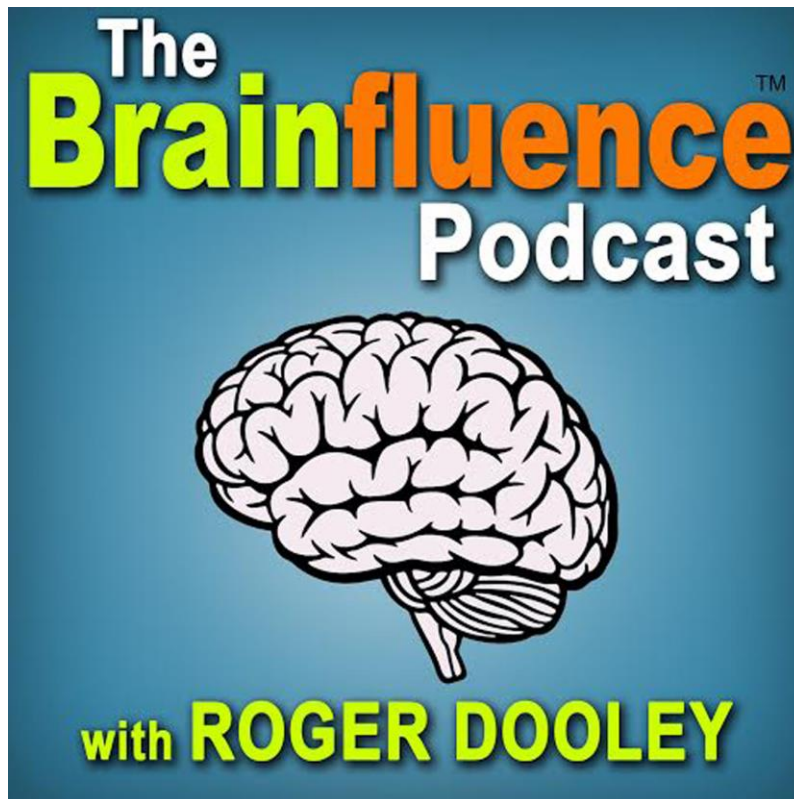


#34: The Art of Storytelling with Bryan and Jeffrey Eisenberg



Full Episode Transcript

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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley, author, speaker and educator on neuromarketing and the psychology of persuasion. Every week, we talk with thought leaders that will help you improve your influence with factual evidence and concrete research. Introducing your host, Roger Dooley.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast. I am Roger Dooley, and today I am here in person with Bryan and Jeffrey Eisenberg. They are the co-authors of the New York Times Bestsellers like “Call to Action” and “Waiting for Your Cat to Bark.” They’re pioneers in digital marketing, helping both small businesses and big enterprises like HP, Intel and Overstock.

Their latest book is “Buyer Legends: The Executive Storytellers Guide.” It’s a Kindle e-book at the moment, with more formats to follow I think we’ll learn. If I gave you a full list of all their accomplishments and credentials then we wouldn’t have any time left for the podcast, so without further ado, welcome Bryan and Jeffrey.

Bryan Eisenberg: Thank you.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Thank you very much.

Roger: Great. We’re meeting here in Austin on a rather uncharacteristically grey and chilly day. It was actually freezing this morning. Austin seems to have become a center for digital marketers. Not just the homegrown ones, but a lot of sort in-migration of digital marketers. Why do you think that is and how are you enjoying it?

Jeffrey Eisenberg: You think they didn’t just all follow me then?
(Laughter)

Bryan Eisenberg: No, they followed Roger. No. It’s interesting, I actually have a perspective on this that we’ve been watching,

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Jeffrey and I have been doing a course down here, we have been coming down for the last about 13 years or so.

The one thing we notice about almost all of the Austin marketers, and mind you we're both East Coast guys and we've advised companies on both sides of the country, what's interesting about Austin is it seems to have a great mix of people who are both left brain and right brain marketers.

Yes, they want that data, but there is still that creative side. Where you go to New York and it seems to be much more of the creative side, a little lighter on the data side. You go to the West Coast and everything is about the data, and without that softer touch. Meeting here in the middle of the country, we seem to have a little bit of that balance.

Roger Dooley: Interesting. Yeah, I've been really impressed. It's been fun though. Because I moved from an area, Northern Indiana, where there really weren't people to talk to, and people assumed I was probably unemployed or something because I kept wandering around the house in shorts. So it's been really wonderful to move to Austin. In fact, I got an ad in my email yesterday for a snowblower, which I just had to chuckle about that and fondly remembering those many winter frigid mornings going out to blow out the driveway before I could do anything else.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: And this is for your listeners especially on the East Coast or the North who are going to be pretty jealous of us.

Roger Dooley: That's right. For my listeners who are in colder climes, you have my sympathies.

Bryan Eisenberg: Well, Roger, we may need you for that other eighth of an inch of snow we might get that closed all the schools last year.

Roger Dooley: Right.

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Bryan Eisenberg: So hey, you never know.

Roger Dooley: It doesn't even take an eighth. A forecast would do it, even an inaccurate forecast of snow.

Let's talk about your new book for a little bit. I love that the focus is storytelling, because in just about every persuasion-related speech that I give I talk about the power of stories. We know that from fMRI studies, stories light up people's brains and can even synchronize the brains of the teller and the listener.

Then just a few days ago I spoke with Paul Zack. He's the guy who coined the term neuroeconomics, and he looks at how neurochemistry drives behavior. His research shows that stories can even change the chemistry of the brain by increasing oxytocin levels and increasing trust and compassion.

So, it's pretty much fair to say that I was presold when I saw what your book was about, but why don't you tell us about Buyer Legends and what kind of storytelling it involves.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: So Roger, we were among your earliest fans. I actually remember when we were down here teaching one of those courses here in Austin at Wizard Academy, we were on the phone together when we talked to you on speakerphone. It was like the early 2000s.

We've been fans because we've always looked at marketing and understood it as a thoroughly human exercise. It's about understanding why people do what they do, and it's not enough to simply look at, "We do great copy," or, "We do great art," or, "We have a great slogan," but rather we really need to understand people fundamentally.

So Buyer Legends is the distillation of, really, almost 20 years of knocking our heads against the wall, and I'll tell you what I mean by that. We've consulted to a lot of really

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big companies, and then we were working with Google. When you work with Google and you get the chance to make impacts better than are 10 digits, that's really rather pleasing to marketers.

We had a very specific challenge with Google. We went in ... and if you look this up, and I can't say this in a way that doesn't sound like bragging, and so I apologize a little bit, right?

Roger Dooley: Go ahead and brag. That's okay.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: I sort of want people to understand the context, right? We've had this experience where we've worked with lots of big companies and given them hundreds of percents of increase in conversion. So Google called us in, and they wanted us to work with them on their AdWords. It's pretty cool to work on Google AdWords.

Roger Dooley: I've heard that's been an important product for them.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yeah. So the thing that happened was this: We did an analysis of their data, and I am not kidding you, okay...

Bryan Eisenberg: But not just data, right? We listened on call centers.

Jeffrey: Right, but the data piled up. Just the reports alone would stack up to, I don't know, around two, two and a half feet worth of reports. We went through all of this, because they were asking as what their challenge was. We went through it, and we came out with a different story than they had.

It was literally a question of narrative, right? They looked at these facts and explained them one way, and we looked at the same facts and had a different explanation. We presented our facts in a story format, right?

We just said, "Hey, look, does this story resonate with you?" and we told them back their story, right? And they said, so—

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Bryan Eisenberg: Afforded by the data.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Right. “Your story seems to explain this data way better than our story.” Then they said, “Okay, so what would you do with us?” and we explained to them what we would normally have done with customers, which was, “Hey, just give us lots and lots of money and lots and lots of time.”

Bryan Eisenberg: And resources.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: And resources, “and we can do these amazing things.” Now, that’s not a problem on their scale, but here was the particular problem and it was the same problem every client had had but they bit the bullet. This is Google.

Their problem was time. It wasn’t a matter of linear time, it was rather the matter that ... and anybody who has ever worked with this brilliant company knows that it has really genius people, but they are all really pressed for time. They go from meeting to meeting to meeting, you know, and they are intense, and nobody would really give us the amount of time that we needed.

Paul Zorzensky who was our sponsor at Google actually said to us, “Okay, guys, we need a different way for us to deliver this,” and he gave us time to think about how we could deliver this differently. We found a way. We literally, it was Bryan and Anthony and me, we sat down and we thought about this for weeks, saying, “What’s the one thing of all things that we’ve done with other companies that gives you the most bang for the buck?”

We were looking for the Pareto principle of 80/20, right? We didn’t quite find an 80/20. Because unfortunately, we couldn’t identify just one thing, but we found just one thing that takes about 5% of the effort of what we used to do but delivers about 65% of the result. Which is a pretty powerful ratio, right?

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Bryan Eisenberg: It's a thing that at the end changed organizations, right? It wasn't just a specific tactic. We teach tons of tactics on how to improve conversion: design tactics, copy tactics, analytics, all of those. But it was one fundamental strategic point of view that the organization adopted, that once they adopted it – and they all adopted it in different ways – that's when they got big homeruns even after we left, and that was the critical part of it.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: When we were at our agency Anthony had been our lead consultant. He didn't just take our stuff, but he actually had to work with clients. This is a very long answer to a very simple thing. It was storytelling, but not storytelling the way most of the world talks about it. Right now if you look on Amazon and you look at marketing books, half the books are about storytelling.

Roger Dooley: Those are more, selling the stories or...

Bryan Eisenberg: More generic context.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yes, and you know what, I'm making no judgment about those books, but we're nothing like that, okay?

Roger Dooley: That was going to be my next point, actually, was just to distinguish the kind of stories that you're talking about, that are mainly for internal consumption, right, as opposed to stories that you tell your customers to make them like you or to make them...

Bryan Eisenberg: Right.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yes.

Bryan Eisenberg: More than that, they're stories that help you align your brand story to the customer. I give this example all the time. I've done it in tons of conferences. I've probably told this to thousands of people at this point.

A couple of months ago, I bought a new laptop. Apple changed their plugs, so I went from the firewire to the new

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thunderbolt cable for the hard drive. I ordered the wrong one, and said, “Okay, I’ve got to return it,” obviously no problems returning it on Amazon.

They give me the shipping label, and it sits in my office, you can see in my office there is a box waiting there also to be returned, something else from somebody else. It sat in my office for two and half to three weeks. I finally put the label on, and I bring it to the UPS store. That afternoon I get an email from Amazon with credit on my credit card. I’m shocked. I’m like, “Wow, nobody has ever done that before.”

The key is very simple. If you think about Amazon and their brand story, Amazon’s brand story is about great selection, great price, quick availability and a great customer experience. Am I correct? Right?

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I’m a big Prime customer myself, or Prime addict as I’ve said.

Jeffrey: But the fundamental part that most people don’t get is that’s what Amazon wants to let the world know, but they know it’s not about marketing that. Because if they market that they can spend tens of millions and have no impact.

Roger Dooley: It’s about being that.

Bryan Eisenberg: It’s about being that. Having other customers tell the legend about how you are that, that goes from person to person. What happens is, in Amazon, every single one of their managers has four metrics that they’re judged by, their category managers: Their availability, right? So 90% of products are shipped from Zone Zero or Zone 1, which means they get there the next two days. They do 20 turns of their inventory every year. Now, to put that in perspective, Walmart does like seven to eight turns.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: And they were the superstars.

Roger Dooley: Yeah.

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Bryan Eisenberg: From a selection point of view, every single one of their categories, their category managers are responsible to have seven times the selection of any other competitors. From a price perspective, they need to be somewhere between 5 and 13% lower than their top five competitors. This is why they change their prices up to two and a half million times a day.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, it seems like half of those are on my book.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yeah, exactly. Then lastly, from a customer experience point of view, they are 13% higher than all their competitors. Now here is the key thing: You expect that from the guy who is in charge of books or the guy who is in charge of electronics. But the point of their narrative, of their brand story and their legends for their customers is that this has to work all the way from the boardroom all the way down to the stockroom. Someone in the stockroom said, "Hey, I know how we can increase the experience of people who send us returns. As soon as we know it's coming into the system, we can credit it them." All of a sudden, that experience metric goes up.

Roger Dooley: Right.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Roger, one of the interesting things, and maybe we should have said it when we started, is we're at the place where marketing and customer experience design actually...

Bryan Eisenberg: Intersect.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Intersect. Right. Some of the techniques that we talk about, user experience, people will find familiar, then some of the things marketers will find familiar. But let me tell you about the main thing about Buyer Legends that distinguishes it from classical storytelling.

Bryan went to that Amazon example. Amazon is a storytelling culture. They don't even do PowerPoints, by

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the way. They only allow written, narrated stuff, so it's very clear. Their communication is very clear.

What we do is say not only do you have to talk about how the customer experiences your brand, product, service, but you actually have to designate how would you measure that. So the distinguishing factor is not so much the storytelling but rather the measurement element as well.

Roger Dooley: So you're tying the story or stories to actual data to see if you are matching that story.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yes, right, and that builds its own optimization. We are starting with data, we then build the story, we then say, "How that will be measured?" Right? It's a self-optimizing loop. Remember, we're classically optimization guys, right? What we're really looking at doing is this applies not just to conversion rate optimization, we've used this with people to do content marketing planning, we've used this for—

Bryan Eisenberg: Social media response.

Roger Dooley: Why don't you ... I think Amazon is a great example, because I know I am a continuous user of them. In fact, in Texas for quite a while, as in much of the country, they didn't charge sales tax. Then they began charging sales tax as part of a deal with the State of Texas, and I found that my own buying behavior didn't change despite the 8% price increase.

Bryan Eisenberg: No, right. We resented it all for a few weeks, and then we just gave up on it.

Roger Dooley: Right, exactly, just because their service is so good and so reliable.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: And the convenience of it all.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, and plus it's one click so they've eliminated friction.

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Jeffrey Eisenberg: And now it's going to be one voice, right? With Echo coming out?

Roger Dooley: Right, but I'm not sure if I can identify with an enterprise like Amazon. Do you have sort of a smaller scale example of a buyer legend and how that works integrating with data and so on?

Bryan Eisenberg: Several. We can go on forever, if you want. There was one of the early reviews on the site that we found out who it was. A guy who owns a nutritional company, sells nutritional products online, does a few million dollars in business, can increased his sales by 46%. He hates writing, but he knew he had to force himself through this. It took him three weeks to execute everything he recognized in the legend, and 46% increase in sales.

One of my favorite examples is my good friend Bill. Bill has known us for years; we've worked with him over and over again. He owns a mattress store up in Canada.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: And he sells nothing online, okay?

Bryan Eisenberg: Right. You can view the inventory online, and that's it. He's been looking at this problem and trying to solve it for years. This is a smart gentleman. He's got a long time horizon. I mean really smart guy.

Working his way through the legend made him reimagine his business in ways that he never thought possible. He actually developed all kinds of action plans. Because now looking at this buying experience from 10 years, he's thinking of things like doing storytelling time on Friday nights with families.

Because if you think about as kids come in, young kids, if you've got a family with young kids like I do, what do you do on Friday nights with the kids? Why not go to the mattress store, where they're going to have pillows around, and all kinds of treats, and they're going to read a

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story, and you can have some books. When it comes to thinking about mattresses, where else would we naturally go?

Jeffrey Eisenberg: He actually was one of our early readers, because we specifically were worried about this. You're right, we talked about Google, we talked about Amazon, we talked about Airbnb in the book, and so there are some big companies. But this is something that you could do with no budget.

I'll make a whole different claim all together. If the book costs \$2.99, you should be able to, after reading the book ... Which should take about half an hour to read. If you're a really slow reader it might take an hour, but you'd have to be an exceptionally slow reader. Amazon has it as approximately 46 pages but I can tell you it was 25 pages on a Word doc, so it's a really short book.

Our challenge when we wrote this book was could people actually use it. So we sent it out to thousands of people, and everybody who we sent it out to we didn't have to push them but they all did what we said you could do, which is you can build your own Buyer Legend in 90 minutes.

Here's the part we didn't know: We thought people would just get better at it. They'd do it in 90 minutes, then do it again. But everybody who got back in touch with us said, "Oh, I actually figured something out the first time I did it," and that was just really cool. That's that thing that makes me say that if that you've ever enjoyed anything we've ever written, and we've got a couple hundred thousand people who have, so it's like... Right? Just from the books we've sold. Forget about it. This is the very, very best thing that we've ever written. It is the strongest thing. The \$2.99 is deceptive in terms of its value. This has the power to transform somebody.

Bryan Eisenberg: Maybe we should just change the price to \$29.99.

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Roger Dooley: I was actually going to ask about that, because we know that research shows that wine tastes better to people when it's got a higher price tag on it, even if it's the exact same stuff. A \$45.00 wine tastes great and a \$5.00 it's not bad, it's okay. Do you worry at all that people are going to think that these ideas aren't significant enough because they're in a \$3.00 book?

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yeah. Here's the thing. One of the things that Bryan and I set out to do, we've been doing this now for 20 years and when we first started out we really had illusions of changing the world. We were going to go out there and help people communicate better on the web, and do things digitally in ways that they'd never done before. For many people, for I would say a few thousand people we've had big impact on how they've experienced their lives on the web, in their professional careers.

But that wasn't really our aspiration. It was nice, and it's lovely when people come to your conferences and say, "Oh, I've used your site, changed my life," blah, blah, blah. While that's satisfying it didn't give us what we really wanted, which is to make an impact in any business at every level on a daily basis.

Bryan Eisenberg: This is what got left out of all the marketing classes. If people really understood what this was, and you think about marketing theory, this is what's going to be taught in universities over the next number of years. Because it's a process that as you look ... and we were talking to Seth Gordon about this when we were trying to come up with a name, and that's why he loved the name legends as well.

Because obviously it's that storytelling of one person to the next which is so critical and that's what customer experience is all about, but also the fact that Legends is that map. It guides you and navigates you through the pieces. If you think about traditional marketing and all the techniques, marketers have never really had to worry about customer experience before online marketing

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actually took over. Now that mobile is so popular, it's integrated everywhere: physical world, digital world, it's all integrated.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Basically marketers' jobs used to be to send people to sales people, right? Let sales deal with it, any type of friction or interaction.

Bryan Eisenberg: Right, but Legends is the piece that's going to help everybody tie this and that together and make sense of it. That's what we're hoping to accomplish with this.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: We could continue to sell it as consulting, right, and make millions of dollars, we have and will continue to do so. But it wouldn't accomplish what we're trying to set out to do, which is really just give this tool to everybody. People who are curious of business, our business model would be more of a training company.

But again, instead of ... We want to make this accessible, right? So instead of charging hundreds of thousands of dollars, even trainings will be much less expensive and really accessible for any individual who wants to do it with a small business. It was a really important factor, and so we struggled with that. We could have made it \$299 and it would have been that much better, but we would have had to make it longer than 25 pages. Really, that would get in the way.

Bryan Eisenberg: We just thought the world needed more singles than albums at this point, so nice, short and to the point.

Roger Dooley: Right. That makes a lot of sense. I've got a smaller e-book in the works that I really don't want to expand into a commercial book. I'd end up padding it. It's still interesting, simply because you've decided to do this on your own instead of going for a big publisher and so on.

Bryan Eisenberg: Oh, actually this is through a publisher, through Amazon. That's a whole other interesting story.

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Jeffrey Eisenberg: It's actually done through the Kindle White Glove program, and they made that available to book agents. Our agent Bill Gladstone is one of the handful of really prominent business book publishing agents. When we talked to him about this, he was excited about it. He was like "Okay, this is what this platform was made for." If there are other books, and I'm not ruling out other books, maybe we'll pad it a little bit more or give a lot more specific examples, he'll be happy to represent this. But we actually, we're limited and we really can't go off of the Kindle platform because we decided to do this.

Roger Dooley: Right. That's great. I think that oftentimes business books go too far in the direction, where they take what should be a simple idea and expand it into a lot more prose than is necessary.

Bryan Eisenberg: Right. They turn a good magazine article into a book.

Rogers Dooley: Not to pick on "Who Moved My Cheese," but you know after the first chapter it was like, "Okay, I think I get the idea here. Do we need the rest of the book?" You've said you can generate the legend in just a very short period of time. How about the total implementation? Obviously, that's going to take more than an hour most likely to get the data source and tie in, right?

Bryan Eisenberg: Well, it depends on what you discover on Legend. Sometimes you're missing just the most obvious thing. One of the most classical examples of one of our optimizations is some work we did with Overstock. It literally was ... we've always thought this way, but we've never explicitly had to tell it.

We talked about, "Okay, here was this movie page, such and such different people come here, and what would they expect?" We talked about that expectation as their stories, and we were able to go in and we were able to identify that anybody who is a little more competitive a

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type personality, like myself, going into an Overstock page and I got thinking, I'm like, "Wait a minute. The only thing I can notice is that this page is about searching movie titles for kids and education."

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Basically, what we found in story format, the bottom line of the story is that we found something that made a \$25 million difference...

Bryan Eisenberg: By changing one graphic.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: By changing one graphic.

Bryan Eisenberg: That happened overnight.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: The thing is, I had spoken to Patrick Byrne, the CEO of Overstock, overnight. We were both sort of nutty and we were IM'ing at like 2:30, 3:00 in the morning. Bryan wakes up really early. When I went to bed, I sent the chat log to Bryan. By the time I woke up, Bryan had already sent them something that said, "Switch this image." In switching that image they got it immediately. So how quickly? It could be as quickly as that. I think that rather, you know...

Roger Dooley: So you found sort of an inconsistent signal, or a signal that was inconsistent with the story that you developed, and so it was really a matter of making that change?

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yes, and lots of people are finding that kind of problem. This is probably the first time for many people that they'll actually step out of themselves. A little bit about this is the process that we're using has a lot of neuropsychological factors. So what we are actually talking about here is that when people look at data, specifically data, there are fMRI studies that show that it suppresses their ability to empathize. Then when they are in sort of this emotional empathetic mood, it suppresses their ability to analyze, actually to go back into the data mode. The language of business is often data, and so we're in that mode...

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Bryan Eisenberg: Spreadsheets.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: By asking people to tell the story it creates some of the things that you talked about before, the neurocoupling, the projections and all of these things, and people are able to actually relate to their customers much better. So these things tend to be Obvious 101, and it's why we wanted to make it so accessible.

Because really, how do I charge you for telling you that you have a pencil sticking out of your ear? I'll just help you pull that out. It was the way that we thought about this. It's like, "Really, we can't provide service unlimitedly to people, we just want to teach a lot of people how to pull that the pencil out of their ear."

You have to first see the pencil there. This technique does that, right? That's its purpose, that's its sole purpose is to help you empathize better with the customer and then figure out what it is that the customer wants.

Roger Dooley: Very good. We're just about out of time but first I want to go back to the point you mentioned really early on, Jeffrey. We talked about that phone call probably, I don't know, maybe about eight years or something that we had. Then you got into the flow of the rest of your explanation, and I didn't want to interrupt. But I do recall that phone call. It was really a great inspiration to me, because I'm certainly fans of yours and that helped me chart my course that led me to where I am, whatever that is now, here talking to you guys I guess.

But what I did not know was that you guys were in Austin at that time. I was probably still snowballing it back then. So it's kind of ironic that conversation somehow came full circle here back to Austin.

As a reminder to our listeners, today's guests are Bryan and Jeffrey Eisenberg, digital marketing experts and authors of the new Kindle book "Buyer Legends: The Executive Storyteller's Guide." We'll have links to the

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book and other resources that we've talked about on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast.

Roger Dooley: Bryan and Jeffrey, how can your listeners find your stuff online and connect with you?

Jeffrey Eisenberg: They can go to buyerlegends.com, and we have a nascent blog. I mean we've literally just started a few weeks ago, but we think there might be some reasonable content there so please check that out. We also do quite a bit of guest blogging, but you can always find more information on us on bryaneisenberg.com, and the reason we use that is lots of SEO reasons for using bryaneisenberg.com. Of course they can always find us all over social media, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook. We're just about everywhere.

Roger Dooley: Great! We have links to those sites.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Yeah, we're not hiding.

Roger Dooley: Great. Bryan and Jeffrey, thanks so much for being part of this today.

Jeffrey Eisenberg: Thank you.

Bryan Eisenberg: Thank you.

Thank you for joining me for this episode of the Brainfluence Podcast. To continue the discussion and to find your own path to brainy success, please visit us at RogerDooley.com.