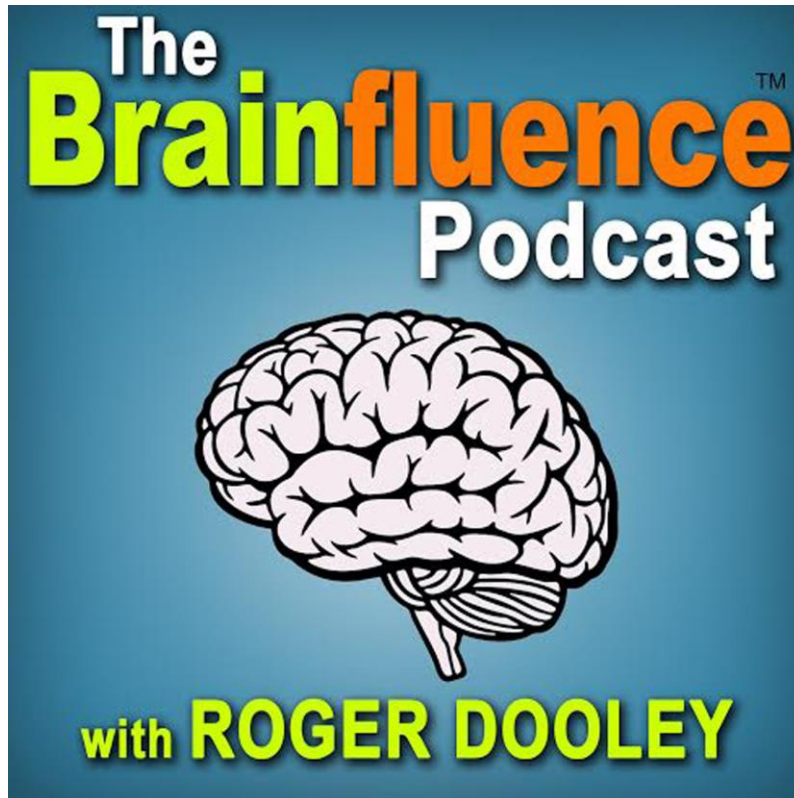


Ep #95: Cultivate Success with Morag Barrett



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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'm Roger Dooley. My guest this week started in retail banking with Royal Bank of Scotland Group in the UK and spent fifteen years in the finance industry. Later, she was responsible for global leadership and executive development in a large US telecom company.

She's now CEO of SkyeTeam, a firm that offers leadership and management advice to businesses of all sizes and industries like healthcare, telecommunications, manufacturing, technology, and more. Her new book is *Cultivate: The Power of Winning Relationships*. Welcome to the show, Morag Barrett.

Morag Barrett: Thanks, Roger. I'm excited to be here. Looking forward to our conversation.

Roger Dooley: You know, I think we have a lot in common, Morag. I spend a lot of my time focused on marketing, advertising, and sales, where you focus more on leadership and teamwork and management. But I think we both emphasize the emotional and non-rational, nonconscious side of things.

I know in the marketing world you see so many businesses that are otherwise really smart but they focus just on the conscious piece, those features

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and pricing and sort of concrete benefits. This is all important stuff but it's far from the total picture. Do you see the same thing in your space, where managers and leaders who sort of tell people just the facts and what's supposed to happen and what they're supposed to do and then assume that it will?

Morag Barrett:

I do. It's exactly why I moved into this part of the business. As you mentioned in the introduction, I spent fifteen years working for a large bank in the UK so I was working with big international companies, local businesses, looking at their business plan, cash flow forecasts, essentially understanding their widget or service and deciding whether or not to lend millions of pounds to help them in their growth strategy.

It became apparent to me quite early on that you can have the best widget or a great idea or a wonderful service but if you don't pay as much attention to how business gets done—the relationships, the communication, how to resolve conflict and disagreements—then chances were that you were not going to be successful either as a company or as an individual leader in the long term.

So that's why I made the deliberate choice to move away from the pragmatic numbers, which I can still talk, and I bring that business perspective to the work that my team and I do. But move from that into the interpersonal, how business gets done and to truly help leaders individually and collectively sustain success versus getting frustrated when results are not being met.

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Roger Dooley: Makes a lot of sense. You mention some Harvard research that says that the most important factor for team success is social bonding among the team members. Do you really think that's true?

Morag Barrett: I do and experience shows it to me time and time again. I mean the listeners to this podcast, think about it. How often do you go home at the end of the day and say to your dog or your significant other or whomever will be listening, or the empty room, "You won't believe what happened at work today. You won't believe what so-and-so did."

So invariably when careers plateau or they flame out or when projects miss deadlines, again, it's not for a lack of planning per se. It's usually because of misaligned expectations, not holding each other accountable, not having the tough conversations. So in my mind, it's the relationships make or break it every single time.

Roger Dooley: Well you built your book around the Relationship Ecosystem model. I know it's tough, this being an audio podcast, we don't really have visuals available. We can't throw up a PowerPoint slide but we actually can I think put an illustration on the show notes page. So if our listeners want to follow along and they happen to have a screen handy they could do that. But explain as best you can the Relationship Ecosystem model and the roles that people can take on.

Morag Barrett: All right. I wrote the book *Cultivate: The Power of Winning Relationships* because of what we've just discussed. What are misperceived as the soft skills

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are actually fundamental to everything that we do. I wanted to provide us with a language and framework that gets beyond going home and being frustrated about your colleague or, "He's a jerk, what did you expect?" Or, "That's sales, they always over promise." Or, "That's operations they can never turn up service on time." There's a lot of blame and finger pointing.

So the idea of the Relationship Ecosystem is it provides a much more positive language that allows you to diagnose the health of your critical professional relationships and do something positive with it to move it forward. So I can explain it quite quickly now. There are four relationship dynamics.

For your listeners, it would be useful for them to think about, what are the business professional goals that they're looking to achieve in the next let's say six months? And who are the three to five people that they work with every day that can either help or hinder them achieving those goals. If you keep those people in mind as I go through these four descriptions, it may help you then to just do a quick diagnosis on the quality of your working relationships.

So, Roger, as you think about your role and the show and the work that you do, do you have three stakeholders, three relationships that you can think of and bring to mind as we go through this?

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Roger Dooley: Well, I'm sort of a solopreneur so my relationships would all be external. But I'll try and keep a few in mind here as we're going forward.

Morag Barrett: Please do because I've made that move from solopreneur to now having a team, but even as a solopreneur your success is still dependent on the quality of the relationships that you have with your clients, with people you might collaborate with, the people who cheer you on and refer you. So think about those people too.

Roger Dooley: Right. That was actually a point that I was going to bring up later in our discussion as to how this model works externally.

Morag Barrett: Yeah.

Roger Dooley: But of course, you do have clients, you have customers, you have suppliers or collaborators or external partners and so on. Okay, well great, sorry to interrupt your flow there, Morag. Go on.

Morag Barrett: So the four relationship dynamics work like this: it starts first with what I call first contact. So Roger, I'll use you and I as an example. We're on a first contact meeting right now and I liken it to almost like a first date. Obviously in our case, a blind date, because we're doing this remotely.

When I ask people, when you're getting ready for your first day on a new job, or in your case first day with a new client, your first project, how do you prepare? How do you turn up in that moment, Roger?

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Roger Dooley: Well, I think I would probably try and learn something about whoever I was going to meet with if it was the first time meeting. And of course, today we've got tools like LinkedIn and all kinds of social media where people are no longer totally inscrutable in most cases. I think a few years ago, it'd be very difficult. You might only have to call people that might know them and do your research that way, but I think that would be one aspect. Then of course, I think you try and prepare yourself for how you want to come across to that individual.

Morag Barrett: Agreed. So we're on our best behavior. Egos are in check. We're waiting to see, are we going to enjoy working together? Then at some point, the nature of the relationship changes. It either becomes conditional or unconditional—more on that in a moment. It moves from a “me” focus, you know, am I wearing my best suit? Am I sounding smart? Am I saying the right things? To a “we” focus in terms of, how are we going to work together to deliver our combined results?

My hope is that the relationship turns into what I describe as an ally, an unconditional relationship that's focused on mutual success, on we. Your ally is like a best friend at work. They are the person who has your back no matter what. But it's not skipping through the daises, *Little House on the Prairie*, everything's lovely. Your ally is also the one who's going to take you aside, give you some tough love and a kick in the pants if you need it to help you through the tough times. So an ally's motto is “I'm right here with you.” They're your confidant, your mentor, your trusted advisor.

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Now if I keep moving through the Relationship Ecosystem, the next relationship...

Roger Dooley: Let me interrupt for just a second, Morag.

Morag Barrett: Yes.

Roger Dooley: How long would it take to determine if this individual that you've just met is an ally? Does that happen in the first meeting or does it develop over a period of time? Multiple meetings, days? Weeks?

Morag Barrett: That's such a powerful question. The answer is yes to all of the above. I think we all have people in our lives who we've met and just clicked with and you'd put them in that ally category from the get-go. Then others where it has been gradual over time.

But the kicker here, Roger, is less about well how do I know if so-and-so is my ally? You can accelerate the process because the true question is: are you theirs? So starting with, are you behaving? Are you being present as an ally to your clients? To your stakeholders? To your colleagues? Irrespective of what they are giving back to you.

Roger Dooley: So really you want to model the behavior that you're hoping that you get from them.

Morag Barrett: Agreed, agreed. Because when you have two allies, when you have—and I'm lucky at SkyeTeam—we are a team of allies. It is one of the most powerful experiences of high performing teams I've ever known. We still have competition. We're still trying to outdo each other but it's less about, can I beat you and knock you down. It's how do we outperform

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together and learn and grow together? The candor and the feedback that we're able to share in the moment about what we do well and blind spots, means that we are continually learning and growing.

So having an ally, having a team of allies, is critical because they're the ones that are also talking about you when you're not in the room. If you're in a corporate environment, when you're looking at projecting your reputation and applying for that next role, maybe a promotion, you want the people who are discussing, "Hey, we've got this vacancy in finance, do you think Roger would be a good fit for this?" Then you want your ally in the room saying, "Yes, we ought to go and tap him on the shoulder so that he can apply in competition with others."

You also want allies so that if there is a misunderstanding about what you're trying to achieve, and there are people at the watercooler going [makes repeating screeching sound] as happens, then your ally is going to step in in that moment and either say, "Hey, that's not how we do business in the company." Or, "Here's an alternative perspective, have you considered?"

They're going to encourage those people to come and talk to you. And more importantly, they're going to come and tell you about the miscommunication. Not to make you feel bad but because of the warnings of impending disaster so that you can go and clarify expectations before it becomes a roadblock.

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Roger Dooley: Makes sense. Now, we haven't even gotten to the other three roles yet but let me ask you while we're talking about allies, is each individual primarily one type of person or does it change with their context and often might they assume multiple roles evenly distributed amongst the various roles?

Morag Barrett: I see what you mean. So my hope is, I mean, I wrote the book so I would hope I'm modeling ally behavior consistently to everybody. But as you will find as we work through the four dynamics, when you think about the three or four people who are impacting your success, invariably what I will hear is that people have a portfolio. I might have one ally. I hope you have at least one ally. Otherwise work becomes a very lonely and vulnerable place.

But invariably then people say, no I've got a supporter, I've got a rival, or I've got an adversary, which we will talk about in a moment. My message is that you are not a victim. You've created this through action or inaction. That whole mindset that says, "Well I can't possibly tell Roger that when he does this it frustrates me or I can't go and ask Roger, what do I need to do on this project because he'll think I'm incompetent and I've got twenty years of experience, I'm supposed to know the answers." All of these stories that we tell ourselves, that prevent us from essentially setting the rules of engagement around how we're going to work together invariably come back to bite us when things don't go to plan.

Roger Dooley: I just see some personality types as skewing in one direction. Some people are naturally confident and

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helpful and perhaps more likely to be a willing ally than other folks who are rather naturally confrontational, suspicious, and probably very easily turned into adversaries.

Morag Barrett:

You've nailed it there in that we tend to label those behaviors with a negative story which is they're out to get me and sometimes they are. But more often than not, it may be again a blind spot that people don't realize. I'm fairly direct, I tend to ask questions around how can we make things better. That can be misperceived as being overly assertive, let me give myself the benefit of the doubt there.

But what I've learned is because school, if you think about—I've got high school teenagers at the moment—all school and university is about me versus the exam board. It's, can I remember? Can I show I'm the smartest in the room? Can I graduate in the top x percent of my class? But when we get to the world of work, it's less about the me, it is all about collaboration and teamwork. When we see that infighting, those silos, politics, and turf wars within a company, it slows down results every single time.

Which goes back to my opening comment that just having a great widget is not enough. If you don't get those efficiencies of your team and your company pulling in the same direction, you are going to be missing opportunities or delivering not the high-quality service you were hoping to. There are going to be flaws, there are going to be more bugs. There are going to be more errors.

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Roger Dooley: So since we've spent so much time on allies, what are the other roles as we sort of move down the hierarchy of desirability?

Morag Barrett: Well let me move through them quite quickly. So the next one is a supporter. Still a “me”—a “we” focus, sorry—but conditional in nature. The supporters look and feel like allies. They're fun to work with until the going gets tough because unlike an ally who will step forward with you, a supporter's going to take a step back. They're not going to put their head over the parapet and take personal risk for you. They're going to give you the feedback you want to hear versus the feedback that you need to hear.

So what I'll hear is when you only have supporters, you're not getting feedback on your blind spots but in a company that creates a culture of supporters, invariably innovation and creativity flounders and average becomes the status quo. Average in my experience is not enough either for your career or for your company reputation in today's market environment.

Roger Dooley: So do cultures typically take on an overarching role that is most common, like a company of allies or a company of supporters or rivals?

Morag Barrett: I see pockets. For example, my healthcare companies, I've worked with a couple who espouse and value the family-centric nature of their organization but the reason which essentially mirrors nicely with my supporter description but the reason they're bringing my team and I in is because

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they're not also embracing the slightly dysfunctional piece of most families that I know of which is the candor and feedback.

So we're being asked to come in and help them to learn those skills whereas a team of allies, you can have that family feel and a sense of comradery and a sense of belonging but you also are held accountable to the standards and expectations of the team and of the organization. So I do see mixes but if you can work towards the ally, if you are deliberate and thoughtful then there are all sorts of rewards to be had. So shall I continue around, Roger?

Roger Dooley: Yes, you might as well hit the last couple there then we can talk about some cultures that you've worked in perhaps.

Morag Barrett: Yeah, so the rival is—we're starting to move into the tense relationships now. A rival I liken as Jekyll and Hyde. When it suits their agenda, they're for you and when it doesn't, they're against you. So of course, you're never sure who's going to show up. What I find is that when people are working with someone that they now perceive and can describe as a rival relationship, we tend to prepare and over-prepare. So in the short term, it raises our game but in the long term, it's stress and burnout.

Then finally, the adversary, perhaps needs no description. Overt and covert. If it's an overt adversary you know who it is and if it's covert, you just know something's wrong, which is why you'd better have an ally who's got your back. The

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adversary, it's consistently tense, potentially toxic relationship, antagonistic, and stressful. So there you have it, the Relationship Ecosystem. Four relationship dynamics: adversary, rival, supporter, and ally.

Roger Dooley:

I would suppose that most of us have elements of all of those things in the same way the other quadrant system that seems to come up a lot in discussions is Myers-Briggs and everybody is always some sort of mix of these things and probably partly environment based, partly depending on who we're interacting with and so on.

Let me ask, can a toxic culture be fixed? Have you gone into any situations where just seeing that everybody was falling into some of the less desirable categories, or almost everybody, the adversarial or rival behavior was just endemic to the organization?

Morag Barrett:

Yes, I have. The answer is yes you can. But it requires a commitment from everybody in the organization from the top down and the bottom up and sideways and diagonally. It does need some support in having those candid conversations, discussing the elephant in the room, and clearing the air essentially around how did we get into this pickle?

The way that you build or destroy relationships is literally one conversation at a time. When we don't say what needs to be said, hopefully eloquently so that the other person can hear it and then respond appropriately then usually there's a downward

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spiral. It means that we get stuck in bad norming in these toxic behaviors.

So I've certainly worked with organizations who have embraced the language of ally and rival and supporter and looked deliberately at what are the behaviors that we need to do differently? When somebody behaves differently, how do we give the benefit of the doubt and assume positive intent versus going straight to the, "See, I knew they couldn't do it." Then we go back to the old ways.

When I'm working with leaders who are perhaps feeling trapped in that sort of broader environment but don't have the influence to affect change what we do there is focus on them and their team and what can they do to provide a little oasis of calm and sanity amongst that behavior in the broader organization. So it's about controlling what's within your scope, whether it's how you work with your colleagues. How you lead and manage your team. Or if you're at a senior level, how you lead and manage your organization.

Roger Dooley: How important are structures and procedures within the company because it seems that some environments would tend to skew in a direction. For instance, if a rewards system is a zero-sum game where if I get it three other people don't or the way an organization chart might be drawn to create an inherent rivalry situation, are those factors important?

Morag Barrett: Yes, they are because as you've identified, you're going to get what you reward. Many of my

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organizations reward the hero mentality where the consequence is everybody is firefighting. It's the crisis of the day and everybody is focused on that but nobody is focused on fire prevention, i.e. the forward-looking strategy and planning. In worst-case situations, you actually get arson. Where I'm going to start the fire in order to be the hero to put the fire out and it just escalates that way.

So having a clear way of articulating what is the culture that we have, what is the culture that we want or we need in order to be successful, and what's the gap. Again, how do we both role model and do, because it's not rocket science but it may as well be, but how do we role model these behaviors. But also, how do we reward and encourage people to move towards the desired state versus getting stuck in the tense or toxic state.

Roger Dooley:

One little aside, you talk about triggers and amygdala hijacking and our listeners got a dose of amygdala science a few weeks back when we had Dr. Joseph LeDoux on. What do you mean by amygdala hijacking?

Morag Barrett:

Well the amygdala is the part of the limbic system, the bit of your brain that is essentially our threat detection radar. It was designed millennia ago to keep us safe when we were living in caves, etc. It's literally your life or death—does it eat me or do I eat it—reaction.

So we've all heard of fight and flight. Well in the workplace, we don't meet many sabretooth tigers anymore but your amygdala doesn't know that and

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when your boss is annoyed or your colleague misses a deadline, it fires still with the fight or flight response. Of course, at work, hopefully it's not resulting in a fight where there's actual fisticuffs but maybe it's raised voices. It's using colorful language. It's banging your fist on the table. We react in different ways.

I'll give you a personal example. I have a phobia of heights, that's one of the things that triggers my amygdala. I get the sweaty palms. My head feels like it's going to explode, not in airplanes, but it does on the second floor of a certain store here in Denver. Ironically, earlier this week I was in that building and I thought, "You know what, I'm going to the second floor. I can do this." For once, I got to the top of the stairs and I walked along this open gangway area and I was doing fine. Then suddenly, my amygdala fired and I didn't know which way to run.

In the end, I ended up closing my eyes so I couldn't see the big space and the gap down below me and had to feel my way until I was in more of an enclosed area. There was nobody for me to ask for help. So your listeners might be laughing and going well that's ridiculous. Here's the thing about amygdala hijacks: it doesn't have to be rational to you. For the person who's experiencing in the moment, it's very real. When you're having a fight or flight response, blood is actually moving away from your brain, your gray matter, your logical thinking and your communication skills. That's why we're literally lost for words.

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So when it comes to relationships, if I feel like you've been disrespectful, if I feel that you don't care about me as a person, my amygdala is firing and it's starting to impact my behavior. If yours starts to fire, we can end up very quickly in that downward spiral where it just bursts into a full-blown argument.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, that makes a huge amount of sense because it might take just one small thing to set one person off but then as that person responds in a perhaps harsher or more threatening or aggressive way, then it's going to spiral downward from there.

Morag Barrett: It is.

Roger Dooley: So one thing today that's different than even just a few years ago is that so many people work remotely either part of the time or even all of the time in a lot of cases. How does that change the ecosystem and just the relationships between people when they are a voice on the phone or on a GoToMeeting or whatever.

Morag Barrett: I think you just have to be extra diligent. My team is remote. We get together once a week but if you can't even manage to get together once a week in person with your team, then it's about scheduling time to just pick up the phone, even if you're just leaving a voicemail that says, "Hey Roger, I was thinking of you. How's the project going? Call me if you need anything." It's about using technology like the IMs and chat messages so that you can have some of those spontaneous contact and conversations that happen in an office when you

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bump into somebody at the watercooler or the coffee station but it's harder when you're geographically remote or separated by time zones.

So be creative. Don't feel like you're cheating by scheduling time on your calendar or reminders to reach out to your colleagues to find out what's happening. The mistake is when we only ever phone me or call them when you need something. You need to also reach out when you're just calling to check in and say, "How are you doing and how can I help?"

Roger Dooley:

Before we talked about external relationships where somebody might not have a team inside their own company but they might have an external team composed of vendors and customers and so on. That's sort of a—in some ways—a low power situation. I think that also within a company too somebody who is not a leader in that company, they're just another worker bee perhaps, if they read your book, see your ideas, say "this makes a huge amount of sense," they aren't in a position to impose this on the rest of the organization either because they aren't in the same organization or because they don't have the powerful position within that organization.

How can somebody like that work to effect change where they don't really have the ability to call a meeting and say, "Okay, we're going to discuss everybody's role here."

Morag Barrett:

You look at it from an individual perspective. Understand what your career goals are. Understand

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what your boss or your team are expecting of you. Then do what we've done in this phone call. Think about the three to five people that can help you to be successful or potentially can get in the way of that success. Deliberately make it a priority to cultivate an ally relationship with them. Have a coffee, reach out to them.

Think about the networking that you're doing within your industry and within your community. Pay attention to the relationships that you need not just for today but also relationships that you need to be cultivating for future career success. So own your relationship ecosystem. Then where you have influence, where you're a team manager, then you can start owning the ecosystem for the team.

Of course, as you move through your career, if you're owning a part of the business or you're owning the company structure, then you can own the ecosystem for the company at large. So take what you control, own your own relationship ecosystem, and cultivate the winning relationships that matter for you.

Roger Dooley:

Great. Let me remind our listeners that we're speaking with Morag Barrett, author of the new book, *Cultivate: The Power of Winning Relationships*. Morag, how can our listeners find you and your content online?

Morag Barrett:

They can certainly get in touch with me on LinkedIn. So look me up, Morag Barrett. It's an unusual name, M-O-R-A-G. Then you can also take a look at our

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company website which is SkyeTeam S-K-Y-E Team dot com.

Roger Dooley: Great. We'll include those in our show notes along with any of the other resources we discussed. We'll have a text version of our conversation there too. It's all at RogerDooley.com/Podcast. Morag, thanks for being on the show.

Morag Barrett: Roger, it was a pleasure.

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.