

Maslow's hierarchy of wants and needs

## It Takes All Kinds

by Colin Read, Ph.D.

There was a time when business meant manufacturing or the retailing of manufactured and farm goods. Where did those days go?

The changing complexion of modern commerce is simply a barometer of our own success. In the last 60 years, agricultural productivity per worker has tripled. Just in the last 30 years, the share of employment in manufacturing has dropped from 22 percent of the workforce to less than 11 percent today.

Construction, too, has become much more efficient, with prefabricated materials making the traditional stick-built home much more cost effective.

Why is business today much less dependent now on food, shelter and manufactured goods?

Maslow's hierarchy of wants and needs ranks the various categories of goods and services based on our needs. Our most basic needs of food and shelter still preoccupy the bulk of the world's population, but can

now be produced by fewer and fewer workers in the U.S. economy.

Once our basic biological and physiological needs have been met, the rest of the labor force can be devoted to serving our more refined wants. These might be basic safety and security, followed by family and relationships, esteem, and then self actualization. These more refined wants are met by our modern service economy.

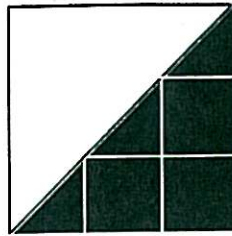
It should not be surprising then that if fewer workers are needed to address our

basic needs of food, shelter, and safety, more and more of our workers are devoted to the higher wants and needs that generate quality of life rather than basic survival.

We see this in the diversity of local businesses that are now devoted to services. While manufacturing and agriculture was at one time the lifeblood of our national and local economies, now, more and more, our businesses take care of our desires to be secure, healthy, educated, happy, and entertained.

There has been a growing concern about the transition of our economy away from manufacturing. Perhaps we should rather view the decline of manufacturing as an opportunity rather than a crisis. Manufacturing jobs are going overseas because the economies in the developing nations are still oriented toward taking care of basic needs. And our economy has evolved.

I say this is an opportunity because it allows us to focus on those services where we have a distinct advantage. This nation



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has, more than anyone else, invented the service industry. This is our new competitive advantage.

Innovation has been the U.S. hallmark, and allowed us to avoid the peril of the Luddites. Two centuries ago, textile workers in England, led by Ned Ludd, revolted over new loom technologies in the production of textiles. Fear of a redefined industry and demand for a different type of labor threatened the status quo.

The U.S. had a different experience. This year is the hundredth anniversary of the Model T Ford. In this country, the innovations of Henry Ford were embraced rather than resented. The cost of a car fell, and consequently salaries and employment actually rose in this innovative sector.

In the world 200 years ago, and especially in the world today, failure to innovate and to embrace new technologies and

techniques would doom our competitive advantage. Just as we recognized a century ago that we can be world leaders in a new style of manufacturing, we must now embrace success through our innovations in service.

But while it is easy to observe and imitate a production process, it is much harder to observe and imitate high quality service. Productivity in service is much harder to measure, and the services provided by our local businesses are harder for consumers to compare.

We are all in this together now. Even manufacturers are finding that their product is a blend of the goods and the services they provide to their buyers. Goods have been globally commodified, and what sets the great above the average is the level of services a business can provide with the goods they sell.

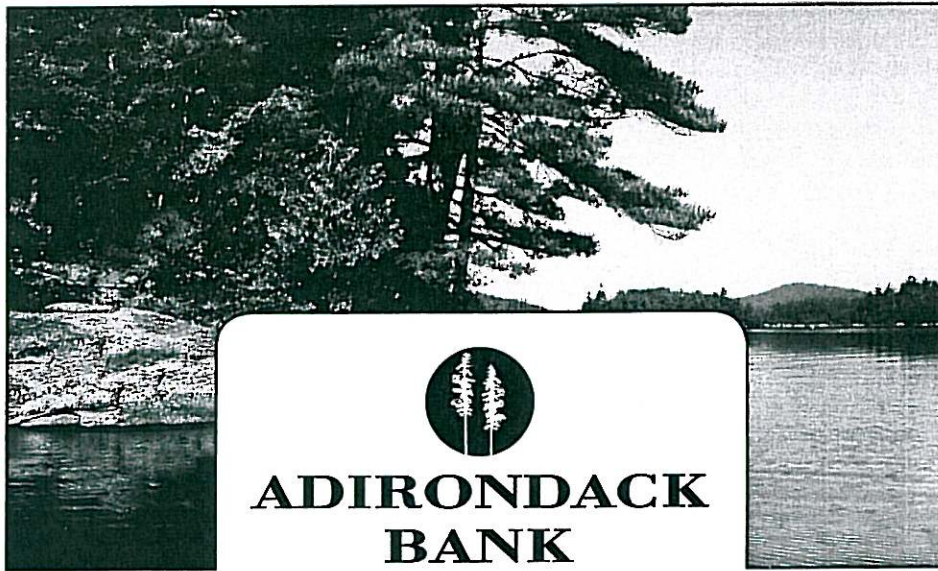
All enterprises must now demonstrate superior service. A business that fears change or competition will contribute to its own obsolescence. While it may be more difficult to figure out how to build the better mousetrap in these new service industries, figure it out we must. We can only imagine that our basic needs will be met with even fewer people in the future, inevitably directing more of us to the service sector.

And as we move away from a labor force defined around the traditional 40 hour work week demanded by manufacturers to a labor force that is more flexible, more transient, and more footloose, our workers and our customers will demand a new way of doing business.

This is truly exciting. And our local businesses truly have some advantages over national franchises. They can provide a service that cannot easily be outsourced — the service of personal relationships and customer support that are so important in a small community like ours.



Colin Read, Ph.D.  
Dean, School of Business  
and Economics  
State University of New York  
College at Plattsburgh  
Contributing Writer



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