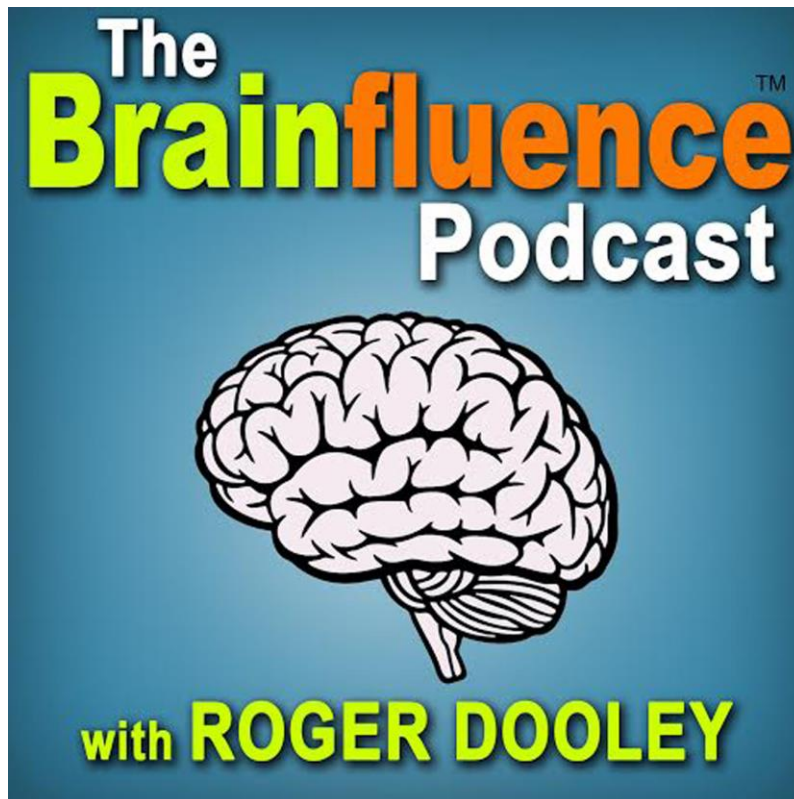


Ep #55: How to Stand Out as a Thought Leader with
Dorie Clark



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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. This is Roger Dooley, believe it or not. I may sound a little bit different than usual but I'm not a guest host. It's just me coming back from a little bout with laryngitis. I'm really excited to introduce today's guest, Dorie Clark. Dorie is a marketing and strategy consultant and writes for sites like Harvard Business Review, Forbes, and Entrepreneur. Her client list includes firms like Google, the World Bank, and Morgan Stanley. In her spare time Dorie's also an adjunct professor at Duke's Fuqua School of Business.

Dorie has a brand new book out. It's *Stand Out: How to Fuel your Breakthrough Idea and Build a Following Around It*. Dorie is a relatively new friend. We met at South by Southwest at an author's dinner she organized. There were three past Brainfluence Podcasts there, my South By Southwest co-panelist, Nir Eyal, plus Dan Pink and Noah Fleming. Now we've got another member of that fascinating group, Dorie herself. Dorie, welcome to the show.

Dorie Clark: Hey, Roger. Thanks so much. Glad you're feeling better, too.

Roger Dooley: Yes, we were supposed to tape this a couple of days ago but Dorie was good enough to postpone to give my voice a chance to somewhat recover. Dorie, I've read the book

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and I really enjoyed it. I guess I'd sum it up as a series of practical steps and actions to become a thought leader. Do you think that's fair, or how would you better describe it?

Dorie Clark: Yeah, actually. That really is what I was aiming for. In the book I interviewed about 50 top thought leaders, some of them indeed your past Brainfluence guests like Dan Pink, and tried to reverse engineer how they came to prominence. How was it that they came up with these breakthrough ideas and then became known for them so that I can apply the principles and hopefully help regular people who have ideas or businesses or causes they're passionate about to be able to better spread their own ideas.

Roger Dooley: I think it's probably important to say too that the book is not just for people who expect to ultimately have their own TV show like Dan does or sells as many books as Malcolm Gladwell, but people who want to just stand out in their field as being somewhat special and more knowledgeable than the other folks

Dorie Clark: Yeah, exactly. Really what I try to get across in the book is that it's not just for thought leaders in the sense of how to become the world expert in something. What I really have come to believe in the course of researching the book and traveling around and talking to people in the business community is that increasingly everyone, every professional, needs to become what I call a local expert. This doesn't mean you need to know the most in the world about something, but if you really want to give yourself job security and career security it is very powerful to become the person in your company at least that

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knows the most about a certain subject. That way people really begin to understand your worth. If you are the marketing expert or the whatever expert inside your company, or in whatever your community might be, a geographical community or an interest group community, then people will say, "Wow, it's so great to work with you," and they'll be willing to pay a premium to do so.

Roger Dooley: You bring up, say, being the marketing expert, but of course marketing is a field that's really crowded. You've got everybody from Seth Godin on down. You've got hundreds of thought leaders in that space. You start with the concept that you first have to develop your idea. Would you mean by develop your idea?

Dorie Clark: Essentially, if we parse even the word thought leader it's got two interesting components to it that I think are useful. One, you have to thought part which is that it implies that the person is famous for their ideas. This is not a celebrity thing. This is not a Kardashian thing. They're famous because they're known for their ideas. The second part, which is equally important, is thought leader. It implies they have to have followers. This is not just about ivory tower exercises and people who are pontificating about what they think might work. This is about real world action and people who are getting out there, who are spreading their ideas, and are getting other people excited about them.

If you're willing to do both of those things, it's a really powerful combination, but it does all start with what is the thing that you are known for. In the course of writing Stand Out I laid out a framework so that there's a number

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of different strategies that people can use to begin to develop their idea, their breakthrough idea.

Roger Dooley: Rather than, say, being a marketing expert, it's probably better to start with a niche like, say, I'm going to be one of the best people in marketing tools for non-profits or marketing automation for business to business, or something like that that doesn't have quite as much competition and I can stand out in that field.

Dorie Clark: You've really put your finger on it, Roger. One of the strategies that I profiled that is a common and very effective strategy if you're looking to establish yourself as an expert in your field is the niche strategy. The reason for this is that if you try to start out with too general of a category, the competition is going to be ridiculously fierce. If you say, "Oh, I'm going to be the technology expert," why on earth would someone go to you if you are untested and are trying to bite off this huge category; whereas if you decide to pick something small and narrow to start with, you really can become a recognized expert pretty rapidly because other people are just structurally not able to pay that much attention to the niche.

For instance, we were down at South by Southwest. The big thing everybody was having fun with over those few days was Meerkat, the live streaming app. If somebody decides to hop on the bandwagon, don't start out as a tech expert, start out as a Meerkat expert. You create a blog about Meerkat. You write a new blog post every day about things you can do with Meerkat or who's using Meerkat in an interesting way. I guarantee you within a month you're probably going to be one of the world's Meerkat experts because you now have 30 pieces of

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content about it, and when reporters are googling you or they're looking for Meerkat, all your stuff is going to be coming up.

Once they start building a connection with you, they call you about Meerkat, you're smart, you're interesting, you know them, well guess what? Then they want to talk to you because you know about Meerkat, you probably know about Periscope, and Periscope has been acquired by Twitter. Maybe they start talk to you about Twitter. Before long, your range of considered expertise or perceived expertise grows because people are steadily imputing more knowledge to you.

Roger Dooley: That's a good point. I think too you may start off in a niche and find your particular skills or passion, or something carries you in a different or broader direction, too. I think that it evolves both ways. People look to you for more but you may also evolve yourself.

Dorie Clark: Absolutely. The trick is not to stay in the niche forever. The trick is to find ways to grow into adjacent areas so that your expertise is over time considered broader and broader.

Roger Dooley: Dorie, you talk about doing your own research. Now I think that probably most people would immediately say, "Well gee, I don't have the time or the money or whatever to do my own research." What do you mean by that and what are some practical ways that people who don't have, say, big research budgets but are actually going to be doing things themselves, how can they come up with research that is original and interesting to other people?

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Dorie Clark: This, I think, Roger, is an underutilized strategy, because a lot of people when they think about research, they think about big projects. They think oh gosh, it would have to be a nationwide survey and I can't fund that. Of course, no, you can't, but that's fine. Original research really just means how can you inject new facts or new information or new data into the conversation as compared to what everyone else is doing, which is just sharing more opinions about things.

One example that I share in Stand Out is a guy named Michael Waxenberg. He's an IT manager for a financial services company. He and his family were trying to figure out if they should buy their apartment in New York City. Michael starts going to a bunch of open houses in his neighborhood. He's kind of a data guy. He wants to keep track of things in a substantial way, so he starts writing these very detailed reviews on a real estate website. He starts posting them, and before long a crazy thing starts happening, which is that other people begin emailing him and saying, "I love your reviews. They're so thoughtful. They're so helpful. Will you represent me? Will you be my realtor?"

The only problem was that he wasn't a realtor and he didn't have a real estate license. At first he would help them out and just give them advice, give them some wine or give them some chocolates. Before long, as his reputation was growing and growing, an actual real estate firm contacted him and said, "Look, if you still don't have your real estate license, come with us. We will sponsor you and you can become one of our agents."

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He did, and as a result he's developed a very lucrative sideline for himself that requires literally zero marketing, all on the strength of inbound customers, inbound marketing, and then the referrals that come from them as a result of these reviews that he does."

Roger Dooley: I've seen some folks also turn public statistics and crunch them in novel ways. Say, particular content marketers like to do this, where they'll take public health stats from some governmental source and weight some of those statistics and sort them a few different ways, and turn it into a top ten states for health living or something like that that's actually kind of interesting and gets people to read your stuff, and certainly presents them as having some expertise in that area. Between government data and trade group data and what not there's probably quite a few sources for that sort of information.

Dorie Clark: Yeah, exactly. There's an entire world of options. It could be reviews that you do like Michael Waxenberg. It could be crunching data. It could be doing interviews just like a journalist. That's a form of research, is surveying people and writing things up. It could be literally doing a survey. That doesn't mean it's a nationwide telephone survey. It could mean sending out a SurveyMonkey to your clients or to some small group of people and then doing a press release or sharing information based on what you learned from that survey. There's really a whole variety of possibilities, but if you're creative, case studies, white papers, you can create material that will get other people talking.

Roger Dooley: That's great. I also find repurposing research done by others to be useful. There's a lot of scientific research out

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there that has some business application or practical application. Often the scientists themselves, they have a different purpose in life. They're trying to extend human knowledge. They're trying to get published in scholarly journals and so on and they're trying to get their lab funded for next year. Some of that data can be really useful if it's translated into something that business people can understand. That's my favorite strategy. That's basically probably 75% of what I do is translate other people's research into comprehensible strategies.

Something that you talk about too in developing your idea is combining ideas. This is a basic creativity strategy that most books about creativity give some time to, or combining two ideas or taking an idea from one field and applying it in another. How does that apply in your field of standing out or to becoming a thought leader?

Dorie Clark: Yeah, absolutely. Essentially, the reason that this is so useful is that what we're really talking about here is innovation. It's innovation of ideas. Innovation is really tricky if you are only looking at the world from one perspective. Oh, you're an engineer so you think about it like an engineer, or you're a lawyer so you're thinking about it like a lawyer. Because the presence of only one world view makes it very hard to even imagine that there are other possibilities.

When you start cross-pollinating, when you start figuring out multiple worldviews and how they fit together, it becomes natural to say, "Well wait, if it works here, why wouldn't it work there?" One of the people that I write about in Stand Out is a guy named Eric Schadt, who is actually a former consulting client of mine. He runs the

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Icon Center for Genomics and Multiscale Biology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York.

The interesting thing about him is that today he's considered one of the top scientists in the world, but he has made waves because he was one of the first scientists to really embrace the use of big data in biology. The reason that he was able to do that essentially is that his initial training was not in biology, it was in math and computer science. As a result, he had a very quantitative worldview and was comfortable with crunching numbers and with that whole process.

In the early days when the technology first really became possible, a lot of traditionally trained biologists rejected it. They said, "Wait a minute, what kind of information is this going to give us? This is not going to be useful." Eric argued that it would and pushed it. As a result, he's been able to make tremendous progress. He has more than 200 peer-reviewed papers on everything from Alzheimer's to diabetes. His level of comfort in diving into that and advocating for it came from the fact that his original training was in another discipline.

Roger Dooley: Very good. That's such a staple of invention. It only makes sense to apply it to the process of developing your personal reputation as well. Dorie, now you've got your idea all fleshed out. You think that you have some niche to focus on or an idea or a theory that you think that can be the basis for you starting to create content. I know probably most of us have had that experience of going out there and putting the first post on a blog and then watching the stats do absolutely nothing, where a few people randomly come in through Google and leave

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because it wasn't what they were expecting. You devote probably half the book or so to the next phase, which is developing a following. How do you go about doing that?

Dorie Clark: Yes, developing a following around your ideas is really a critical part of it, obviously. It's kind of if a tree is falling in the forest. You can have the greatest idea in the world but if you don't have people sharing it or talking about it it's not going to do the world any good.

What I've discovered in the course of doing these 50 thought leader interviews is that it's really a three-step process when it comes to spreading an idea. The first step is building your network. The second is building your audience. The third is building your community. Basically what I mean by this, this first step of building your network is about getting a group of people, a small group of people around you. You could call them a Mastermind group, personal board of directors, something like that. It's about getting a group of allies who you trust their opinions, you know that they have your best interests at heart. They're folks that you can bounce ideas off of and really use them for an initial look at your ideas and whether they're any good.

Because the truth is some ideas are actually not that good and you need people that you trust to be able to say, "This one is brilliant. This one, maybe you shouldn't be pursuing." Because sometimes even just a 5 or 10% tweak of an idea can be what is necessary to take it from something that won't work to something that will work brilliantly.

Roger Dooley: How do you find these people?

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Dorie Clark: One of the ways that you can begin to do it, it's really about a combination of starting where you are and thinking about the people who are already in your life. Literally what I'd suggest is making a list of the let's say half dozen people that you know that you admire the most, and then write down what is it that you admire about them. What would you like to learn from them? Because you have to be really clear about that. I think in a lot of ways we're past the era where everyone would like to have a mentor, a general purpose mentor who's like you but sort of the perfect vision of you in 15 years. We'd all like it both those are very, very hard to find.

Instead, what I suggest in my first book, *Reinventing You*, is that in creating a mentor board of directors you look at everyone, whether they're older than you, they could be your peer, they could even be your employee or your intern, but do they know something that you don't know or do they possess a quality that you wish you did? You think about that, write it down, and say, "How can I get this person closer in my life? How can I really learn from them?"

It doesn't have to be a formal thing like every three months my board of directors meets and talks about me at a day-long retreat. You certainly could do that if you wanted to but really it's about having the consciousness of how do you emphasize the relationships that matter most, because for a lot of people we get so distracted. We're willing to accept the inbound coffee invitation from somebody that we don't really want to see but we say yes to because they asked, and we don't make time for the person we really want to see but they just slip off our radar. It's prioritizing it and just keeping in mind what do I

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want to learn from them. How do I ask them the right questions and how can I really soak in what they know and try to give back to them the best I can, whether it's something as simple as retweeting their tweets or something as powerful as how can I send them referrals for their business or how can I otherwise support their dreams and goals?

Roger Dooley: Moving onto the audience and community, what's the difference between audience and community, for starters?

Dorie Clark: The building your audience is really the place where you begin to share your ideas with the world. This is what we might traditionally think of as marketing. It is folks who are blogging or giving speeches or doing podcasts or things like that. It is taking your ideas and making them visible and findable to other people. The audience is you're saying it, they're listening to it, and hopefully liking it. The community, how do you build a community, this is the final step. In a lot of ways it's the trickiest because it's the one we have the least control over. This is the place where you stop being the only person who is talking about your idea. If your idea is a really good one and if it has actual value to other people where they consider it useful to their own lives, you hit a tipping point where you are no longer just presenting to audience after audience. Your audience actually starts to become evangelists and they talk to each other. In the process they become a community. It only happens if they really believe in your idea and say, "Wow, this is useful in my own life. I really want to talk about it."

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Roger Dooley: Are people really going to do that for a lot of business ideas? Even if you have a pretty novel take on one area of business, do you think that you'll develop that level of engagement with audience people?

Dorie Clark: I think a lot of people are willing and able to do it. I'll give you some examples. One of the people that I profile in the book that your listeners may well be familiar with is Eric Ries, who wrote the bestselling book, *The Lean Startup*. This is an idea about how startups can improve their methodology. How can they be more effective? How can they get better results?

Because people heard it, startup entrepreneurs heard it and found it so useful in terms of challenging their thinking and getting them to think about things more clearly, today there are 750,000 people around the world who are registered for Lean Startup meetups. That's incredibly profound. These are not 750,000 people who have heard Eric Ries give a TED Talk or even read his book. These are people who are motivated enough that they will literally go out to you a meetup in their city so that they can talk to other people about these ideas. That's pretty powerful.

Even on a microlevel, if you look at something, if you've ever told your friends about an amazing new cupcake shop that opened in your community or if you have been really excited about a product or service ... Just yesterday there was a breakfast that I went to and I was telling everybody about my latest fascination, which is a software company called Meet Edgar. It allows you a better way of scheduling and reusing your tweets. I was talking to them about that.

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The truth is people want to engage in word of mouth marketing if the product or service is good, if the idea is good, because it makes them look good. It makes them look like they're in the know. People are grateful because a good suggestion is a very helpful thing. The trick is you can't put lipstick on a pig. You can't have a bad idea and then try to sell it to people with a lot of money on advertising. This is where the initial vetting with your network is really critical. It has to be a good idea to begin with that people will find value in. If they do, then if you do the first two steps right, communicating it with your network and then building an audience, then the latter, the community building, takes care of itself.

Roger Dooley: That's a great point. You know, Dorie, I think too that the community can help shape your ideas. I know that I've been blogging at NeuroscienceMarketing.com for ten-plus years now and my emphasis has changed. Part of that has been driven by the community there. I see what gets shared, what gets commented on, what goes viral. Not wildly viral perhaps. It's kind of a specialized field but some posts may get a few thousand shares and others may get a few dozen.

Over time that tells you what's resonating with your audience and which ideas are working, and which ones aren't. I think that's a great feedback loop that you may not have on your first of getting started with your content creation and dissemination, but over a period of months or even a few years you will get that feedback loop going.

Dorie Clark: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's exactly right.

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Roger Dooley: Dorie, one thing I really like about your book is that it's practical advice, first of all. Even though you've got some great examples like not everybody is going to be Eric Ries and develop this massive following and position as a thought leader, but there's just a lot of very straightforward, practical advice that people at any level can use. In fact, a lot of it really matches my experience where I'm not a neuroscientist but by, as you say, combining a couple of fields, neuroscience and marketing, I was able to develop my own little reputation and grow an audience. Not quite at the Malcolm Gladwell level yet but it's been effective and a lot of fun for me certainly. I really enjoy now when I get a speaking gig at another location, another country, to meet folks that have been reading my stuff and discussing my ideas. I can tell you that these ideas work. The only thing I wish was that ten years ago I would have your book, because I probably would have made a lot fewer mistakes.

Dorie Clark: Thank you, Roger. I appreciate that. It's definitely my goal for readers, is that they can hopefully begin to use this as a road map for themselves. Actually, one thing I'll just mention quickly is that for folks who are interested in the idea of how they can begin to apply these concepts in their own lives, I created a free 42-page workbook that's an adaption of Stand Out. At the end of each chapter I have questions, sort of self-reflection or self-assessment questions that people can ask. I combine them together. There's 139 questions to help you find your breakthrough idea and build a following around it, and put that into a workbook. Folks can get that for free on my website, dorieclark.com, which is D-O-R-I-E-C-L-A-R-K.

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Roger Dooley: Great, that was a good lead-in Dorie because I was just about to remind the audience that we are talking with you, Dorie Clark, who is the author of *Stand Out: How to Fuel your Breakthrough Idea and Build a Following Around It*. Dorie, other than dorieclark.com, are there any place else that folks should be looking for you online?

Dorie Clark: Yeah, thanks. I'm on Twitter @DorieClark. I also mention, on my website there are 400 free articles, so for folks that would like to dive in there's a lot of material there from my blog posts for Forbes and the Harvard Business Review as well.

Roger Dooley: Great. Links to Dorie's site and social media links and so on will be in the show notes at rogerdooley.com/podcast along with the text version of this conversation, which may be a little bit easier on your ears than my voice today. Thank you very much for being on the show, Dorie.

Dorie Clark: Roger, thanks so much.

Roger Dooley: Yep, bye now.

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.