learn
4. The drive to defend

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“Turning potential into performance”

David Herdlinger, Herdlinger Associates

Dreamers Welcome

At Herdlinger Associates, I encourage people to dream. And the positive results have been astounding!

When individuals pursue their dreams, their lives percolate with purpose, passion, success, and fulfillment.

As a coach, I don’t try to make my clients’ dreams come true. That’s their privilege...and responsibility.

My role – and my joy – is to stand by their side to encourage, guide, challenge, and cheer them on.

Are your dreams big enough? Let me help you unleash your potential and accomplish more than you ever dreamed possible.

...David Herdlinger

HERDLINGER ASSOCIATES has helped thousands of professionals at all levels in all types of organizations achieve extraordinary success and satisfaction.

We serve clients in North America, Europe, and Asia, ranging in size from individuals and very small businesses to corporations with annual sales in excess of \$40 billion.

Learn more about HerdlingerAssociates at our website:
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In their book on motivation, *Driven: How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices* (Jossey Bass, 2001), authors Paul R. Lawrence and Nitin Nohria explain this new theory on basic drives in humans.

These two Harvard Business School professors draw evidence for their four-drive theory from evolutionary psychology and Darwin as well as from social sciences and organizational life.

Human beings are driven to seek ways to fulfill all four drives because these drives are the product of the species' common evolutionary heritage: they increase the ability of our genes to survive.

1. The drive to acquire objects and experiences that improve our status relative to others:

This is defined as a drive to seek, take, control and retain objects and personal experiences. In the course of evolution humans have been selected naturally for this drive by survival pressures, based on the basic needs for food, fluid, shelter, and sexual fulfillment.

People are driven to acquire both material and positional goods. Both goods and social status are important here. The *drive to acquire* is rarely satisfied; you always want more and always seek ever greater status.

2. The drive to bond with others in long-term relationships of mutual care and commitment:

Humans have an innate drive to form social relationships and develop commitments with others that is fulfilled only when the attachment is mutual. Groups of individuals who were bonded to one another had a better chance of surviving environmental threats than group that were not. This drive draws humans into cooperation with others.

3. The drive to learn and to make sense of the world and of ourselves:

Humans have an innate drive to satisfy their curiosity, to know, to comprehend, to believe, to appreciate, to develop understandings or representations of their environment and of themselves through a reflective process. This drive without doubt has enabled mankind to survive the elements and has given humans distinct advantages over other creatures.

4. The drive to defend ourselves, our loved ones, our beliefs, and our resources from harm:

Humans have an innate drive to defend themselves and their valued accomplishments whenever they perceive them to be endangered.

The fundamental emotion manifested by this subconscious drive is alarm, which in turn triggers fear or anger. This drive has obvious survival value. This may have been the first drive to have evolved in earlier human species.

The *drive to defend* manifests itself in modern life in many ways. Much of human activity is generated by this drive. It is activated by perceived threats to body, possession and one's bonded relationships, and also by threats to one's own cognitive representations of the environment and of one's self identity.

The Balancing Act

The four drives are innate and universal, found in some physical form in the brains of all human beings. The drives are independent even though they are highly interactive with each other.

Each drive has a "dark side," as when the *drive to acquire* becomes excessively competitive and diminishes respect for others, or when the *drive to defend* one's current thinking diminishes the *drive to learn* new perspectives.

You only have to look around you at how people act and interact in any workplace environment to see how these motivators drive people in both positive and negative ways.

Each of these four drives exist in all of us, and determine the choices we make. In some people, one drive will be more developed than others, creating an imbalance. In some jobs, some drives will be emphasized more than others.

Understanding how each of these drives shows up in your life can help you understand how and why you make the choices you make. Working with your coach can help you understand yourself better.

You may be relying too much on your *drive to acquire*, or placing too much emphasis in the *drive to bond*, while neglecting your *drive to learn*. Often the *drive to defend* can overwhelm other important drives that must be satisfied in order to have a well-balanced, successful life.

Which drives are guiding your choices? Which drive do you neglect? All four drives are basic to human nature and a balanced life includes some satisfaction in all four areas.

"The challenge is to find a course forward that fulfils all of our basic drives in some creative, balanced way. ...The way forward must be to use the best side of each drive to check the dark, excessive potential of human nature" (Lawrence & Nohria, p. 283).