

## A PERSONAL CAREER COACH FOR THE 90s

# THE DOOM LOOP SYSTEM

# A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CAREER MASTERY

**DORY HOLLANDER, Ph.D.**

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**DOOM LOOP  
SYSTEM**

A Step-by-Step Guide  
to Career Mastery



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# THE DOOM LOOP SYSTEM



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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As you read the examples and cases in this book, you may wonder whether they reflect real people and true situations. The answer is yes and no. The issues and the dynamics are real; the names and actual situations are not. I have made some changes and occasionally combined information from individuals who shared similar stories to maintain the privacy of those involved.

For my clients, who have been my teachers,  
and for all of us who work

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We all need a little help. You know—a brain to pick, a shoulder to lean on, and whatever else it takes. So here goes.

First—the brains to pick. In the course of my education as a psychologist, I have benefited and learned from the work of many professionals in psychology and organizational development. Their theories, research, and ideas have contributed to my thinking and to the underpinnings of this book. Specifically the studies and writings of Daniel Levinson in adult development, David McClelland in achievement motivation, Kurt Lewin in organizational psychology, John Holland in career development, and Isabel Briggs Myers in psychological type have deepened my understanding of how we approach work, organizations, and change in our adult years.

Next—the shoulders to lean on. Here I had help from my friends. Even though I enjoyed writing this book, I wrote *The Doom Loop System* during times that made me especially sensitive to the bonds of friendship. To those friends, colleagues, and clients who kept track of my progress and me as I commuted back and forth from the village of Cambria, California, where I lived and wrote, to the heartland of St. Louis, where I work, my message is simple: your support was vital.

You know who you are, but I would like to single out a few of you for special accolades:

Janice Galka for her ability to get to the heart of things.

Richard and Bonnie Polinsky for good company and a lion's share of commiserating through two years of writing and growing pains.

Bruce Wexler, who began as my agent and outside editor and became my friend, for helping me rediscover simple English sentences and for uncommonly good sense.

Dawn Drzal, my Viking editor, who is speeding along the Doom Loop's Quadrant I to II path, for her fresh vision and faith in *The Doom Loop System's* success.

Last—whatever else it takes. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge a few other key players, notably Charles C. Jett who created the concept of the Doom Loop and who first sparked my interest in the Loop in 1985 when I met him at the American Psychological Association in Los Angeles where he presented a symposium paper on the Doom Loop. I also want to thank in print: my former spouse, and friend of three decades, Jerry Blumoff, for usual and unusual dedication; my friend and colleague Fred Nader for weathering two years of Doom Loop evolution, and for sticking around until the book was done; and my good friend and fellow writer George Salamon for making me laugh even while in the throes of last-minute editing.

Have I left anyone out? Sure. Just ask Sam Blumoff and Rebecca Hollander-Blumoff. They will tell you they have stood by their mother and made it all possible. And of course they are right.



# THE DOOM LOOP SYSTEM

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# The Doom Loop

When I first came across the Doom Loop in the summer of 1985, I was intrigued. Here in a disarmingly simple form—a half-loop plotted on a two-by-two matrix—was a powerful career management tool that resembled nothing I had seen before. Somehow this matrix created an instant mirror and self-assessment tool that encouraged people to view their past, present, and future jobs with new, sometimes startling insight.

I am an organizational psychologist and career coach. My clients tend to be bright, motivated people who are discontented with their careers. The seemingly elusive goal they seek is a more fulfilling work life. In the Doom Loop I sensed the potential for a remarkable shortcut to that end—one that also promised to be fun to use. Part of the Doom Loop's appeal was that it could be tailored to benefit nearly anyone—whether that person was just beginning a career, was suffering from a bad case of midcareer blahs, or had recently been spewed into the swelling ranks of the unemployed; whether he or she was a banker, a secretary, or a rocket scientist.

Helping people effect positive career change is my business. And the Doom Loop, despite its ominous name, had possibilities.

In the coming years I would witness similar “aha” reactions from all kinds of people—students, professionals, small-business owners, executives, entertainers, military personnel, office workers, and technicians. What these people

had in common was a keen desire to find happiness in their work. Merely grasping the Doom Loop's simple concept seemed to help many of them get a better grip on what they had to do to avoid or resolve career crises, and to steer themselves toward more satisfying career paths.

What is the Doom Loop and where did it come from? To answer that question, let's go back to 1978 and the Harvard Business School.

## THE GENESIS

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Charles Jett is a leading career management consultant. In the spring of 1978 he was in Cambridge, conducting interviews with the latest batch of hopeful, eager Harvard MBAs, many casting longing eyes in the direction of management consulting jobs. As Charlie tells the story, after a long day of interviewing, the last candidate appeared. After a few minutes of talking to him, Charlie could see that this young man was not cut out for a consulting career, despite his aspirations. Charlie decided it would be an act of mercy to convince him that a consulting career was a disaster waiting to happen.

When the young man started talking about a matrix approach to strategic planning—an approach that was then very much in vogue—Charlie decided to fight fire with fire. He would use this same matrix approach to convince the young MBA that consulting just wasn't in the cards for him.

He began by asking the young man to list ten basic consulting skills that a consultant would need to acquire during the first few years on the job. The young man thought about what he had learned in his basic business courses that might apply to consulting, and about the consulting jobs that two of his professors had described to him. He realized he would have to interview a variety of consultants in some depth to figure out what the basic ten skills might be, but being bright and eager to please, he still took a stab at it. And his impromptu list of consulting skills turned out to be reasonably accurate. It included proposal writing, fact-finding, problem identification, interviewing, analysis, drawing conclusions,

writing reports, making recommendations, and a few other skills.

Charlie then requested that the young MBA rate himself along the following lines: whether he liked or disliked those skills and whether or not he was any good at them.

After going through the list, the young MBA decided he wasn't really very good at any of the skills, primarily because he had never had any job experience that required them. Still, that didn't seem to faze him. After all, as an ambitious new MBA in search of the right fast track, he certainly wasn't afraid of hard work and learning. It did, however, make him wonder out loud at the sheer magnitude of work and learning a consulting job would entail.

When he rated the skills he "liked" and "didn't like," the new graduate said he didn't like two critical areas: writing and analysis. There were a few others he wasn't over-enthusiastic about, either. What he did like was the people contact: interviewing and making recommendations.

He and Charlie plotted his ratings of all the skills he had listed on the following matrix. They then used the following matrix to plot the ratings of all the identified skills.

	LIKE	DON'T LIKE
GOOD AT	QUADRANT II	QUADRANT III
NOT GOOD AT	QUADRANT I	QUADRANT IV

Then Charlie asked the aspiring consultant to analyze each of the four quadrants in the matrix by answering a simple

question: “How would you feel if most of the skills of your job clustered here?” They started with Quadrant I.

	LIKE	DON'T LIKE
GOOD AT	Happy Satisfied  QUADRANT II	Frustrated Bored  QUADRANT III
NOT GOOD AT	Anxious Challenged Uptight  QUADRANT I	Unhappy Miserable  QUADRANT IV

Here is an approximate reconstruction of what the graduate said:

- **Quadrant I**—If he were doing something he liked that he was not yet good at, he would feel challenged, but it could be a mixed bag. He might feel pretty insecure about his performance and about hanging on to his job. On the other hand, even though he might be uptight and anxious, he decided that these feelings might not be all bad. In fact, they might motivate him to learn more quickly.

- **Quadrant II**—If he were doing something that required skills he was good at and liked, he would probably feel happy and satisfied. Why not? Wouldn't anyone?

- **Quadrant III**—If he had the skills to do the job well, but didn't like most of them, he would feel frustrated and bored. He'd had enough classes like that. A job in this quadrant was totally unappealing to him.

- **Quadrant IV**—If he found himself working at a job that he neither liked nor was good at, then he would probably be extremely unhappy and would look for an immediate change

of scenery. He certainly wouldn't choose a job in this quadrant.

It was a simple and obvious exercise, permitting straightforward conclusions. But, in fact, when the MBA plotted his ratings for the ten consulting skills he had listed, he saw that most of them clustered in Quadrant IV. He thought a minute; then his eyes lit up. It was a revelation. "Okay," he said. "I get it! If I go into consulting, the odds are that I won't like most of the skills involved and I won't be particularly good at them, either. So I've been interviewing for the nightmare job without knowing it. I guess I'd better rethink my career choice, and find something that capitalizes on what I like. Something like working in the sales and marketing end of a business using people skills—right?"

Without any browbeating, the matrix had helped him see for the first time that consulting might not be the right career for him. But instead of feeling bad about it, he walked away feeling relieved, ready to try something more promising, more satisfying, that fit his own particular pattern of likes.

After the young man left, Charlie studied the matrix. He was stunned. In his many years as a consultant, he'd often tried to convince people to change careers they obviously weren't cut out for. It was no easy task. Yet the matrix had achieved that objective almost instantly. It was enough to deter a determined and strong-willed MBA from blindly making a poor choice.

How else could the matrix be used? Charlie found out when he met the president of a large Midwestern university who faced an altogether different career crisis.

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## DOOMED

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Richard Keefer had served successfully as a university president for ten years. Though he had been enthusiastic about his job early on, he gradually found himself becoming bored and distracted. A robust man in his mid-fifties, he figured he still had enough good years left to try another career. But

what would he do? Where could he go? To another school? To a different type of institution? Back to a professorial or departmental chairperson's slot? To something altogether new? His crystal ball was cloudy. Nothing really excited him.

Charlie trotted out the matrix. He wasn't sure it would work. After all, Keefer was a seasoned professional who was set in his ways. Any way you viewed it, his situation was substantially different from the young MBA's.

Richard Keefer had been elevated to the rank of full professor at thirty-five. Three years later he was appointed college dean. He became a university president in his early forties. In his first years as president, he was understandably anxious about proving himself on the job. He was challenged, sometimes even overwhelmed, by the job's ever-expanding demands. Though being a university president was his capstone—the long-range goal that represents personal career success—he didn't possess enough of the skills that were necessary to succeed in his capstone—skills like jousting with the state legislature for funds and dealing with the escalating demands of departmental fiefdoms.

But he loved the challenges and possibilities the position offered. And the prestige and the trappings that came with the job sweetened the pot. So he pushed hard and eventually acquired the skills necessary to perform effectively. He established a track record for himself by helping the school successfully weather a few serious financial storms and a particularly rending tenure dispute.

In time, Richard Keefer settled into his role. And why not? He was happy, successful, and skilled. After a number of years in the job, however, Richard began to stagnate. He began to feel inexplicably bored with the daily tasks of running a university. Little things began to irritate him, and he found himself oscillating between frustration and apathy. He was tired of grappling with cigar-smoking politicians for tax dollars and weary of going to the same old parties and fund-raisers year after year. The campus press labeled him the "old man," and on his fifty-third birthday, after ten years on the job, he felt like one.

At the annual faculty meeting a particularly outspoken critic



suggested that Richard had exceeded the life cycle of his job. Things were taking a downturn. Richard complained to Charlie, “I’m doomed if I keep doing what I’ve been doing.”

Doomed. The word would stick in Charlie’s mind.

Charlie helped Richard examine his career progression through the matrix’s perspective. Looking at the quadrants, there was no denying that his career as a university president had slowly progressed from Quadrant I to II to III. He had taken on the presidency in Quadrant I, liking the skills involved but still having to acquire the whole array of proficiencies required to be an expert administrator. Over time he mastered the skills demanded of a university president. Then, to his amazement and eventual chagrin, he found that performing these skills well in a stable and prestigious job often as not bored and irritated him. Though Richard intuitively knew that something was wrong, he couldn’t get a handle on it. He wondered if perhaps the problem was in him.

When he saw his career progression through the matrix’s windows, the light poured in. He was bored and frustrated because he had mastered nearly all the skills his job required. What he needed was the challenge of new learning: it was time for a change. The “aha” experience for Richard Keefer was that he was ensconced in Quadrant III of the matrix.

To help Richard make the right change, Charlie asked him about the skills he used in his job that he liked—skills that could return him to Quadrant I or II of the matrix. Richard was thoughtful. He considered the various skills required in a typical week’s work. A pattern emerged. His Quadrant I and II skills involved dealing with academics, mingling with important people, working toward culturally significant goals, and providing an educational experience. His Quadrant IV skills involved dealing with faculty grievances, university politics, and classroom teaching.

Given his likes and dislikes and the skills he possessed, Charlie suggested that Richard might search for a job as head of a cultural institution. Such a job would recycle the university president into Quadrant I, providing him with renewed energy and fresh challenges.

The following fall, Richard Keefer accepted an offer to