

# Doctor Gloom or Doctor Intentional

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

For many small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), business is not looking good right now. Doctor Gloom's shadow is on the horizon from the U.S. stock market being significantly down in January 2016 to the trickle-down effect of China's gloomy economy. Then there is the forthcoming U.S. Presidential and state elections only adding to all the uncertainty and indecision.

Some of these same SMB owners and sales professionals are probably thinking, *What actions should I take, and then what should I do first because a misstep might be financially fatal?* The first piece of advice is to stop and breathe. Then take another deep breath.

The next action is to stop fretting, stressing out, and worrying about what you cannot control. Your next

steps require you to look to what you can control or what you can influence. From my personal and professional experience, we human beings have an extreme tendency to direct our emotional and physical energies toward what we cannot control. When we stop and breathe, we can return to what we can control or even influence.

Earlier this year, I read an article shared by a colleague about adopting one word for the current year. The goal of this exercise is for you to use this word to keep you on the right path. Initially I gravitated to the word "focus." However, upon further reflection, I selected the word "intentional."

Intentional means "done in a way that is planned." According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, other synonyms are *conscious*, *deliberate*, and *purposeful*. The word also implies reflection through critical thinking skills because one has engaged in pre-determined planning. Additionally, the other synonyms of conscious and deliberate suggest the individual has top of mind awareness. Finally, the word intentional is directly connected to an individual's purpose.

As I continue to be intentional (I envision my forehead with a big Post-it with INTENTIONAL written on it in big, bold, red letters), I am reminded of something a colleague said to me years ago: "We drive by more business than we will ever have."

Just imagine how successful

each of our businesses would be if we became more intentional about what businesses we want, what decision-makers we want as clients?

What this means for me is to no longer ignore information right in front of me. For example, LinkedIn has incredible statistics on the number of followers you have to who viewed, liked, commented on, and shared your LinkedIn Pulse articles. With one out of three business-to-business (B2B) professionals worldwide on LinkedIn, this social media site is outstanding for B2B sales prospecting.

Even LinkedIn members with free membership can gather these statistics and become very intentional about whom they wish to know. The data is also separated into four demographics including top industries, top job titles, top locations, and top traffic sources.

On January 3, 2016, I published the article "Putting the How into Employee Engagement" using the LinkedIn Pulse platform. In less than five days, the posting had over 5,000 reads, 614 likes, 28 comments, and 202 shares. Those following me (reading my LinkedIn Pulse articles) grew by over 100 individuals.

With my new, intentional behavior, I personally thanked each of the 202 members who shared the update in his or her status bar. Also, in some instances, I asked a question to find out what the sharer specifically liked about the article.



**First ASK YOURSELF who you like to do business with. Who are your BEST CUSTOMERS—the ones who challenge you, yet you ENJOY WORKING with them?**

These interactions, along with the subject matter of this article, gained me one confirmed speaking engagement, two very viable sales leads, and 10 prospects. My LinkedIn connections also grew by 33 in less than five days. I also learned that 90 percent of those who shared the article were second and third degree connections. Five percent of that sharing was from the LinkedIn Pulse Leadership and Management stream.

From the comments, I was able to gather that the topic of employee engagement and the implied topic of leadership resonated along with the overall content and the pragmatic writing style. Readers are tired of concepts and theories. They want simple and solid information they can immediately apply.

Had I not been intentional in digging through all the data, I would not have gained the results I had. I would have been, as my colleague said, “driven by all those businesses.” By being intentional, I am channeling my energy to what I can control. Unfortunately, many of us become so enmeshed in what we can’t control, we hyperventilate.

What does intentional look like for your SMB? More importantly, what actions should you take to be more intentional instead of the all too common Captain Wing It who sprays his or her actions all over the place and then prays something will stick?

### Assess Your Current Customers

First ask yourself who you like to do business with. Who are your best customers—the ones who challenge you, yet you enjoy working with them? Who are not your best customers—the ones who are challenging and create internal dread when you see their number on caller ID?

Take the time to write down the qualities of your best customers. These qualities can be separated into two columns: demographics and psychographics. The demographics are industry, size, number of employees, prompt payment, etc. Psychographics are the qualities or traits behind the buying decision such as forward thinking, last minute, in a rush, wants hand holding, etc.

### Assess Buying Behaviors

Your next step is to look at the buying cycle of each customer, yearly value,

and lifetime value. The lifetime value is essential because this is not just sales but includes average referrals. For example, one client may not purchase in high volume but may consistently send you referrals. His or her lifetime value may be much higher than a client who makes a significant dollar buy once every year to two.

This internal operations assessment also includes how easy it is to do business with each client. Difficult clients drain your employees and even yourself. Even if they are high volume ones, you may need to rethink your solutions and your pricing structure.

### Assess Your Market

The marketplace is in a constant state of change. To expect business will remain the same is foolhardy. Even successful businesses must be vigilant in watching the dynamics within their own customers as well as the global marketplace.

Forward thinking SMB owners and sales professionals look for “trigger events” that cause a shift in the buying decisions. For some, these trigger events spell doom while others may see opportunities just by shifting their solutions. At the end of the day, these innovative solution shifts may actually increase sales and profits.

### Assess Your Behaviors

Being an SMB, a solo entrepreneur, or a salesperson is not easy during discouraging times. There are ceaseless demands on your time, your emotions, and your resources. Reactive behaviors can kick in. Tempers may become short and flare up, sometimes with the least amount of provocation. A mentality of scarcity instead of abundance ensues.

This is the time to step away and take a personal assessment of your own behaviors and, even more importantly, the talents supporting those behaviors. There are two proven and affordable tools to support you in those assessments: The DiSC assessment for personal behaviors and the Attribute Index for knowing your talents.

Assessments are not tests. Tests determine right or wrong answers such as true and false or fill in the blank. The purpose of any assessment is twofold: 1) establish a benchmark; 2) provide clarity.

When you have clarity about yourself and your behaviors, becoming intentional is easier. You now know what you do well and how your behaviors are perceived by others. Additionally, you can take this information and apply it during stressful times to relieve much of those negative forces.

Dr. Gloom will always be just around the corner waiting to materialize. When you become Dr. Intentional, you may see Dr. Gloom, but his or her presence will not deter you from where you want your business to go. **N**

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