

## WHAT PERSUADES PEOPLE TO VOTE? By Bing Sherrill

In the 1920's, at Western Electric Hawthorne Works, Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger ran experiments to increase worker productivity. They changed light levels in the work place, developed work teams, even added incentive pay schemes. The results were far different than expected. Articles and books have been written analyzing the data from these experiments.

The first, and simplest of the experiments was the change in lighting levels. When the experimenters and work team raised the lighting level, output increased. When they lowered the light level, production also went up. Eventually Mayo realized that the attention given to the workers, not the lighting, had changed their environment and increased their productivity. This experiment led to the recognition that workers are not robots without feelings in human suits. Workers work in a social as well as a physical environment.

In "Counseling in an Organization" 1966, Roethlisberger described "the Hawthorne effect" as the phenomenon in which subjects in behavioral studies **change their performance in response to being observed.**

"Her [Hillary Clinton's] incendiary "basket of deplorables" and other remarks flourished on the internet and fit into the narrative of people who spread an anti-Hillary gospel. Her words nourished the opposition, stiffening the resolve of the **people who already felt pushed to the side, forgotten,** broken by bad loans, layoffs and factory closures." Ray Long, Chicago Tribune, November 14, 2016

All we need to remember from the Hawthorne Studies is that attention from others [particularly people in power] modifies the situation and can motivate behavior.

Jump forward to 1954, Abraham Maslow defined the theory of a Hierarchy of Needs to help explain motivation pattern he observed in the workplace. Even today, his list of needs is familiar to many.

### **LEVELS OF NEEDS**

SELF ACTUALIZATION - utilize your talents in achievements

ESTEEM                    ^ self-respect and approval by others

SOCIAL                    ^ interaction with others

SAFETY                    ^ absence of threat

PHYSIOLOGICAL        ^ air, water, food

The list of needs only becomes useful when joined with the less familiar Rules:

### **RULES OF THE HIERARCHY**

1. NEEDS ARE MOTIVATORS – *They drive our thinking and action*
2. NEEDS ARE STRUCTURED IN LEVELS – *the one active need is the principle driver*
3. NEEDS APPEAR SEQUENTIALLY – *when the next lower need is satisfied*
4. SATISFIED NEEDS ARE NOT MOTIVATORS – *only the lowest, none-satisfied need is active*

Maslow's rules say that when a need is satisfied, it is no longer a motivator.

If you are hungry, you are motivated to seek food. Having eaten, food is no longer a motivator. The bottom two needs, Physiological and Safety are specific and result in direct action. The higher-level needs are more general, and motivate behavior in more diverse ways.

Hunger satisfied, we stop looking for food. Safety achieved, we focus on higher need levels where our behavior response is less specific, less defined. However, we [the person in power] can change that. **By threatening a person, we can drive them back from their higher level needs to focus on their basic [Safety] needs.**

“As both the US election of 2004 and the Israeli election of 1996 demonstrate, an election campaign that places the importance of security front and center drowns out other salient issues such as the economy and social welfare.”

Burhan Wazir – “Fear and the Ballot Box” – TOW Center for Digital Journalism

The 2004 US Election came six days after the Osama bin Laden threat video

The 1996 Israeli election was impacted by Netanyahu’s stress on the Palestinian threat while his opponent, Shimon Peres was seeking a peace treaty.

The 1988 US Election was affected by the Willie Hutton and later “Revolving Door” ads.

In politics, a campaign can focus on [give attention to] the small town, rural states that the other party has seemed to ignore. People change behavior when they receive more attention. They vote. 2016

Second, a campaign can stress the threat from “The Other,” the immigrant, the minority, the “caravan,” Nancy Pelosi, the unknown. When their “Safety Need” is activated, people take action...they run; they fight; they vote. 2018

On the other hand, if the voter sees the manipulation, her anger may carry her to the voting booth to fight back.

Finally, in 1992, James Carville wrote, “**The economy, stupid,**” which helped Clinton defeat the incumbent George W. Bush. When the economy is poor, the challengers have a boost. When the economy is good, regardless of why, the incumbents have the high ground.

After an election cycle, the hindsight is far clearer than the foresight had been.