



Doomsayer Behavior

When Reps Worry Rather Than Sell

By Jeffrie Story
As seen in
MacDonald Advertising
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If you're lucky, people with Doomsayer behavior aren't applying for your sales jobs. If they are, send them to the Research Department, where they will fit in better! Why? Doomsayer behavior is toxic to selling. It's also incurable because it's hereditary.

Doomsayers look for low-probability catastrophes that might occur, so they can plug every hole possible. This type of Sales Call Reluctance® behavior was discovered by scientists at Behavioral Sciences Research Press, Inc., for whom I'm a licensee.

That doesn't mean Doomsayers can't succeed in sales. They can. But they need a lot of energy and goals to compensate for their innate behavioral mode. Unlike reps who display other types of Sales Call Reluctance®, they can manage their fears but they can't get rid of them.

Doomsayers have terrific qualities, which include not taking risks. If you're hiring a scientist, contract attorney or engineer, you don't want them to take risks. But selling is the Land of Supreme Risk! We're not expecting perfection, we're expecting action! Taking action by prospecting becomes a way to practice skills, which then improve with more action and practice. It's a nice circle of benefits for gaining revenue, market share and expertise.

Doomsayers worry a lot, lack spontaneity and like to stay in the background, however. Good salespeople need to stay visible and initiate contact based often on little more than blind faith.

I once worked with a group of salespeople who had migrated into sales due to restructuring and downsizing. Most were Doomsayers based on the needs in their previous jobs, and all felt miserable in sales. Many couldn't sleep at night. Within two months nearly all had given up their "job security" for their emotional well-being. They had quit.

You undoubtedly don't have many Doomsayers in your sales organization, but you probably have a few. In managing Doomsayer salespeople, here are some tips:

- Don't use rah-rah motivation. It doesn't work.
- Don't try putting fear into them. It doesn't work.
- Don't try to talk them into taking risks. It only makes the behavior worse.
- Do speak calmly.

- Do work with them to increase prospecting and selling by appealing to their need for financial security.
- Do identify areas where they triple-check their work, and help them redeploy that time.

Interestingly, I've found many mid-level managers with moderate Doomsayer behavior, and many are excellent performers.

There's a characteristic of the Doomsayer that is helpful in this role. If you're changing policies or compensation plans, you want to seek out and destroy any negative ramifications of the change. Asking, "What's the loophole here?" or "Where can this backfire on us?" can be crucial.

Doomsayers want to succeed, and they're capable. But they can't jump into risk. The more you help them understand this side of themselves, the better able they'll manage their fears and their results!

The other option is to entice them down the hall to handle research instead of sales. Both of you may end up as winners.

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