

# Bringing Out the best in others

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## The Hazards of too Much Positive Thinking

By Alice Wheaton

**Positive thinking with no grounding in reality creates happy underachievers.** They are happy because they placate themselves with good intentions, magical thinking, and hope. Hope is always about the future. Salespeople who feast on an abundant market place with a belly full of hope will starve to death. The mayday moment comes when the candidate has the zeal of positive thinking but is unable to provide evidence of positive results.

I received the following e-mail message after a presentation to a management group. In a few words, it tells a memorable story: "Alice, your comments about addiction to a positive mental attitude really hit home this week. I decided to demote my VP of Sales and Marketing to an account rep position. He had established a consistent pattern of delusional thinking about forecasts and even results. His positive thinking has had negative impact my company's bottom line."

For the record, I want to say that many boards of directors, CEOs, executive team members, and sales managers are often afflicted with an addiction to positive thinking because they, like the general population, have been bombarded with the virtues of positive thinking and chastised by our peers for daring to discuss a reality less than favorable. I am not advocating negative thinking. I am advocating reality thinking. We all remember the demise of high-tech companies that failed to meet their brilliant forecasts. Eventually the piper must be paid. It is far better to receive bad news and create a strategy to solve a problem, which might lead to the sale, than to have happy ears and go under.

Fear of economic insecurity causes economic insecurity. I do a piece of research with almost all the sales groups I speak to at various conferences. I ask this question: "What will your sales manager say if you tell him, Boss, I think we are going to lose this order?" Their summary response is, "My sales manager will reprimand me by saying *If you think you will lose it then you will.*" What utter nonsense! It takes more than negative thinking to lose a sale. In fact, I encourage salespeople to maintain a low level of paranoia at all times. This ensures they have the vigilant attitude necessary to qualify and re-qualify the deal.

Sales reps need to strategize with their manager, but often his/her fear of economic insecurity, combined with poor management and training skills, stands in the way. A sales leader interested in perfectionistic, positive, mental gymnastics, without a base in reality, is a guarantee for sales failure. Why would a Big Game Hunter and Closer stick around?

Happy underachievers have the potential to become happy overachievers when they face reality and put an action plan into place. The universe is organized around action. Our planet spins and rotates, the seasons change, and life is continually evolving. I cringe when I hear a salesperson say I am putting the energy out there, because what one thinks about comes to pass. Yes, positive thoughts are vital, but they must be backed up by appropriate action. Wishing does not make it so, unless you are Alice in Wonderland!

Occasionally life delivers a wake-up call: a moment of change, and we are never the same again. A loss or hitting bottom often precedes an epiphany, though not necessarily so. At such a time,

our defenses are down, our minds are open, and opportunities suddenly appear. We feel the willingness to do the work, to actualize the opportunity. Life-changing moments depend on your response to the wake-up call. Whereas being stuck in negative thinking is not the answer, neither is being stuck in positive thinking. The idea is to entertain both but not to be owned by either. This way you will have a strong base in reality and the results will show.

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