

Unhoused Software Engineer

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My recent employment situation has been a long and misunderstood journey; no one needs to understand except employers and I, yet no man is an island. After an accomplished career with a large network as a non-traditional university graduate I've been called dramatic and threatened by relatives, called a fraud and shirker by an old friend, and effectively disowned by nearly everyone. I'm not crying yet I am bleeding, so I'll attempt to explain the opportunities and blockers briefly at the cost of a little more blood; something that until recently I did not have the capability to do due to various resource deficiencies—writing detailed emails alone can take 3-7+ hours with perfect conditions, never mind with food insecurity and no income. I'm food secure through the end of the year with a weekly loan, and my shelter while far from healthy provides a place to prepare food, go potty, study with IT, and shower—things I was able to do prior to the pandemic but became mostly unable to do with the indefinite lockdown and health mandates. Refer to the attached diagram of work possibilities at the end of this article: Unskilled, Professional, Freelance, Startup, and Unemployment—each possibility connects to its relevant dependencies. Red are blockers and Yellow are unstable.

The first step to employment is qualification, the second is the interview, and the third is administration like background and reference checks. For some vocations I can pass some of the steps, and for others I'm completely blocked. Professionally I've been blocked by the reference check step since 2017 and prior due to a dispute with a manager which led to a firing based on false pretenses—with them, each attempt to make my case or reconcile was met with retaliation. Solution? Find an alternative to Professional work, and that I did with various success at each step. I did not have a diagram with the possibilities to work from, and I've figured it out on my way with helping hands.

Open Source was my coping mechanism as a teenager and so I began my healing there, with my remaining savings. I was burned out, but I had a little time to explore options and did so intensely while living monastically. Aware that I could not commit to freelance work as my savings ran out, my focus shifted completely to the so-called “creator economy” with faith in God that I would thrive. I was overly optimistic about my ability to get funding from family, friends, and Patreon supporters via my several hours per day of live streaming the construction of software for public good. When my savings and assistance were depleted and my possessions sold I had eroded to about 100 pounds and voluntarily left my apartment, put my things into storage, moved into my Civic and started considering the new possibilities such as Unskilled labor. After 15 years of Professional work, what was I qualified to do?

I returned to the Hacker Dojo, my regular hacker space when I'd arrived in Mountain View prior. There I met a fellow who'd been through the Day Worker Center of Mountain View and followed his lead; people at the center became my new family as I regained strength. Each few days a job was assigned and I received cash for the work, and I figured out the shower situation. I was grateful that I could eat and pay late bills, and I gained skills and confidence needed to apply for entry-level jobs in service. I went on to be a server for the first Spring and Summer, and a shopper at a grocery store during the second. I'd worked service in high school while I learned to code, and it was familiar and left plenty of mental energy to build with at cafes between shifts. The Winters were tight and thankfully I got assistance. This was prior to the pandemic and there were many possibilities still available. Everything changed in the subsequent Winter and as the ongoing health restrictions set in.

What changed leading up to the pandemic? In early Winter I was served for a restraining order hearing, requested by the Professional employer who was blocking my reference checks. The order was retaliation for Tweets on a real-named account which escalated due to their unwillingness to reconcile via email as my hope of returning to a Professional life in the near future waned. I was happy to work service jobs and do Open Source development when I had the chance—I had reconnected with my high school roots and was hopeful for an even brighter future. The first court order was easily defeated as the complaintants did not show up to witness for themselves. Within a month I was served again based on even more egregious statements and misrepresentations, and again I prepared for the hearing in cafes, which was on Apr 20, 2020, as news of a pandemic unfolded and health restrictions imposed. Ultimately I did not appear to represent myself and a default judgment was made, effectively labeling me guilty of 'workplace violence,' restricting my right to self-defense and propagating my name to databases of all law enforcement agencies in the country. I was in the process of applying for my final job at the grocery store when the order took effect, and my intuition told me that God would straighten this out. Indeed, they asked only for criminal convictions and this is a civil matter so I said nothing.

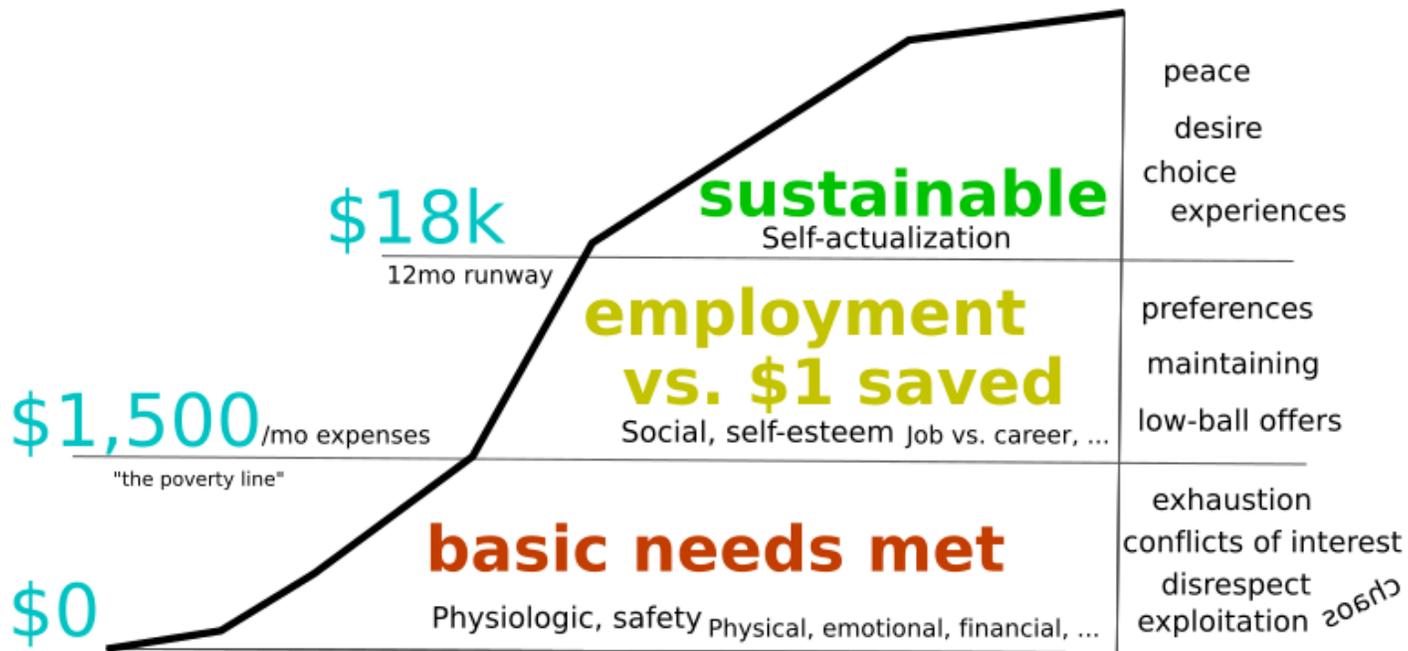
I left my final employer, the grocer, after great internal struggle. One does not frivolously leave their job while unhoused and employed in a position with room for growth during a pandemic. I expressed my gratitude and grievances to the store manager after what would be my final shift and resigned without notice. Why the urgency? The expressed grievances were nothing that I could not live with and surpass with a change of position, but in fact strange customers started appearing regularly that made me feel uncomfortable given what had transpired with the Big Tech employers' legal squad and the breadth of the defamation and depth of the fiction in the allegations. I had been out of place throughout my time in Unskilled labor as I learned the ropes but nobody asked questions. I showed up, worked hard, behaved well, and was pleasant to work with—I was management material who needed

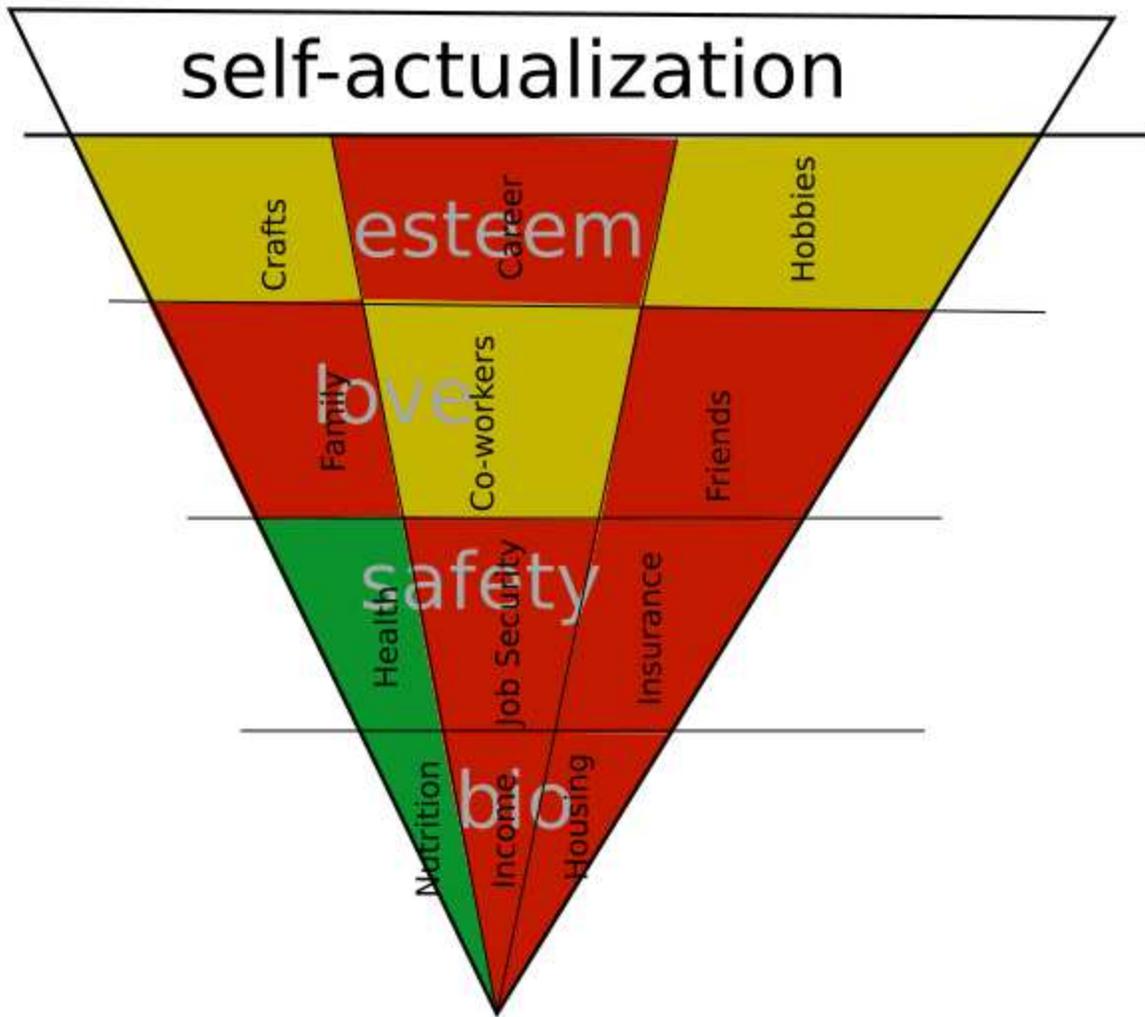
to pay dues on the ground floor, and was happy to do so. Was my departure a failure of faith? Perhaps. I felt that I was in danger and left; not an instinctive flight response, but a carefully weighted and meditated upon one. Indeed, in my final weeks I'd injured my finger doing routine cleanup work due to distracted rumination of the strange customers. The time was right to leave, whatever the cost.

Following my departure from the grocery store in August and with the reality of the indefinite health restrictions sinking in at year's end, my Unemployment insurance claim was granted and yet my proof of work and identification was rejected several times. At this point I was depending on a relative for about \$2-300 a week for food, gas and bills which was a great strain but it was my saving grace—unable to reach UI by phone I turned to snail-mailing paper appeal forms and focused my attention back to tech. I'd all but forgotten about tech work yet realized the need for a personal IT story, given my intermittently broken and out of service iPhone—during my time at the grocer I'd made no attempt to complete the online training. I made a series of repairs to the phone: battery, screen, home button; and my car still had a weak battery from attempting to run my laptop from an inverter in the year prior.

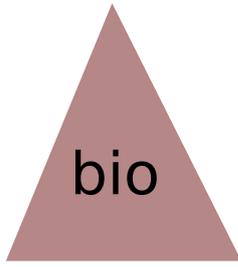
As I built personal IT with parts from storage, the Federal stimulus checks, and donations from people online I was able to fit it into a business plan that I'd started working on prior and create Fiverr services and a Shopify store to sell it as a product—I was using it daily in a harsh environment and effectively QA tested and could support it with the product cost. It became apparent that my work had showed up on radars despite rough/non-marketing and with faith in God I've persevered and continued to use and refine the offering. Given a safe working environment I was able to gain confidence in the product as a way to fulfill Freelance requests as I had used it to author the draft of a book, illustrate ideas, and practice modern web development skills from cafes and in the home of a relative; I traveled after I'd saved from the weekly loans and it became clear that health restrictions would be ongoing.

And that's where we are today. During the period at my relative's house I've been able to lift my weight from 110 lbs in August to nearly 140 lbs in late November on a vegan diet of mostly home made taco bowls. I've explored what it would take to turn the recipe into a small vendor next year as well, namely a couple thousand dollars to meet health requirements and ideally a truck. The unemployment situation has evolved continuously and opportunity scaled with available resources. The draft book is a survival guide based on my experiences and is written as a series with a part for each layer of Maslow's hierarchy starting with Physical and followed by Security needs; the former which is mostly written and needs editing and the latter which is based upon data. Like everything, editing takes time and focus. I've included supporting illustrations with this article. Lacking resources I'd been unable to write well while unhoused; now after months off the street and a weekly loan of \$500 I've been able to work my way up into the second layer of Maslow's hierarchy and produce this work.





The Physics of Destitution



Unemployed deserve welfare;
Hard pushes can save Uh. and D;
Hard kicks may can save below.

\$1,500/mo Unemployed

"the poverty line" Unhoused

Destitute

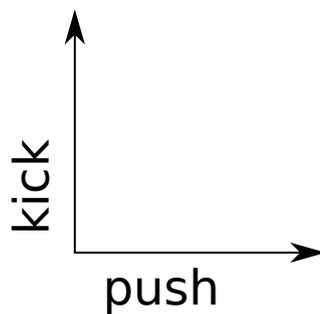
Idle

Lazy

Desperate

Avoidant

Dishonest



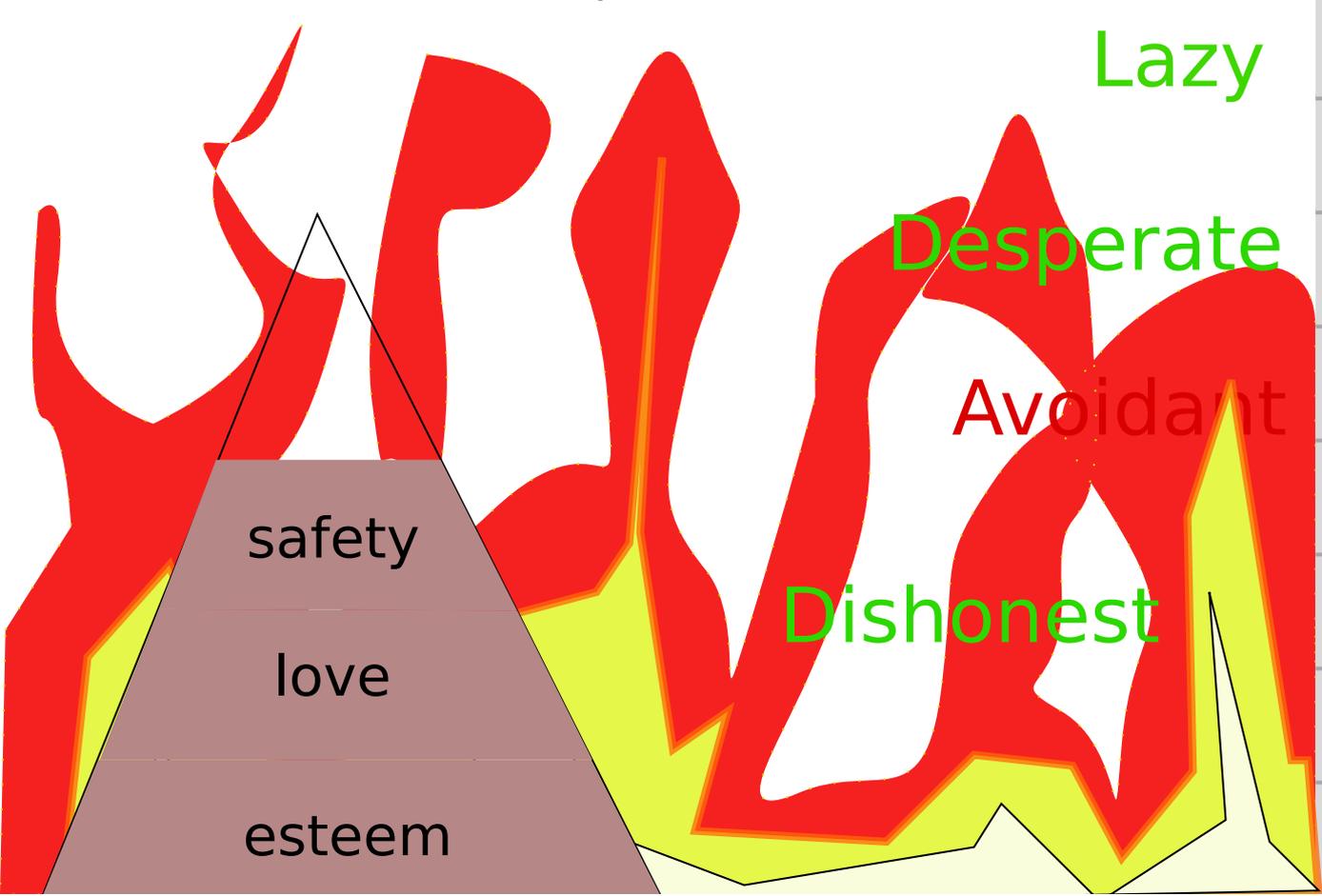
Ascent

Descent

safety

love

esteem



Doing Business

While Unhoused

finding usable time for work
prioritization for usable time

