



COLORADO LAWYER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Why People Behave Badly

“Your beliefs don’t make you a better person. Your behavior does.” ~ Sukhraj S. Dhillon

“If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten.” ~ Tony Robbins

Why do you do the things that you do? Why do other people do what they do? Ironically, the behaviors that make us cringe with disgust might stem from the same motivation of behaviors that we respect and cherish. Motivation is the key to understanding why people behave the way they behave. There are many theories (such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs) about what drives us to be who and what we are, whether that is how our personalities develop, what we have accomplished, or how fulfilled we are in life. In order to change our own behavior and become the person we want to be, it helps to examine what needs we are trying to fill. It also helps to understand what is motivating someone else so we can decide how we want to respond to them. For example, one basic human need is feeling significant or worthy of attention. Some people might try to meet this need through making lots of money, becoming famous in some way, becoming a police officer or firefighter, or focusing on their friend’s or family’s needs. Some other people might try to become significant or noticeable by being bullies, committing acts of violence, having anger management problems, or otherwise forcing their way into other people’s attention.

Below is a list of some basic human needs. Think about how you fulfill each need, and if there are needs you have that aren’t being met. How can you work on getting your needs met in ways that are healthy and productive for you, and in ways that make you feel more fulfilled?

1. **Connection:** Every human being feels the need for connection. Love and intimacy, whether platonic or romantic, is part of our blueprint because we couldn’t have survived as a species without it. How are the interpersonal connections and relationships in your life going? Could they be better? Do you make an effort to communicate openly and honestly with those around you? Do you nurture the relationships that mean the most to you or do you take your stress and frustrations out on those you are closest to?
2. **Certainty:** We need an amount of certainty in our lives to feel safe (food, shelter, etc.) Ironically, we also need uncertainty because if every minute of every day were planned out and set in stone, we’d get bored fast. We need a healthy balance of

knowing that we will be “okay” and a sense of possibility and hopefulness for positive change or new opportunities.

3. **Community:** No man is an island. As was already mentioned, we have a need for connection, and that relates to the need to make a difference to the “whole.” We are all part of groups and our communities (large or small) because we want to have an effect on more than just ourselves. That might mean having children, taking care of the elderly, having a career that provides assistance to other people (such as practicing law), volunteering, creating companies that serve a need for others, etc. It doesn’t mean that we have to be Mother Theresa or a philanthropist, but we do need to contribute to humanity in order to feel productive and significant.
4. **Challenge, Goals, Growth:** Again, if everything was handed to us on a “silver platter,” we would self-sabotage because of our need to change, to grow, to learn, and create. Even though many of us see life as too much of a struggle, the truth is that we don’t want it to be “too easy.” Finding ways to grow and expand who we are, what we know, and what we do is a basic need. When we are stagnate, we might feel directionless, anxious, and depressed. The growth doesn’t have to be continuous leaps and bounds; it can be small things to prevent us from feeling stagnant: picking a new project to do to improve your home, taking a class, applying for a new job, reading a new book, meeting new people, researching or starting a new hobby, etc.

What needs could you work on fulfilling in your life? What is missing? What needs are met? This week, examine how well you are at organizing your life in a way that meets your needs, and pay attention to those around you. Do they have needs missing that you could help them with?

*By Sarah Myers, JD, LMFT, LAC
Clinical Director, Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program
February 2017
© Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program, 2017*

Your Colorado Lawyer Assistance Program provides free and confidential services for judges, lawyers, and law students. If you need resources for ANY issue that is compromising your ability to be a productive member of the legal community, or if there is someone you are concerned about, contact COLAP at (303) 986-3345. For more information about COLAP, please visit www.coloradolap.org.