

# THE UNTOLD SECRET OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

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“If you deliberately plan to be less than you are capable of being,  
then I warn you that you will be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life.  
You will be evading your own capacities, your own possibilities.”  
Abraham Maslow

There is an untold secret about how self-actualization works, a secret that the original pioneers of the first Human Potential Movement did not know. They did not know it because they were so involved in their first pioneering efforts into the farther reaches of human nature. At that time it was a vast unknown territory into the bright side of human psychology. They also didn't know it because of a few of the wrong turns that they took— wrong turns that simply did not put them on the path to discovering these secrets.

But as Isaac Newton noted in his classic statement about seeing further because we stand on the shoulders of giants, today we can see the wrong turns and the missing secrets precisely because of the wonderful vision of hindsight.

- What are these untold secrets about self-actualization?
- How can they empower and enable us in unleashing our potentials and the potentials of our clients, children, and loved ones?

## **The Discovery — The Functions of Self-Actualization**

Three years ago I planted a question in my mind that then led to a lot of research, reading, and interviewing. The question was, “What is self-actualization a function of?” From there I began making lists and lists of processes that contribute to the process of unleashing potentials and actualizing a person's highest and best. After two pages of lists, I took a breath. Then, re-reading the five books of Abraham Maslow and two of Carl Rogers, I made another 10 pages of lists. So many!

“Are there any patterns in all of these things? What are the mechanisms at work?” I tried numerous things to answer these questions, mind-mapping, brain storming, playing around with various

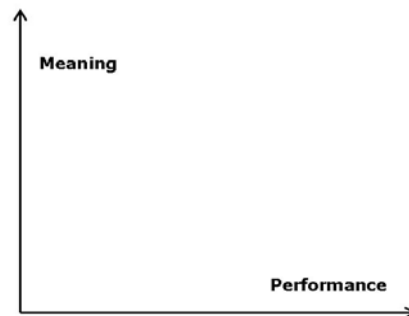
structures. Then a few days later as I was reviewing some meta-programs, I began wondering. Could I summarize self-actualizing in terms of internal reference / external reference? Reflective / active? Intuition / sensor? And with that the *Aha!* was very close.

Then somehow an idea emerged, “If self-actualization is about living a fully rich and meaningful life that leads to great, if not top and even peak performances, what if . . . What if self-actualization is a function of these two things, meaning and performance?” And, of course, that was one of those “Aha! Of course! Why didn’t I see that before?!” moments.

*Meaning* and *performance*—rich inner meanings of significance and value inside (visions, dreams, values, understandings, beliefs, etc.) actualized in real-time actions, behaviors, speech, and responses—performances—on the outside. And that then naturally led to the Self-Actualization Quadrants.

### **The Self-Actualization Quadrants**

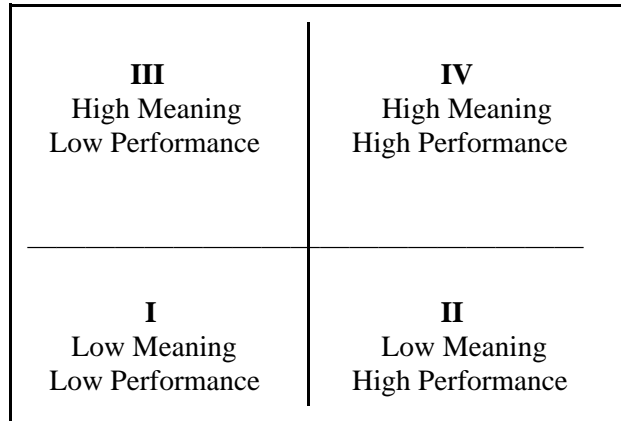
*Meaning* summarizes all of the internal factors that support the unleashing of our potentials. It refers to all of the internal things that mean something of significance to us—purpose, intention, vision, value, significance, inspiration, passion, belief, as well as all of the inner frames of mind that support us in learning, discovering, and growing as *meaning*—as what we “hold in our mind-body system.”



*Performance* summarizes all of the external things. Performance includes all of our actions, behaviors, skills, activities, experiences, experiments, explorations, and the results we get. Performance also incarnates and expresses our meanings. After all, it is in and with our neuro-physiology that we translate our ideas into the action of performance. It is in our body and neurology that we express or unleash our talents as skills and competencies. It is in our muscle memory that our learnings become unconscious patterning or habits that literally *embody* our meanings.

Now with these two axes, we can postulate four quadrants by viewing the *meaning axis* from low meaning to high and the *performance axis* from low to high. To make the self-actualization quadrants explicit, we have the two axes of meaning (Y semantics) and performance (X neurology) which allows us to form four quadrants.

*The Self-Actualization  
Quadrants*



**From Axes to Quadrants**

Something that surprised me in all of this is that when we relate meaning and performance as an interactive system, the interface of these two critical variables of self-actualization reveals *a pathway for unleashing potentials*. The pathway that emerges from the interface points us to the way to activate potentials as it identifies the quadrant where we unleash various interferences.

Ideally we move through life diagonally from the lower left corner up to the upper right corner. *This is the self-actualization or flow channel*. Moving along this pathway you unleash and actualize your best potentials. Moving in this way you will experience a “the more, the more” pattern. *The more* you act on your meanings and *the more* you give richer meanings and challenge to your actions, *the more* you self-actualize your potentials.

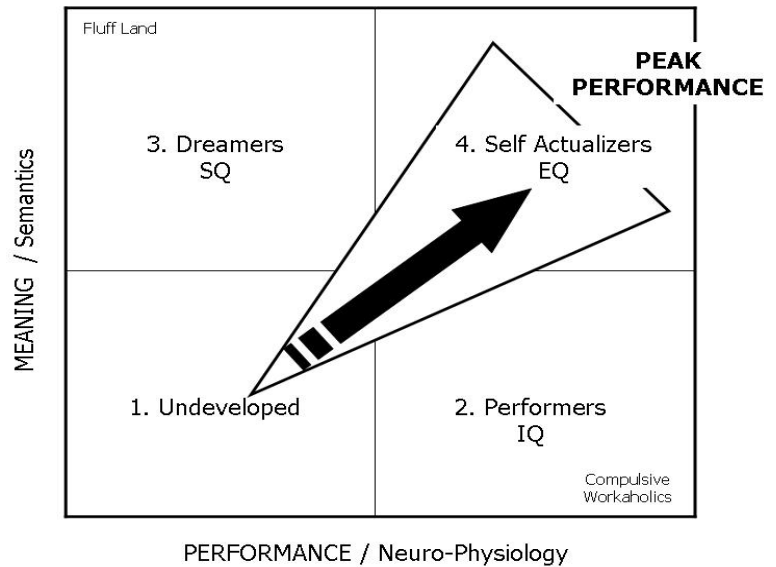
When you do not synthesize meaning and performance, but specialize in one or the other, then you will be engaging in a “the more, the less” pattern that undermines self-actualizing. *The more* meanings you create without taking action, *the less* we actualize, and so the less integrated and congruent you will become. *The more* you act and perform without reflecting on meaning, or connecting to your highest meanings, *the less* meaningful the activities, the less motivation you’ll have and *the less* whole and healthy you’ll be.

**The Self-Actualization Flow Channel**

The self-actualization “flow channel” ideally moves naturally from Quadrant I where we all begin (*the undeveloped quadrant*) to Quadrant IV (*self-actualizing*) as we grow. By developing richer meanings and actualizing them in actions, we progress to Quadrant IV. Bit by bit we add a touch of meaning (value, significance, connection, challenge) or a touch more of skill (competence and expertise in doing something about the meanings).

Yet because we all seem to have natural predispositions for either the meaning or the performance axes, most of us have predispositions to move to and specialize in Quadrant IV from III *Creators* or II *Performers*. Which is your tendency?

Quadrant II of *High Meaning* is the realm of *creating*, dreaming, designing, planning, etc. Those who are naturals here have great ideas, beautiful visions, and brilliant schemes. Here people live in *the Construct* of meaning where they use their dreams, visions, and values to create meaning and to invent the various forms of meaningfulness. However, when a person does this without the interface of performance, that person becomes just a dreamer. He will dream and wish his life away and while he may feel tremendously inspired by it all, yet in actuality he will do nothing and so achieve nothing. He will be living in fluff land.



For those best skilled in the construction of meaning (*creators*) to move into the actualization channel they have to *unleash* themselves from their over-dreaming and over-optimism in Quadrant III. They do that by learning how to implement and execute their visions and follow through with more discipline on their plans.

Quadrant II *High Performance* is the realm of performance, action, movement, response, activity, etc. Those who are naturals here have a tremendous outward orientation and are typically practical, pragmatic, social, and extroverted. As a result they often achieve tremendous success, money, status, achievements, etc.

Yet this also can become addictive and over-done. When a person does so without sufficient meaning, she will become compulsive, workaholic, and a Type-A personality. People in this mode can wear themselves out as they become more and more efficient, but less and less effective in living their lives. Taken to the extreme, they increasingly become compulsive in doing things and can wear themselves out in always pushing for more efficiency.

If you are more skilled in taking action (*performers*), you have to learn the more reflective skills as well as framing skills regarding how to set new meaning frames to keep yourself fascinated in your engagements so that they seem important and significant. In this way you will move from being stuck place in Quadrant II into Quadrant IV where you can *unleash* your potentials.

There's another distinction to mention. If you have been performing inadequate or even toxic meanings, meanings that have become incorporated in your body, you will need to *suspend* and *release* them from your neurology. Embodying meaning is a natural process, a process we all

engage in which explains how we often *embody* negative and harmful meanings. So just as important as it is to create rich meaning and embody it in our neurology is the converse ability, to identify toxic meaning, suspend them and release them from our bodies.

In both instances, moving from Quadrant II or III, *we synthesize meaning and performance* and gracefully step into the channel of self-actualization. That's when and where you truly unleash your potentials.

### **The Synergy of Meaning and Performance**

It was mainly Viktor Frankl and Rollo May in the first Human Potential Movement who emphasized meaning, but Maslow missed *meaning* and so failed to put it in the Hierarchy of Needs model. Maslow failed to realize was that our "needs" at all levels are not absolutes but are relative to the meanings we attribute to them. After we travel up and down the levels of needs the first times, we begin creating meaning about them—what a particular "need" is, what they means to us, how the need relates to us, how to fulfill it, etc. After that, *our meanings reign*. From there, our meanings transform and govern our experience of the needs as we semantically load them with meaning or deprive them of meaning. This is the realm where our human psycho-logics structure our experience.

Our nature as meaning-makers and the role that meaning plays even in our experience of our instinctual needs makes *meaning* the critical factor. Developmentally, we embed our needs within our meanings. Then we see them through the filter of our meanings. Then they become psycho-needs. After that, our responses are performances of meaning, that is, we are acting out, feeling out, and seeking to actualize those meanings.

When our meanings are healthy, appropriate, enhancing, empowering, and expanding our life experience, we often have *peak* experiences. But when the meanings are limited, or worse, when they are toxic and morbid, then our responses (or our meanings-in-action) become our toxic habits and self-sabotaging life-styles. We then create semantically loaded meanings that drive us and that control our lives. This can create a living hell for ourselves, or for others.

***If our meanings are that powerful in governing our lives, then we need a model that can track our meanings, the construction of the meanings, the embedded frames of meanings that we build up, etc. This we have done with the Meta-States and the Matrix models. We can now begin to work with the synthesis of meaning and performance, which is precisely what the Self-Actualization Quadrants are all about.***

### **Summary**

Self-Actualization is a function of meaning and performance. Realizing this opens up new insights and processes for unleashing our highest potentials. And now I have told you what has been the untold secret of self-actualization.

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