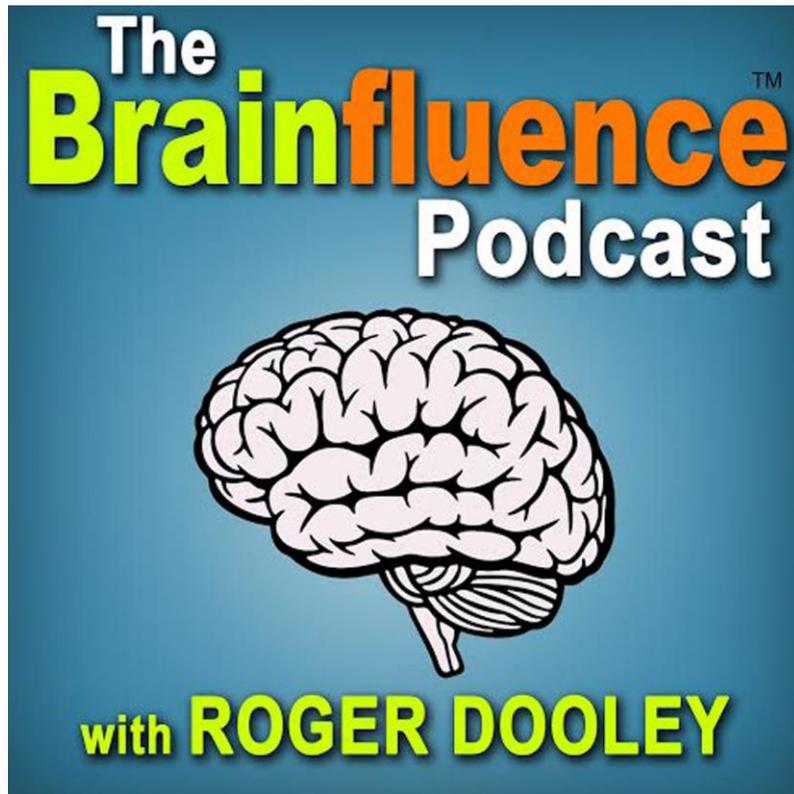


Ep #7: Chris Brogan on Freaks, Owners, and Entrepreneurs



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**Roger Dooley**

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## Ep #7: Chris Brogan on Freaks, Owners, and Entrepreneurs

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 and today I'm really excited we have with us Chris Brogan. Chris is an entrepreneur and the author of multiple bestselling books. His newest book is *The Freaks Shall Inherit the Earth* Entrepreneurship for Weirdos, Misfits and World Dominators and Chris speaks creates courses, consults, advices and since he doesn't really have too much on his plate, he recently launched *Owner* magazine, a digital magazine targeted at entrepreneurs. Welcome Chris, anything you want to add to that sort of elevator there?

Chris Brogan: And reader of Brainfluence.

Roger Dooley: Thank you very much.

Chris Brogan: Neuromarketing is so fascinating to me and every time I read a book like yours I just realize how stupid I am but appreciate that there are very smart people who do good work out there that we might have a chance of gleaning things from.

Roger Dooley: I'm really at awe of the people who do the hard work on this and heavy lifting because really I just chronicle and try and explain it to business folks as opposed to the folks who really do the work, the neuroscientist, behavioral scientist and so on. Anyway, Chris let's get started talking about *Owner* mag a little bit. What possessed to start a business magazine? You got established print competitors like *Inc.* and *Fast Company*, and they have strong digital presences. They've got sites like *Forbes*. I'm a contributor there and there's more than 1000 of us all grinding away creating business oriented content and not to mention lots of independent blogs and so on. What possessed you to do that?

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Chris Brogan: I had a really simple idea. I decided I would make a loyalty program cleverly disguised as a business magazine. I reached out to people that I knew and liked and said, "Hey, write for me." They said, "Okay." That's all I had to start and what I decided was I needed to write a how to business magazine because what I find on most all the other magazine are thought pieces or who to kinds of pieces where in which we discuss how Mark Zuckerberg did what he did. In my little town there's a nice lady named Patricia who runs a chocolate shop and all she's trying to figure out is how do I make more revenue because there's only really 4 obvious chocolate holidays and I need to get more people in on the other 8 months that aren't covered.

I said to the people that are writing for me, "Let's do how to articles." How do we get people to take an action of some kind or whatever. When I read Fast company, Inc., Forbes, I'm a magazine junkie that might help me make bad choices by starting one of these. I decided that all of these magazines had something in common. I said, "They're just trying to get attention number one." They're trying to get people to buy something that goes up against an ad number 2 because that's how we make money in magazines and then number 3 especially these kind of plays where they allow thousands of authors that's just from our page views and so it's not that people are sitting there trying to solve a problem every single month.

I thought I had at least a fighting chance. Now I'm not necessarily right yet. My numbers are so low that I can tell you that I look like a very small press so far but I think that in the longer game, I mean there's just information that came out today roughly that the New York times did a study internally about their sponsored content versus their not sponsored content and it's just as interesting and just as worthy. What I've been preaching to businesses for a very long time is if you've made your sponsored content, if you made content that sold you that was actually useful people would actually appreciate it as opposed to the kind of drool that we have to sort through out there. I have a business intention in mind I guess that's the deal.

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Roger Dooley: Can an online magazine even be profitable do you think Chris? Certainly a lot of big name publications are struggling with the profitability of their online side.

Chris Brogan: First off that's all because what they do with their sales people more than a decade ago is say "Sell the print ad. Give them the web for free." Then when print dried up they are stuck not being able to sell their web ads for that much space. To me I think the web is far more valuable. Print doesn't do anything. You can't click a print ad. I find that the selling metrics were backwards to start.

The other thing is again they were relying on banners for so long and they're now starting to search the sponsored content which is bringing the revenue up which again is what the times is pointing to and alluding to. I would say that the next experience is that once ... the big difference is that when we advertise to a community that doesn't much care that we're there, most advertising is built like how big is your subscription list. Let's put an ad there because it seems big enough for us to care about it.

What we try to do at Owner and what most companies I think will eventually catch on and start doing if they're smarter is they all advertise to the communities that they have the opportunity to serve. For instance, my community knows that I like to blend business and health and fitness. If Fitbit puts something in my magazine then the people who like Fitbit are also the people who read Owner and so we can make something that's a lot more synergized and that people can take a choice and go, "Ah I would like to be a part of this." I think that's the big difference is that context Roger is that context makes it such that people are going to take a better opportunity and move it forward I guess.

Roger Dooley: Can people trust the sponsored content? That's always been a concern of mine that okay Fitbit does an article but if it mentions electronic products and so on is it going to be fair or is it best for sponsors to stay away from anything that looks like promotion and try and focus on just providing good stuff.

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Chris Brogan: I think there's both. I think that Fitbit would do great to show you for instance how to get even more out of your Fitbit. That's a great article for me because everyone just sits there and goes, "Oh 10,000 steps got it." You can do that with a \$2 pedometer. You don't need Fitbit to do that but Fitbit does some other stuff that says for instance how active are you by hour and there's this little visual graph that shows up on our dashboard that says you were pretty sedentary all day except for that hour you were at the gym. They could show what you could do to change that and kind of shock you into some different activities and that would be useful information.

What I wouldn't trust from an organization is why we're better than the other guy but that's not the point. I think that's how a lot of advertising and marketing has been set up because we're supposed to do brand differentiation. We're supposed to do all kinds of things to separate us out and show our unique value proposition. I'm looking at a shelf full of liquor in my house and a lot of it was sent to me by different people.

Southern Comfort sent me some of their cherry flavored Southern Comfort. That's a very acquired taste and not very many people are saying, "Gosh I can't wait to have that." Meanwhile right next to it is Hendrick's Gin which is another different and acquired taste. I think that the person who likes one is definitely not the person who likes the other unless you're weird like me. I think there's just a big opportunity to just talk to the people that you have the pleasure to serve. I don't think in that way it doesn't matter that I trust them because I'm already embracing them. It's when we need to make distinguishing kinds of experiences that we need a source we can trust.

I think no one goes to Esquire magazine to figure out what would be the watch for them to wear, worried about the trust of it because they should know that anything that shows up in the magazine is an ad however what they should understand is that things like Consumer Reports are going to boil it down to deciding factors that might not be your criteria.

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Roger Dooley: Since Owner Mag is more or less a content marketing vehicle if you will or at least in a content vehicle, what do you think about the explosion of content on the web? It just seems that there's more and more stuff being created and you can't pick up a book about almost any topic whether is SEO or a PR or whatever. I just talked to Gini Dietrich the other day and in writing a book about PR basically she turned into.., at least part of the book, into content about marketing and if you go to CEO conferences that's all folks talk about. There's a lot of content being generated out there and some of it is actually pretty good. It seems like the bar is getting higher. What do you think is the bar getting higher? Is it tougher to get content noticed?

Chris Brogan: Absolutely. It's amazing the lower and lower numbers. If I trusted only social media and websites to make my business happen, I would be quite out of work. It's amazing because what used to get a great deal of interaction. 277,000 people follow me on Twitter. If I send out a link supposedly 277,000 minus a few robots see that. Of that I can tell you in any given day that the amount of clicks that I get on some of a kind link that I've put out there aren't what you would expect. I will tell you that clicks for yesterday. Let's see I'll go the day before yesterday on one of my bigger links was a whole 50 clicks.

277,000 people saw it and 50 people clicked it. That's abysmal and that's just one link out of a bunch. That tells you that yes it's really hard for somebody to get the attention that they deserve and so you have to do 2 things. You have to be trustworthy in something that somebody actually wants you to see and then secondly what you have to have is you have to have that opportunity to have a way to deliver it such that people are going to care about it outside and around how else you used to promote it I guess.

Roger Dooley: What topics resonate on Owner mag. Is there any theme to it? Are there certain topics that seem to get a lot of attention and shares and so on or is it really kind of all over the map just based on individual pieces of content?

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Chris Brogan: I never know what's going to hit. It's the strangest piece of the business. I've been doing content of some kind or another for years now since 1998 when they called blogging journaling and I am still surprised what gets the big hits. This month one of the biggest ones that we hit was recipe for the perfect online email newspaper by Donna Maria Coles Johnson who runs the Indie Business Network. For whatever reason, that one was a huge one and people really wanted to understand and get into it a little deeper.

There's a guy Alan Weinkrantz who writes with me and his concept ... he and I developed this concept called the start over economy and it's the whole notion of people who maybe have been trounced in some way by a business and now are going to start over and make something else happen. I think that it's just a great body of work that he's been putting together and the people who read Alan are really starting to resonate with him.

It's interesting just that experience of not ever knowing what's going to hit but because my magazine is entirely how to type of information, I find that the people who are reading and consuming it are definitely feeling that they can take some actions based on it and that's what keeps people coming back in this particular case.

Roger Dooley: I think you're probably on to something Chris. I love to read stuff from people like Jack Welch or Richard Branson. As a small scale entrepreneur it really doesn't always resonate. Obviously they have some insights into human nature and so on that are useful but in terms of hard core business how to advice, most of those folks are in just a completely different universe from a small business person.

Chris Brogan: I mean very few of us run GE. Very few of us have this notion of I'm going to cut 4 divisions today so that I can buy 10 start ups. It's just not the way our system is scaled in our head. Actually interestingly about Branson the book that I read of his that really made me fall in love with him was Business Stripped Bare because he says in it it's hard for me

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to conceive of or make businesses that have more 100 employees. I just can't see in more 100 employees. I like small businesses and I have 400 plus small business. The only few that he had to break that rule on were the airline is. It's got way more employees. I think his new space thing has more than 100 employees already.

What I really appreciate is that he said it's just hard for me to conceive is because I make small business. I don't ever intend ... I actually seriously consider running for CEO of Yahoo twice but I don't think anyone would give it to me but I thought I would do it for fun and at the same time, what the hell would I do there? There's just so many bodies. There's an employee to sharpen pencils or something. I guess I'm far used to having the action right at my fingertips.

Roger Dooley: I wasn't aware of that 100 employee limit. Actually there is some interesting brain science behind that. There's research that shows that people can maintain a maximum of about 150 friends and obviously you can have 1000 or 10,000 or 100,000 followers or people you're connected with in social media but in terms of actually knowing and interacting with people 150 is about the maximum. Certainly there some businesses that have organized along those lines where when a division gets above a certain size, they'll divide it in some way if they can.

Chris Brogan: That's Dunbar's number and it's a very longstanding that your social network can only necessarily have those 150. When we publish *Trust Agents* back in 2009 Julien Smith and I we just figured what if we spanned a lot of different people's 150 so that we could have that many connections through people by maximizing our Dunbar's number. We don't expand the 150. We just try to be really close to a really good 150 so that we can always have a close good amount of people there. So far that's been a working theory of mine for years and it works well. Anytime I try to go beyond 150 really close detailed connections it never works to my favor that's for sure.

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Roger Dooley: We've just reached a point of diminishing returns already. If you add something, something else has to go. Jumping over to freaks, in fact the theme that I found to be common between Owner mag and freaks is that all the advice is very practical. There's not a lot of theorizing in there. It's all very hands on practical for the entrepreneur. How did you come up with freaks as a designation? Do people want to be known as freaks? How and why?

Chris Brogan: Kamal Ravikant who wrote a really fun book called *Love Yourself As If Your Life Depended on It*. He said to me in a quick call where I asked him some advice. He said, "No one really wants to be a freak but they are and they know that they are." He goes, "A lot of people would like to be owners so even though you've written a book about freaks it's pretty inherent that in the book that you're trying to teach to them how to be owners." and that was always my goal. I liked the word because I wanted to reclaim the same way the gay community reclaimed queer. I have been called many names in my life for being weird or different or outside the norms of other people.

For a really long time since who knows third grade, fourth grade when you're about 10 years old, you start leaning how wrong you are became everyone wants to tell how wrong you are. Your parents don't want you to run around even though that's what you're built to do. The other kids don't want you to do something that doesn't match their version of what play looks like. We get told just be what everyone else is and fit in. What I've come to learn and the first time that this actually resonated in a very loud way I was on stage.

I was talking to 3500 or so PR professionals and in the crowd was a huge number of PR students from what they call the PR SSA, the junior league of the PRSA. One of the quotes I said on stage random throw away thing I just said. It wasn't in the notes said the weirder I've been in my life and the more true to who I really am, the more money I've made and that got the most tweets, the most shares, the most comments, the most human

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contact after the event was saying I really loved what you said about being weird. I thought, “Wow! I think I’ve just struck a nerve.”

I will tell you Roger that the experience so far with the book California’s number one trial attorney calls himself a freak. This pair of CPAs who runs a show for CPAs, a podcast like this just called themselves freaks. A dentist just told me he’s a freak because he delivers this different quality of relationship minded service. It’s fascinating to me that what I didn’t get, that I expected more of was nose pierced, multi tattooed crazy people. I got absolutely the people you at least want to call the freaks saying “Me, me, me! I’m a freak.”

Roger Dooley: Maybe you’ve created a whole new meme here that going to take on a life of its own. Actually there’s kind of a tie-into weird, it’s a tested and proven thing because I’m sure you’ve noticed all these stupid ads that appear, the margins of sights whether it’s Facebook or something else that’s one weird trick to do this or the weird thing and there’s something that intrigues people about the concept of weirdness or freakishness that you have to check it out.

Chris Brogan: I think so. I think we’ve all been called it at one point in our life or another and even if we’re the most fitting-in person in the world, we’ve had that moment where we just think we’re crazy. I tend to have a very low filter of what I’m willing to say. I’ll say anything that comes into my head a lot of times and I told somebody once that every time I’m in a high place even if it’s a conference or at a tall building or something I’ll think at one moment almost every single time probably every single time “I wonder it would be like if I jumped right now? I mean that would be awful.” I think it every single time and then I get myself this little piece of vertigo.

I think that when I share things like that someone listening to your show will go, “Holy cow I thought I was the only one.” I think in that feeling of belonging this ties in to this whole concept described in the book, all these thoughts about businesses, about belonging. Once we have that feeling where someone says, “Oh I see myself in that.” I’ve just knocked a whole

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bunch of barriers out of the way so the real interesting stuff can transpire and that's I guess what I'm aiming to do mostly.

Roger Dooley: Chris you mentioned montue. Why don't you explain a little bit about that. That was a new term to me and I found the concept really interesting.

Chris Brogan: It's a new term to most everybody except for people who have expended their options on Netflix and landed on happy which is a documentary not about Pharrel Williams but about what do all the happiest people on the planet have in common. Montue was a word in Okinawan not in Japanese it turns out because I started saying it to my Japanese friends who stared at me awkwardly. It means one family and it basically is the family we choose and it's the people that we want to have in our life and that we do care about and we think are great. It's not necessarily your clients although your clients can be in your montue.

It's not just your peers and it's not necessarily people and sometimes it could be people you haven't even met but that you just know that that's somebody that you would extend any kind of great courtesy to. I think this mental difference between someone who is or isn't in your montue is if that person asks you a favor you say "Of course, absolutely. How can I help?" versus "Oh here there are again." I would say that that's probably the easiest litmus test. When I say that I have a guess that the people who are listening to your show went I know who's not in my montue but there's also those few people that you know that if you get a text message while you and I were talking and they said they needed something you would rush to help them and that's the real goal.

Roger Dooley: Great concept. The book is a manifesto or maybe a how to guide for doing your own thing. Chris, do you run across people that after you meet them and speak to them for a while you just say, "Hey probably ought to stick with your day job."?

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Chris Brogan: That's a great question. It's also a book about challenging fear and if I wrote it as the title in which way no one would buy it because no one likes to face their fears. No one likes to take on their negatives or whatever but that's really a great deal of what the subtext of the book is. There's a lot of people who are just too afraid to do some of what they need to do and they're just not ready yet. I'm not a psychiatrist but I play one on TV and I will say that what I've come to learn is that when we challenge our own fears and when we look at risk a little differently everything else opens up to us.

What I've tried my hardest to do in this book is diffuse a lot of those things. I mean that's why there's chapters called fall in love with not knowing that's why there's all kinds of ... I looked up the word fear on the Kindle version just to see where a particular quote was. All I typed in was the word fear and there are 48 matches for the word fear in the book so that will give you a sense of how often I want to talk about it. I think that's probably who isn't necessarily ready to be a freak. It's that person who says, "I just have to fit in or I'll die."

Roger Dooley: Unfortunate this is an audio podcast. If this was a video podcast I'd zoom in on the cover of your book. Can you explain how you came up with that cover Chris?

Chris Brogan: it's a fun story in its own way. My friend Matt Holt is the head of business publishing at Wiley. He said to me, "Hey do a book with me." I said, "No, I'll just publish it myself. It's easier." He's like, "No it'll be fun." I said, "Okay." because I like Matt. Then he said, "what should we call it?" I gave him 2 names and one was The Freak Shall Inherit The Earth and the other was far more businessy sounding. He goes, "Go with the freak's title." I was like, "You sure?" He goes, "Yeah." He sent over a bunch of cover mocks which are always ugly and never looked good and whatever. He sent me that crazy cover with all kinds of bats all over it. Like a natural science type drawings of bats.

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Roger Dooley: Just to clarify for the listeners. These are not baseball bats. These are the little furry things that hang upside down.

Chris Brogan: That's right. There's a reason and I'll get to that in one second. There were 2 other title covers that were ... one was really crazy kind of like a Goth girl with her faced pierced and all that. It was kind of neat but it wasn't really what I was going for and the other is really businessy looking like a nice man in a nice sweater and I was just like you did that to be funny. I went with this one for a very specific reason which is that one of the thing I say in the books is that you have to set up your own bat signal.

In the cartoon Batman, Commissioner Gordon would light this big flaming lamp in the air and a bat signal would show on the clouds because it was perpetually cloudy in Gotham I guess and Batman would drop whatever he was doing and come figure out what the police wanted. It seemed so much weirder than just having like a text message or a pager but that's how they did it.

The book cover was a bat signal to people who wanted to see something out of the ordinary. I was a little worried about it because it looks like no other book on the bookshelf and then I realized that's why it's going to work and everyone runs over to it. It's been very photographed according to Instagram and Facebook so far.

Roger Dooley: I don't doubt that. Changing gears just a little bit, in your book I think there's one group that's been quite a few years ahead of you. I've spent some time in the college admission space and higher ed marketing and a lead institution, the most selective schools out there or the Ivy's, MITs, Stanford's and so on, they have gotten away from the concept of well rounded students as their most desirable candidates and in fact seem to be focused on students obviously perform well in many things and meet their academic standards but stick out in some way. They've got some particular skill or accomplishment or something that makes them exceptional.

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Instead of looking for the person who is the president of 3 clubs and a good athlete and vice president of the class and this sort of thing, they'll go for the brilliant pianist or the kid who created the bestselling iPhone app and that kind of thing. Unfortunately I think that's limited to those very few selective institutions. What do you think about our education system? It seems like in education conformity is by and large the watch word. Do you think that's true and if so is that a disservice to our younger people?

Chris Brogan: Absolutely. Here's where I get in hotter water with the higher ed world. Interestingly I spend some time at a high school the other day with the superintendent was there for one of my sessions. He said the right question which is "What would you have us do? If you're mad the way high school is put together, what would you do?" I said, "Choose your own adventure." It's amazing how school is this route] system and it's always for the same reason. It's because it's so hard to judge and measure anything else.

If we don't have some kind of standards then it's really hard for people to know but this has been a fight that's been going on for 100 years or more probably thousands of years and no one's going to solve it anytime soon. Instead what we have to do is thank goodness for the other *Freakonomics* books what Levitt and Dubner did, was give me the language I needed to explain what's amiss in higher ed. It is absolutely about incentives. There is no incentive in saying you're weirdo would fit in great at my school. Instead the incentive is your kid will do great here. We'll spit out just like we've done before a very obvious and visible and clearly understandable product.

We love mass production and we've brought that to the school system. However the problem with that is ... look Roger I'm inside a factory. My house is a factory. The office that I work in used to be part of the textile industry that supported making horse drawn carriages and what not in the older days and what's funny is we used to all live on the farms and then someone said, "Hey stop that let's all go work in the factories." Then the factories closed down because we found cheaper ways to do it at other places.

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Then we said to everybody, “Let’s go to the cubicles instead.” Now you can hang out in New York and all these other major metropolitan cities and find floor after floor of empty cubicles and where’s everybody? Oh they’re back in the husk of old factories that have been turned into loft spaces because now we’re creating another whole economy. So to me the higher ed is still promising new jobs that you could be a middle manager at GE any day now when that just doesn’t exist anymore.

Roger Dooley: Chris, you’ve been a health kick for a few years. I know the first time I met you I think you were in the speaker’s line at South by Southwest and you certainly ... that was probably maybe five years ago or more and you look a lot different now and obviously you’ve done a lot in social media and then writing about health. We think of entrepreneurs as pulling all nighters, eating pizza, drinking sugary caffeinated drinks to stay awake and so on, is that a good model? I’m thinking the answer is probably no but how important is health. How does health relate to business success?

Chris Brogan: First off so I own a magazine called Owner magazine where I talk about ownership of your choices and all that. It seemed pretty weird to try to promote that when I really couldn’t own the distance between my fork and my mouth and so that’s one of the reasons I went after my health. The other is that I really to your point I bit right into the same things everyone does about startups and this new exciting economy and how nobody sleeps and we’re all about the hustle and everyone is so busy. I was doing what everyone was doing and I travelled a whole lot. I was at a lot of really fancy pants dinners. It seemed like a bad idea to not have drinks with everyone and not eat the steak dinner every single night even though you’ve had 5 steaks in that week.

After a while it all kind of piles on top and most of our businesses are very sedentary. I’m paid to sit still and type and I would say that when I finally started looking around and what I wanted to project and what I wanted to portray and I wanted to start giving for help and leadership and business advice, I started thinking well part of that is good fitness regimen. What I

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didn't know this sounds like an awful upworthy title, What he didn't know would change him forever.

I can tell you that what I didn't know was that most every day at the gym I have some kind of a breakthrough in my business that most overtime I'm doing some exercise I never would've ... could've killed me first before I'd say yes to doing it. I'm now almost always coming up with this whole experience of like "Wow I really have this great new idea." or "Huh this discipline is teaching me about business discipline." I've learned more than I ever have about business sitting at the gym than I ever have in a speech somewhere out in a circuit.

Roger Dooley: Do you have another book in the works?

Chris Brogan: I have a fitness book that I'm almost done writing called My New Before and it is the stupidest thing in the world for me to write a fitness book because I'm just yet another fat guy who lost some weight but these are the questions people kept asking me. It won't be a mainstream book. It would be published in some self published way and I don't imagine more than few hundred people will buy it if that. It's basically the sum total of what I learned but I also asked people a lot of questions about I already think you know all this so why is my book going to be any different.

How can I help you in a way that's no one ever done in one of these books that you've purchased and then chosen not to follow. I took all those questions and turned those answers into the book and that's the only thing I could say will kind of be fun about it is that there's a lot more about the mind. There's a lot more about mental toughness. There's a lot more about what we say to ourselves and our self talk and how that works. That's the only thing that's going to be vague saving grace for this product.

Roger Dooley: That sounds great because really I think weight loss is a lot more about the motivation and the specific regimen. There's lots of diets and fitness programs that will work but actually doing them is the hard part.

Chris Brogan: Sure.

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Roger Dooley: Chris, we're just about out of time so what I'd like to do is encourage our readers to check out Owner mag at [ownermag.com](http://ownermag.com) and also to pick up a copy of your book from Wiley also my publisher, *The Freaks Shall Inherit The Earth*. I'm sure they can find it wherever books are sold. It's really a good read and it is as I mentioned earlier really practical. This isn't a theory book. This is all about the nitty gritty of how to do it, how to get moving and how to actually accomplish what you need to. Chris where else can our listeners find you online and connect with you?

Chris Brogan: Besides Owner mag just go to [chrisbrogan.com](http://chrisbrogan.com). If you're willing in the right upper corner there's a spot to grab a newsletter. Get my newsletter because I promise you that's when you'll go, "Oh now I know who this guy is." and you'll feel a little bit better about the whole thing.

Roger Dooley: Great. Thanks so much for taking the time to be here Chris.

Chris Brogan: My utter pleasure. Thanks for having me on.

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](http://RogerDooley.com).