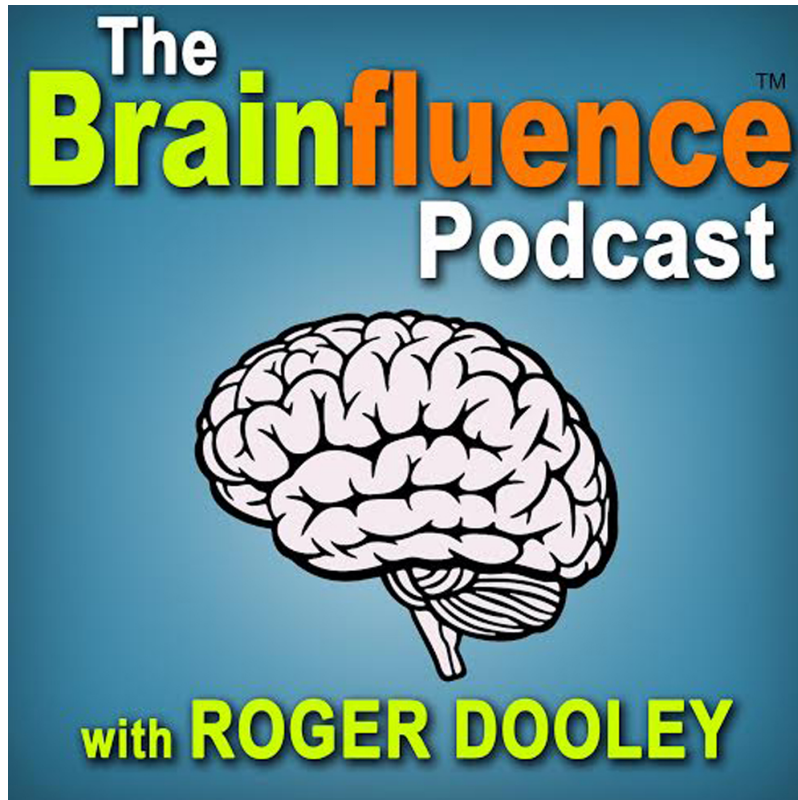


Close Deals Faster with John Asher



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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. Our guest this week is one of the top sales experts and trainers in the country. John Asher is CEO of Asher Strategies, a growth strategy consulting firm focused on improving sales. John learned about leadership and sales in an unusual place, the Navy, where he served as captain of two nuclear powered fast attack submarines before becoming the program manager for a billion dollar software development program. John went on to co-found an engineering firm that grew a compounded growth rate of 42 percent per year for 14 straight years. He later a sales and marketing advisory business training over 70,000 sales people in 22 countries on his efficient and effective sales process to quickly close new business. John's new book is not surprisingly Close Sales Faster. John, welcome to the show.

John Asher: Great to be on, Roger. Great to be with you.

Roger Dooley: Well first, John, thank you for your service and I'm curious, does the business world seem kind of tame after nuclear attack subs? I mean, have you ever had someone to come to you with a problem they think is life and death and respond by telling them what a real life and death problem is?

John Asher: Well, when you're a program manager in the Pentagon or any of the services, you have three jobs. First, you're the program manager, managing the program and I had a staff of about 500 people. Second, you're a buyer. Your

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staff puts out RFPs, companies bid on it, you select one and they build your program, and then third, you're totally a sales expert. You must learn how to do sales and marketing to keep your program sold, to fight budget cuts, demonstrate the value, demonstrate the content from a marketing standpoint, and of course, deliver the content from a sales standpoint.

Roger Dooley: Right, well, yeah, I think you're bringing up a couple of important points here. One is that even if your title doesn't have the word sales in it or marketing in it that you're constantly selling. I know for years I was a project manager and not quite the scale of projects that you were involved in but I totally see where you're coming from on that because in a matrix organization, you had to get a lot of cooperation from people that you did not control. You had to get other departments to allocate your resources. If you had a problem you needed their help to solve it, and of course, and in my case at least I had a customer that was outside the company that I had to keep satisfied, so we are all in sales all the time just about, right?

John Asher: Totally agree. Charles Schwab and the late, great Zig Ziegler have always been telling us this and then Dan Pink and his book *To Sell is Human*, actually did a whole bunch of research on it and he claims that one in nine of us professionals has sales in our title, VP Sales, Sales Managers, Sales Rep, and that sort of thing, but he said now in an internet based global economy, the other eight of the nine of us, we're in sales also. We're selling our selves, selling our ideas, selling to the boss, the boss is selling to us. We're selling to the bank to get more capital. The banks are selling to us to get our business. I totally agree. We're all in sales.

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Roger Dooley: Yeah, yeah. Dan's been on the show and I love the title of his book To Sell is Human because it really reflects what we're talking about. It's one of those sort of great book titles that really pops out. So, before we get into the ideas in your book, John, I'd like to get your thoughts on sales in general. You've been selling and training others to sell for probably what, 30 plus years now or something. What's different today? How is the sales process conducted in 2017 that's different than in the past?

John Asher: There's only five factors for sales success, and they haven't varied much in the last three years. New apps come in, new technology. The internet had a huge effect and that sort of thin but when you fundamentally look at sales success, there's five factors and if they're all operating together it's the perfect storm for sales. So the first great factor for sales people is product knowledge. So if you've got great product knowledge as a sales person it gives you power, confidence. You can really add value to prospects and suspects, and today in half the global 33 industries, product knowledge is actually becoming more and more important. Many buyers and especially CEOs would much rather deal with a subject matter expert with deep technical knowledge than with a sales person with a shallow technical knowledge who they know is just trying to sell them something. So the first thing you really need as a sales person is brilliant product knowledge.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, and I think just to interrupt you for a second there, John, I think, that's something I've heard echoed in the past that that sort of deep product knowledge, the ability to be more of a consultant than a sales person is increasingly important because today the customer can get most of the basic product information online. They can

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look it up. They can see the brochures and the pictures and by the time the sales person is in contact with the customer whether it's in an in person meeting or even over the phone or some other mechanism, the customer may know quite a bit about the product and really it's that sort of next level of knowledge that how can I use it in my situation that makes the difference.

John Asher: Totally agree. Second factor is sales aptitude or natural talent for sales, and this is easily measured with sales aptitude assessments and we have one, we use one of the top three, and they really tell us how much talent a person has for sales. For example, if you know somebody who likes to stay in a cubicle and work on their computer and doesn't really like other people much, you can pretty much predict they're not going to be too hot in sales, so the second factor is does the person have a natural talent for sales. Is their personality a fit? And we know from huge studies, a summary of all the studies in the sales institutes and HR institutes called a meta-analysis that just this aptitude accounts for 50 percent of sales results and the other four factors account for the other 50 percent, just over a broad range of many sales people.

Roger Dooley: Right, so let me stop you there. What, if you had to sort of characterize what that innate sales ability is, you mentioned the sort of introversion/extroversion aspect of it which somebody who lives to be alone is probably not going to be a good sales person but beyond those metrics what are the characteristics of a good sales person?

John Asher: One of those assessments we really like is the Advanced Personality Questionnaire, been around for a long time and it measures personality traits all independent of each other and there's about four of them where you really

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want that trait to be high. One would be intensity drive or goal orientation or fire in the belly which is kind of obvious. You want sales people to be driven naturally to achieve a quota. Second is assertiveness, a high degree of assertiveness, so that when it's time to ask for the order, they've got the natural gumption to ask. They're not going to try to ask too soon, but when it is time they've got the natural talent to ask. The third is social drive. That is the people who talk to other people on an elevator naturally, who want to go to trade shows, who love to meet new people, build networks and that sort of thing. These are three of the traits you really want to see very high.

Some of the traits you don't want to see high would be detail orientation. So it's not that detail orientation high cannot be good. It is good for certain jobs, architects, accountants, carpenters and that sort of thing, but for sales people you don't want them to get bogged down in analysis paralysis. You actually like for detail orientation to be fairly low. Another trait of interest is called need to nurture, need to nurture other people. You would like it to be somewhere in the middle. You want sales people to naturally want to build relationships and serve others, but you don't want them to get all bogged down in building relationships and never get the sale. So that's a trait where you kind of want to see it in the middle. So there's eight of these basic traits and depending on the trait you either want it high, low or in the middle, and when you've got them just where it should be, that's when you see the outstanding talent for sales.

Roger Dooley: Great. That was illuminating.

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John Asher: The third factor is selling skills, and these of course must be learned and they're the classic skills almost every sales person knows, focus on a few top customers, research the buyer and the company before you go, build insight, coaches, know how to match and mirror personality styles, how to build rapport, how to be the perfect listener, how to close the deal and those sorts of things.

Roger Dooley: Right, and this is really the meat of the content of your book, John, the skills that are teachable rather than innate.

John Asher: Correct. Yes. In the book there's also an opportunity to take one of these personality assessments to see how much talent the reader has for sales and of course the goal is, is where there may be a couple of traits where you're a little bit off what you should be for effective sales, but just knowing it, that it's those two traits is the goal. Then it tells you where you need to stretch for more effective sales.

Roger Dooley: Very good.

John Asher: The fourth factor is just motivation, and that is do they have the grit, the passion, the purpose, the prioritization, the perseverance to follow through, so the big picture way to look at it is aptitude is will they do the job, do they have the talent to do the job. Product knowledge and selling skills are can they do the job, but some people have all three of those but are lazy or met their quota or got three small kids and just don't want to work very, there's all kinds of reasons why people don't, lack that motivation.

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Roger Dooley: John, is that motivation something that is inherent to the individual or is that motivation that comes externally from the company, the boss, and so on?

John Asher: Well, it's really three factors that go into people's motivation. One is their natural motivation and it's back to that trait I mentioned earlier, the intensity drive, goal orientation, fire in the belly. The second is external factors and that can be the market, the price of oil just dropped by 70 percent and now there's no business going on in Houston for six months, and then also motivation inside the company, the sales manager. Do you have the right sales manager and they're motivating you and helping you or not. So motivation's fairly complex, a combination of the manager you've got, your natural fire in the belly and external factors that you can't control actually.

Roger Dooley: Okay, and the fifth factor.

John Asher: The fifth factor is the sales and marketing processes to support the sales people, and that's the company's job, and a classic example is you've got a sales person, they've got three major accounts and you want them to get new accounts, and you got a quota for new accounts. Well, it turns out for the first six months of the year that they're overwhelmed by account management of the three projects they've got, and they have no time to hunt for new ones, and so when you scratch your head and say well, what's wrong. Well, what's wrong is the company that screws this up because the company should have provided a junior person to help the sales person manage the details of the accounts so they've got the time to hunt, but anyway, if you sum it up when you watch the great sales people, brilliant product knowledge, natural talent, got the selling skills, charged up and self-

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motivated, got the right manager, market conditions are good, and the company has the sales and marketing processes to support them. All five, you've got a great sales person.

Roger Dooley: John, you've got ten chapters each of which focuses on a skill. The first three take place before you even contact the prospect. I'm guessing that many sales people get a lead that looks hot and just can't wait to race to their phone to call them up and start selling, make an appointment, whatever. What are those things that should be happening before that first contact occurs?

John Asher: Well, the great sales people are the great researchers. They'll research the company. They'll research the products and services, research the industry, and they'll research the prospect's competition. You're a sales person and you know a lot about the prospect's competition and sometimes even more, you can come across as a real resource. The fifth area to research comes from one of the latest sales books called The Challenger Sale and that is figure out how you can help the company pick up their game to a higher level with either technology or a process and the reason the Challenger Sale because of all this new technology that's in two and a half million apps, internet technologies, smart software, drones, hydraulic fracturing, artificial intelligence, machine learning, you can just go right down the list, huge list, and so that's the fifth area to research, how will we be able to challenge this buyer to separate ourselves from the other sales people. And then the whole second area of research of course is to research the person themselves. So go to Bloomberg, go to LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, do a thorough research of

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that person, and interesting website, number one app for sales people is called Crystal Knows.

Crystal, as in the woman's name and knows and Crystal knows you. That's crystalknows.com, and it's not ours. We just promote it because we like it. So you go to Crystal Knows, put in the buyer's name, put in the buyer's company and up pops everything that's known about that person's personality. Are they the driver, motivator, thinker, supporter? How should you write an email to them?

Roger Dooley: How does Crystal know that?

John Asher: It reaches out with smart software all throughout cyberspace, starting with LinkedIn and then comes back and integrates everything about the person into what their personality style is.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, there's actually been quite a bit of research, John, on analyzing just say a person's Facebook posts and being able to predict their big five personality traits fairly accurately, so it sounds outlandish that some sort of automated software could do this but there is some pretty good science showing that you can get an approximation, obviously not as good as if you could do proper testing on that individual but at least a pretty good first guess.

John Asher: I totally agree. So in other words, totally research the company, their competition, be ready to challenge the buyer, and research the person themselves.

Roger Dooley: John, I think one thing that's important about researching the person themselves ties into either the next step or one of your later steps which is socializing a little bit with the customer to build rapport and one of the great ways to do

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that is to find things that you may have in common with that person, whether it's the same school, you grew up in the same town, you both like German shepherds, both interested in fishing or Formula One racing, whatever that might be. When you can find that commonality that immediately builds greater trust and what are some other ways beyond finding those sorts of things, what are some other ways to build rapport with customers?

John Asher: Well, this whole area of brain science is one I'm familiar with. One of the cognitive biases is called the similarity bias. So, we all kind of gravitate to people that are like us. It's just the way the old brain works, and I'll just give you one quick example. A couple years ago I went to see a CEO in Lawrenceville, New Jersey and I researched him and here's what he and I had in common, it just isn't him, here's what we had in common. We're both CEOs, we're both running international companies, we both travel extensively internationally, we both have an MBA, we're both engineers, both have three daughters, we both like soccer, we both like golf. He speaks four languages. I speak some German which I have a little bit of familiarity with, and we both like Belgian beer, and we're both in a Vistage organization, an international organization of about 20,000 CEOs, so I was armed with all of that before I went to see him, and since I know all that and we have all those in common, I feel a lot more comfortable going into that meeting.

I actually have a lot of confidence, and I'm going to pick one of those to get the conversation going and the general advice is to pick business, technical or business related items because if you come in as a chatty sales person talking about a German shepherd, that will turn off two of the four personality styles or could, the driver and

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the thinker. Well, the general advice is do great research, find out everything in common between you and the other person and then figure out which one to use to get the conversation going. Well, I actually asked him, I had a coach who referred me, and so I said "Albert Larry, my coach, told me that you've been in Vistage for several years. How's your membership going?" And since I've been in Vistage for many, many years and he has, and the person referred me has, that resulted in a 20 minute conversation. After that 20 minute conversation, we're like new best friends. That's essentially the way to do it.

Roger Dooley: That's so important. There was a study a while back that used a psychology test called the Ultimatum Game to see if people could cooperate successfully and each earn a little bit of money from the experimenter and without getting into the details, it's a very simple thing and first person makes second person an offer who can reject or accept it, and surprisingly even though rationally nearly 100 percent of the deals should be accepted, about a third of the time they fail in real life when they do this in a laboratory, and they found that by simply having the participants chat with each other for 10 minutes first and they don't know anything about the game. They're not talking about strategy. They're just getting to know each other for 10 minutes. The failures went from one in three to one in 20, and I think it's exactly what you're describing where people find, even though neither one had been able to research the other, but if you talk to somebody for 10 minutes, you're likely to find something that you have in common, and that was enough to sort of dramatically affect their attitudes and their behavior and result in almost, not quite 100 percent but 95 percent success rate.

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So, that's great stuff. What about mirroring personality styles? That's something you talk about. Explain how you mirror a personality style.

John Asher:

There's four classic types, almost any personality assessment you take. There'll be the people with high or low empathy, and empathy is ability to put yourself in another person's shoes and respond accordingly, and they are high or low in ego drive and ego drive doesn't mean you're a conceited person. It just means if you're high in ego drive, you're a fast moving, fast talking, fast decision making, out there, extroverted, and if you're the opposite, you're more of an introvert. And so, it results in four different personality styles, high ego drive, low empathy would be the driver sort of person who's always driving ahead. High ego drive but high empathy is the big talker, communicator. Low empathy and low ego drive is called the thinker personality, somebody who really needs the details, and then the supporter is the high empathy but low ego drive.

So if you were a driver personality, gets to the bottom line fast and I'm one of those big talking motivators and I come into the meeting and I can't shut up, what are you thinking to yourself pretty soon? You're thinking well, this guy needs to shut up. Is there a caboose to this train? Where are we going with all this? But if you're the driver selling to me, the big talking motivator and you come in and you don't do rapport building or even attempt to, I'm just turned off. If you were the driver and I'm the thinker personality, you're the big picture guy and I'm the guy who loves the details, and I put one foot through your doorjamb of your office and you see this big stack of data under my arm, you're totally turned off. You're saying, whoa, where are we going? But if you're trying to sell to

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me as the driver and you just come in and try to give me the big picture and close the deal fast, it just isn't going to work.

Then the supporter's kind of interesting. Everybody loves supporters. They're gentle people. They're always being helpful for everybody. They volunteer to help out the Christmas party. They pass ideas around the office to get consensus. It's really great. Now, does the driver personality care about this? No. However, most driver people who've been around for a while know that because of leadership training and experience that they need to act like they care but they really don't care. And it doesn't mean they're bad people. So, matching means send a driver to sell to a driver. Mirroring means it doesn't matter which personality style you send to the driver if you understand what the driver wants. Essentially very little rapport building and just the big picture and the bottom line, then give that to the driver. Don't give what you'd like to get. Give to the driver what they want to get to make their decision. That's what it says matching and mirroring does.

Roger Dooley: Right. I guess it's important to stay in the moment. I'm sure that many sales people go in with a sort of a predefined game plan of what they're going to do rather than listening and observing to figure out what they need to adjust on the fly. Since we brought up mirroring, John, what do you think about physical mirroring? I've heard some sales and negotiation experts advocate that where you, when you're in an in person meeting you subtly adopt the same postures and motions as the other person, not in a way that's obvious or ridiculous but just very subtle and that tends to increase liking and trust. Do you believe that?

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John Asher: Yeah, that's actually another one of those cognitive biases called the familiarity bias, and the advanced degree in that is neurolinguistic programming, and it goes back to how the old brain works. So, if I'm doing NLP with you, Roger, if you're talking faster than I'm talking and so you're the buyer and I'm the sales person. If you're talking faster than I'm talking, I'm going to speed up. If you're talking softer than I talk, I'm going to talk softer. If you're from Italy and 16 percent of your communication is nonverbal, arm waving and all that sort of stuff, then as you suggest, I'll kind of subtly pick up on that. If you start using acronyms associated with your industry, I'll pick up on those acronyms right away, and it doesn't take very long. Pretty soon the buyer's old brain, they're saying wow, this person is just like me, therefore he must be awesome, and so you've built rapport. It's a funny sounding term, neurolinguistic programming. Neuro means brain. Linguistics, the whole are of language. So if I'm doing NLP with you I am programming your old brain to like me without your new brain or conscious brain knowing it. So, the advanced degree in mirroring if you will is NLP.

Roger Dooley: Right. We've had a few people on the show been very interested in NLP. Let me get down sort of to some nuts and bolts things. You mentioned LinkedIn quite a bit in the book particularly for research but also for reaching out and so on. What are some LinkedIn hacks that maybe not everybody knows about?

John Asher: Well, number one, once Microsoft bought LinkedIn and realized how valuable the advanced search technique is, they changed things around so that to use advanced search technique you must have a higher level, and mostly sales people have what's called the sales

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navigator level on LinkedIn, and if you've got that, you can use four of the shortcuts associated with LinkedIn for sales. The first shortcut is advanced search technique which allows you to do an internet Google search if you will within the LinkedIn database and identify a prospect. The second shortcut in the research mode is of course to research the buyer before you go to see them, and most of the great stuff comes from their LinkedIn profile, and it's usually pretty darn accurate because people build their own LinkedIn profiles. The third shortcut with LinkedIn is in skill three, and that is getting inside coaches to help you, so these sales people only really go after deals where they've got a good inside referral or coach and when the LinkedIn started in 2003, the two fellows who started LinkedIn, they're original hypothesis was I wonder if you can use the internet to squeeze down the six degrees of separation?

And now they claim with LinkedIn with 190 million users in the US, six degrees of separation has been squeezed down to four, and the fourth shortcut comes in the building rapport chapter. Imagine if you're the buyer and I'm the seller and I link in with you before we actually meet in person and we go back and forth within mail together for a while, when we actually meet in person, the ice is already broken. The LinkedIn helps with the ice breaking and that build rapport skill before you ever meet in person.

Roger Dooley: Right. Let's jump back to that insider person there, helper, coach or whatever. You've got a great story about Marriott Hotels. I want you to tell that, but I'm thinking that was kind of like lightning striking, but why don't you tell the story and then explain how in a more normal situation that might work?

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John Asher: Well, I was at a neighborhood barbecue and Bill Marriott and his head marketing guy were there, so we struck up a conversation and they told me about an opportunity they had and that was they were looking for help for their resorts and the trouble that they had was the occupancy rate for events was 15 percent, and they really wanted to get it higher, and they actually told me a couple of very large consulting firms they talked to, and so the marketing, head of marketing invited me to come over and talk the next week and I did, and pretty much helped him shape the RFP and when the RFP came out of course, we bid and we won, and principally because I had that inside coach and of course helped shape the RFP. So the inside coach is the person who is coaching you just like a football coach, coaching you on how to get the job. Really feeding you all the information you need to know about the requirements, issues, pain, incumbents, competition, budget, everything. It's fundamental by the way to do training. Figure out who they buyers are. Use their technical skills and get a coach.

And the experience with that concept is an 80-20 rule. In other words, if you have an inside coach when you're going after an opportunity, you got an 80 percent chance of getting the job. If you don't have an inside coach, you have a 20 percent chance, and then if you go back to the matching and mirroring, if you can successfully match or mirror you've got an 80 percent chance, and if you don't a 20 percent chance. So when you multiply those two 80-20 rules together that's fundamental to sales training. Eight percent got a coach times 80 percent know who to match and mirror the personality style, 64 percent chance of closing] the deal. Twenty percent no coach times 20 percent blow the match or mirror, in other words try to give the driver all the details or the thinker only the big

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picture, then 20 percent times 20 percent is four percent chance. It's a huge difference. Elite sales people are always going after opportunities where they've got a coach. When they meet the buyer, they're matching and mirroring the personality style. Average sales people aren't doing either.

Roger Dooley: Any tips on how to develop that coach if you say want to deal with a large company, say you think that you could help Facebook solve a problem, and obviously in a small, really small company, finding multiple people might be difficult, but say you're dealing with a big organization and you don't, somebody doesn't pop to mind immediately, well, gee, I know this person there. Any tips for how you might identify or develop somebody that would give you sort of an alternate path as opposed to just working with the person who's running the procurement effort?

John Asher: Well, almost every case that's social media now that's given even smaller companies a big advantage that we didn't use to have, and of course one of the key tools we've already talked about and that is LinkedIn. One of the things if you've got a sales navigator level and you can identify one person inside the company, then LinkedIn gives you the ability to do what's called political mapping. Suddenly, now you can see every person in that company who has anything to do with that phase of marketing project. So you get one, then if you got the sales navigator level, you can see everybody in the company that you need to talk to, so you can map it politically so to speak.

Roger Dooley: Right, and then maybe choose somebody that you find, the GMO, only one person separated from this other person maybe I can get an intro or maybe you find that

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you've got something really very much in common with somebody else that could be an easier road in. Say, I want to be respectful of your time, John. Let me remind our audience that we're speaking today with John Asher former nuclear tag subcaptain, present day sales guru and author of the book Close Deals Faster. John, how can people find you and your work online?

John Asher: Well, you can either come to our website, asherstrategies.com or if you're interested in the book, you can get it on Amazon and one kind of interesting thing, this is my second book, that happened was the first day it was available on Amazon it sold out I think in 15 minutes. So the reserve Amazon had was gone quickly, very much been replenished now, but easy to get on Amazon.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, I'm sure Amazon's inventory mechanisms will kick in and they'll have it in stock from here on out. They're pretty smart that way. Fool them once or twice but not for too long. So, we will link to those websites, to the book and to any other resources we talked about including Crystal Knows which I'm going to check out on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast. John, thanks for being on the show.

John Asher: Thank you, 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.