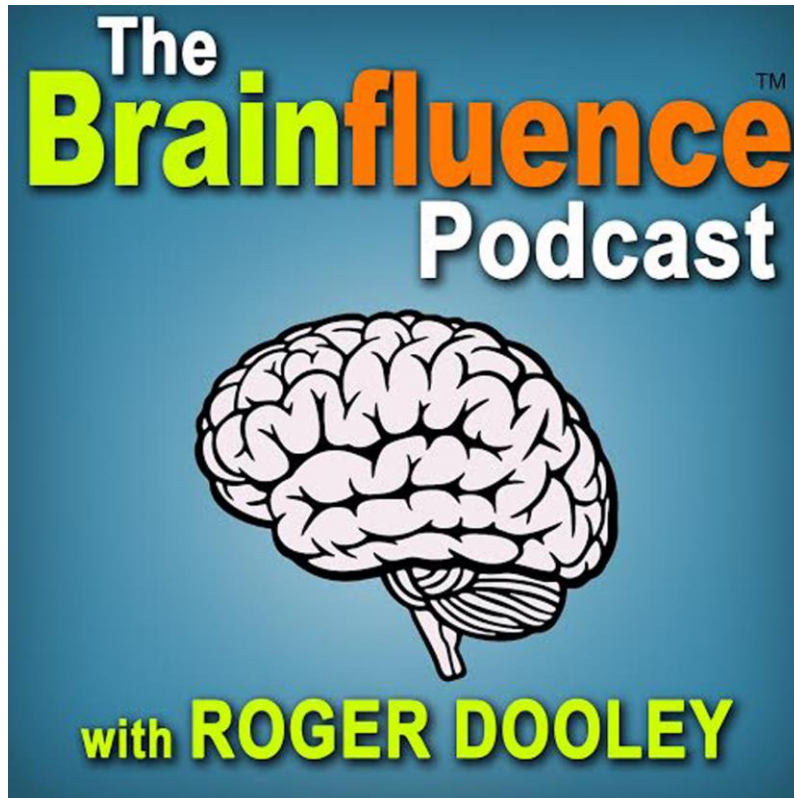


Ep #12: Subconscious Selling with Peter McLaughlin



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Roger Dooley

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

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast. This is Roger Dooley and today with me I have Peter McLaughlin. He has 25 years of sales and entrepreneurial experience. His areas of interest run the gamut from business selling to sales management and technology health care security, but he has a few elements in his resume that you won't find in the resumes of too many of his peers.

He's a practicing hypnotist and former professional actor. Peter we're really interested in hearing about you. Anything to add? I guess one thing I should add right now is that his work is becoming the customer, empathy, influence and closing the sale. We're going to talk about some of the ideas in Peter's book. Anything to add about at the outset?

Peter McLaughlin: No, I think that's a pretty good introduction.

Roger Dooley: Since we focus a lot on the non-conscious side of marketing and sales here, explain how you became interested in the subconscious side of sales and even became a hypnotist Peter?

Peter McLaughlin: Eleven years ago, I was volunteering to be a fireman and an EMT in my town in Connecticut and it turned up a diagnosis of Lyme disease and leukemia. On the same day, I got hit with these two things and it, as you can imagine, really knocked my socks off.

At the time, I own my own business, so I was able to put that on autopilot and begin researching this condition which the hematologist and oncologist on the leukemia side was saying, "We don't know what causes it, we

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don't know how to cure it." I just wasn't prepared to accept that.

The more I research things, the more I came across things that we've all heard about including the placebo effect. These dramatic changes in clinical outcomes based upon nothing more than an idea or a thought and I thought, "Wait a second, if my mind is this powerful that it can actually change outcomes in my body, I'd be insane not to learn more about this."

For me, the best way to do that, the best way I could imagine was becoming trained as a hypnotist. That's where the hypnotism part came in.

Once I began learning about all of the things that you are an expert in, the influence of the mind, how words can influence outcomes, how the mind actually operates, I thought, "Wait a second, I've been sales my whole life, if we just merge these two worlds the way you're doing, wouldn't this be amazing?"

I was fairly confident that most sales people are not receiving any information on this subject whatsoever. That's what led to the book and that's what led to this career of teaching what's in the book.

Roger Dooley:

That's really fascinating. I think the placebo effect is really a lot ... There's a lot there. I heard a few blog posts and including my book, I got some stuff about what I call placebo marketing that I recall Dr. Andrew Weil talking about the placebo effect and how typically most research tries to eliminate that from the results. In other words, it's sort of an artifact that screws up the real data.

Yet, I thought a very intelligent comment, he said, "Gee, if placebo effect is curing 30% of the patients, maybe we ought to try and figure out and start to try to eliminate it how we can up that percentage a little bit. That makes a huge amount of sense.

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The other part beyond the hypnosis part is your acting background. Tell me about your acting career and sales career, were they simultaneous or did one perceived the other?

Peter McLaughlin: When I got out to college, I took a job in sales and technology. I had this dream to be an actor. I was moving to New York City anyway and so I decided to pitch the full time career and become an actor and I was able to find work as a commission-only B2B sales guy of high-end financial research on Wall Street.

I was able to make a really nice living and because it was commission-only, I could call my own shots. No one expected me to absolutely be at the phone at 9am and leave at 5. I could come and go as I pleased as long as I was making sales which I was.

It was fantastic. If I didn't have additions, if I didn't have other things going on, I could work sort of full time and if I did, I could disappear, I could leave. I use to do these cruises where I would be an actor on cruises and I'd leave for 10 days, two weeks and I'd go to England or I'd go to Portugal or something and it was just a marvelous blend of the two professions.

Roger Dooley: We just had Nick Morgan on the show and he advocated that sales people and presenters and others in any kind of sort of communications role should adopt method acting as a technique for more or less getting into character and particularly if say a speaker want to appear confident rather than just saying, "Gee, I need to somehow adjust my posture to look confident."

By using a sort of method acting approach, you could get into character by recalling say a moment of great personal success and that would be far more effective at getting your body language right. Did you find that your acting efforts had a positive impact on your sales efforts

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and in particular the way communicated either verbally or non-verbally?

Peter McLaughlin: Yes absolutely. I find that it's a perfect marriage with what I've learned about sub-conscious influence. It's so heartening for a person who identifies as being a professional actor even though I don't do it anymore that business is waking up to the value that the arts can bring to business.

With presentations, with role playing, with telling stories, all of these areas are areas that actors are experts in. At a time, it's gone funny, I've got kids and at a time when public schools are cutting the arts, business is starting to realize how much the arts have to offer the business. Yes, I absolutely think that this discipline is relevant to the business world.

How many times in business meetings do we get thrown a curb ball? Something happens that we didn't expect. Actors have to deal with that all the time. Something a light goes out, a prop doesn't work, an actor forget his lines, that's where you have to improvise.

There's even a discipline of improvisation that is extremely valuable for business people. When you're making a presentation and I think you may appreciate this one. I was on one of these LinkedIn groups about two weeks ago and they were talking about public speaking.

Someone asked the question, they said, "How much of your presentation do you dedicate to entertainment to keeping the audience sort of entertained?" People were saying, "Oh, 10%. Oh, 15% or 30%." I picked up and said, "You know guys, coming at this as somebody who used to be an actor, my answer is 100%."

If you reverse that question, it would be, "How much of your speech do you want the audience to be bored?" The original definition of the word entertainment means

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to capture and hold attention. That's our job as a speaker. That's our job as a sales person.

Yes, being able to read your audience which actors have to do vitally important whether you have an audience of 1500 or one.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I certainly agree with that. Peter, a couple of weeks ago I had John Jantsch on the show, Duct Tape Marketing and author of a new book, Duct Tape Selling. Like you, he's had several decades in sales and he gave us his perspectives on how sales has changed or the role of the sales person has changed since he got started.

You've been around for a while as well. What do you think are the big changes?

Peter McLaughlin: I think what the experts like I think your guest was saying the same thing are accurate and that is it used to be that sales people had to inform their clients about what they had to offer. Clients and prospects already know that, so it's very important to be able to tell a story. The story is how you can use this product or service to your advantage.

Some of the things will never change. For example, the role of rapport I think is absolutely vital. It always has been. I don't think that's changed at all and I still think that we need to be able to establish that before we can get to the point at which we can understand somebody's business well enough to know what to recommend or to recommend anything.

Roger Dooley: You brought up rapport because that's actually next on my list of things to ask you about. Why don't you talk a little bit about building rapport and then also I got an interesting story in the book about an interview with a couple of people and needing to build a rapport with them individually. Tell us about the general process and then maybe that specific anecdote.

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Peter McLaughlin: When I was in sales as a young guy, I was told by people that the way you build rapport was you look around the person's office and you can see a picture of the person fishing or if you saw a picture of their family, you would engage them in a discussion about those things.

I think what most people who've been around for a while can tell you is that that doesn't always work. Sometimes it does but it doesn't always work. There are some people with whom you can build rapport very quickly and other people that it seems completely elusive.

This is one of those areas from the world of ... I call it therapy really because actually what a hypnotist does and I'm not talking about a stage hypnotist but a hypnotist that helps people is they have to build rapport with other people too before those people are willing to divulge important and emotionally laden information to the hypnotist.

When the folks have understood in that world and in that world of therapy, we call it neurolinguistic programming, hypnosis and even conventional kinds of counseling is that you can build rapport with another person based on a science. It has to do with matching and mirroring.

If you watch people who are getting along in a bar or in an airport or other places people congregate, what you notice is that those people are actually matching their body positions to a certain degree. When one person moves their arm from leaning on the bar to putting it on their hip, chances are that person that they're speaking with if they're in rapport is going to do the same thing. Not instantly and not even on purpose, but they just do it naturally.

We can find ourselves doing this. Once you've been exposed to this idea, you can begin to watch this unfolding. You can also match and mirror voice. Tone

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and pitch and tempo and this is another area where being trained as an actor really helps you because an actor's voice, they call it his or her instrument.

You can even mirror and match things like breathing. After you do this for a specific amount of time, you'll notice that the other person begins to follow you when you change something. Once they start following you, you know that you have established rapport at least in that moment.

In my opinion, this is a huge skill that's vital for anyone in communication and because sales is nothing if it's not communication, it's vital for sales people.

Roger Dooley: Can you over do it? Have you ever been in a situation where somebody called you on it or at least sensed that something was a little bit off if you were doing little too much mirroring and matching?

Peter McLaughlin: The answer to the first part of that question is yes you can over do it. There's no question. Just like you can over do your acting. You can be too big. Unless you're doing a farce, it looks absurd. It doesn't look realistic and you pull people right out of the reality of the situation of what's going on.

Yes, you can over do it and I don't recommend the people even try it unless they practiced it a bit. There are certain techniques for practicing it. For example, if you only move when you're speaking, so in other words you're not trying to mirror every single action that the other person is making, you just kind of shade yourself in that direction and you only do it when you're speaking.

If you do those things, those are just kind of basic rules. It really helps it to be much, much more naturally. As I say, you don't have to mirror everything about the other person. It's just one or two things is completely sufficient. What that person will tend to feel is they'll tend

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to feel like, "Hey, this person understands me. They get me."

Roger Dooley: Briefly explain a little anecdote about the interview with a couple of different people. You can understand if you're in a one on one situation the mirroring kind of make sense, but what if you're in a room with two people who may be doing very different things?

Peter McLaughlin: That's a great question. The anecdote that you're talking about was I was interviewing for a job a number of years ago and actually I used to come home during this period of time when I was interviewing and I said to my wife, "If somebody would pay me to go an interview, I would just do it because I was having so much fun with this."

I was interviewing with the president owner of the company and his number two guy, the vice president and I just began mirroring the president as he was talking and then I changed up something and I saw him follow me and I thought I've got rapport with him.

Then I turned over to the vice president, did the same thing, so I've got rapport with him too. Then I just kind of went back and forth between them during this interview process. As I said before, I wouldn't advocate people just kind of run right out there and do it right away without practicing because you still have to remember what you're saying.

It's very effective and it actually led me, this process led to calling my book, "Becoming the Customer." Because what you're actually doing when you do this mirroring is you're metaphorically stepping into the world of the other person. When you start to match their body positions here and there, when you start to shade your voice towards them, when you start using some of the language that they're using, it actually helps you to understand them better.

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Not only do they feel a degree of connection to you but you begin to understand them better and after all that's when we work best as sales people when we can understand the people we're serving because then we know what to deliver. We know what to give them. We know why they're interested in their product or service.

Roger Dooley: I think to some degree, this has been going on perhaps not as formally organized but I recall an old sales ... I started off my career decades ago with a brief student in sales and recall a much more experienced older sales person who called on a variety of clients. He was I think out in Texas where actually I live now and would be ...

At one point at a big corporation in Dallas and then that other time sort of out in an oil field somewhere and he would change his clothing and his manner of speech and so on to match the clients he was dealing with. If he was in a board room in Dallas, he had to obviously be fairly polished a corporate persona, but that would not have flown with folks out in the oil patch.

Peter McLaughlin: That's exactly right. From time to time, somebody may ask, "Hey isn't this being ... Aren't you fooling people? Aren't you being insincere by doing these things?" My answer is no. You're actually being respectful of the other people because you're entering their world. You're not expecting them to enter yours.

Just like the examples you gave between the oil patch and the board room. In your personal life, if you were invited to a marriage and it was in a religion that wasn't yours and it was substantially different yours, you wouldn't kind of barge into their place of worship and expect them to conform to what you're already comfortable with.

You might change your dress. You might put something on your head. You might act in a different way in order to be respectful and to conform to this new environment

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you find yourself in just like traveling overseas. I view it more of bad, of being sensitive to the person you're with and not expecting them to conform to you.

Roger Dooley: How does hypnosis really do sales? I assume you don't walk into somebody's office and pull out a pocket watch and start having a ... Act like a pendulum going back and forth and ask them to focus on it. Is this a very indirect sort of relationship? How do you tie those two fields together?

Peter McLaughlin: I would absolutely say that it's indirect that I'm not advocating people attempt to hypnotize other people and give them direct suggestions of the outcome that they want. What I am suggesting however is that people use their language for example to their advantage that they don't use words that are counterproductive.

If you were to use a word like don't or not or isn't or won't, the unconscious mind doesn't process that. If you were to say, let's say you were making a presentation and you were to say something like, "This wouldn't be the worse decision you could make." The conscious mind hears the meaning of that sentence. The unconscious mind doesn't. The unconscious mind hears worst decision ever.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I'm still trying to parse that mentally right away. I got an extra negative in there.

Peter McLaughlin: Hypnotist will use this to their advantage. You may say to a client, "I don't know if you're going to go extremely deep and trance today or if you're only going to go to a medium depth." You may not even want to go extremely deep and all of that is okay. What I'm doing is I'm repeating over and over again go deep into trance.

A simple example would be if I ask you and I put this on my book, don't think about a giraffe. Roger, please don't think about a giraffe. You can think about anything you want but don't let it be a giraffe. In order to make sense

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of the word giraffe, your mind has to come up an image of a giraffe.

From this perspective, we can think what do we want in the mind of our client. How are we going to structure our language to make it to our advantage and not to our disadvantage. People will say all the time, "Don't forget to put this on your calendar." To a hypnotist, that's an unconscious command to forget something. No different than ...

Roger Dooley: So it would be better to say remember to put this on the calendar?

Peter McLaughlin: Exactly. A simple change. Always phrase something based on what you want rather than what you don't want. Our culture is unique in that we often talk in terms of things we don't want. I don't want to be fat. I don't want to be poor, all these other things and we're just kind of re-emphasizing if you will these words in our mind.

Incidentally and I'm sure you know what this is because of your expertise is the science of priming. John Bargh in NYU and so forth have proven that people who are "primed" which to a hypnotist is a suggestion will behave in measurably different ways than people who have been primed with different stimuli or not primed at all.

Roger Dooley: That makes a huge amount of sense and some of the work that was done with priming shows that this power of just incorporating those words like aging words, even in a different context. You hear something like gray in relation to a gray sky or wrinkle in relation to a reason and the words are not in an age-related context but simply by hearing those words repeated they changed people's behavior in a way that they move more slowly and in effect acted older.

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That made the connection between that and the suggestions in hypnosis but I can understand how they're somewhat related.

Peter McLaughlin: Absolutely, without a doubt. The other thing too that I think is fascinating from science is that now based on as you know MRI machines, we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we make all our decisions not just whether we're going to buy something or not or whether we like someone or not which are vital to sales, but we make these decisions based on emotion.

The MRI machines show conclusively that these "decisions" are made by the unconscious mind based on unconscious factors, four to seven seconds before the conscious mind is even aware that the decision has been made. The conscious mind is now being referred by some as a lawyer that justifies a pre-determined decision.

I look at all of this and I say, "How can sales people not understand or not be trained in these dynamics when their customers are determining whether they like them and whether they're going to buy their product or not based on unconscious decisions and then rationalize them later?"

We spend all of our time in sales just on one side of that hole, on one side of that puzzle which is all the logical, rational reasons why you should do something.

Roger Dooley: Yup, features and benefits.

Peter McLaughlin: Precisely and I don't say toss out that side, I say, "Hey we have two hemispheres of a brain for a reason. We have two arms and two legs, let's use both sides. Let's not just focus on that one side because we're limiting our potential."

Roger Dooley: The feature and benefits ... I kind of talk features and benefits down too frequently but they do play a very

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important role because obviously the lack of a feature, benefit can be a blocker from doing any kind of a deal at all. Then also even if say the features and benefits or various products aren't all that different at work and so on, having that personal justifications available is important when the conscious mind goes to justify the emotional decision.

Peter McLaughlin: Agreed and just like it's important for the work I do in hypnosis with clients to understand why they're sitting in this chair and what makes them tick and why this is an issue for them. It's the same for sales people. Sales people, if you understand exactly where that emotional connection to your product or services, when you talk about features or benefits, you get to link it to something that has an emotional power behind it.

If you miss that one, then you're kind of throwing the spaghetti against the wall and waiting to see what sticks.

Roger Dooley: Peter are you still raising chickens?

Peter McLaughlin: I am still raising chickens. I am.

Roger Dooley: It sounds like your wife was learning some of your techniques when she persuaded you. Tell us about that.

Peter McLaughlin: My wife wanted to get chickens and I was thinking I don't need chickens, I don't want chickens, it's going to be a lot of work, P.S., we can go to the grocery store of course but we can also go to local farmers and just buy it ourselves so we can get the organic eggs if that's what we want and it's going to be cheaper.

What I learned in my research for my book was that I was thinking about this and she first came at me with this kind of idea of a market condition which is the price of the eggs versus the cost of doing these things. She pivoted at some point and talked about how important this would be for the kids, the life lessons that they would learn.

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I crumbled at that point and what I realized was that she was began appealing to my identity, my identity as a father overcame my sort of rational cost model that this will going to be more expensive than just going out and buying these things.

If you look at lots of issues, politics is a huge issue where this occurs. Identity can often trump the cost benefit analysis. I think that this is a huge area that we should be pursuing with our clients is finding out what does this mean to you, what does not achieving this goal mean to you and what does achieving the goal mean to you.

Are you moving away from something? Are you trying to get away from a problem or are you trying to get toward something, making more money, being able to retire? Who's driving this decision? Is this an internally driven decision by you or is it by your boss or is it by your wife who wants you to retire?

All of these things are vitally important and that example ... I'm glad you brought it up because that was a perfect one in my own life where I wasn't being persuaded by the cost benefit and when she came in with the identity, it was like I melted.

Roger Dooley: One of the things that individual sales people face is the organization that they work in. If somebody reads your book and has start doing things a little bit differently, what are some of the organizational obstacles that they might run into and other than getting the sales management and organizational management to buy in to your strategies, read book and so on that can be used to sort of overcome these organizational obstacles?

Peter McLaughlin: That's an excellent point. It occurred to me in one of the jobs that I had in the past that sales is often portrayed as the solo activity. One person going out into the world

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and either syncing or swimming on his or her own. It became evident to me that if a sales person ...

If a company has 75 clients and they've only got two referenceable accounts, that sales person now has a much more difficult role than if they had 50 referenceable accounts that that fact has created friction in the sales process that will slow down that sales person's activities and efforts and may even kill some deals.

That slowing down, those deals being killed may just get blamed on the sales person. If a prospect calls and they talk to a receptionist that is rude to them, that in effect creates friction in the sales process. I think companies that view sales as a holistic activity where the sales people are doing the bulk of the selling work whether at the tip of the spear and yet are supported by a larger organization are companies that are getting it right.

I would advocate that these sales people at least annually be polled, do an independent party, ask them. These people are in the trenches every day. What's working, what's not working. Look at those factors that the organization can control and shore up those areas of weakness.

Share areas maybe that a handful of sales people that's doing something that's working that the other sales people don't even know about. Spread that information, but essentially tap the sales force for their expertise and disseminate that information through the organization and make changes based on it to streamline the selling efforts.

I think that this is a big point and I think it would help organizations that decide to do this sort of thing.

Roger Dooley: Peter, we're just about out of time. I want to remind our audience that your book which is a really fascinating guide to at least part subconscious sales process, the

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book is Becoming the Customer, Empathy, Influence and Closing the Sale. Peter if people want to get in touch with you or learn about your stuff online, how would they do that?

Peter McLaughlin: The best way would be to go to my website which is BTC which stands for Becoming The Customer, btcsalesdev.com.

Roger Dooley: This has been Peter McLaughlin and I am Roger Dooley and it's been the Brainfluence Podcast. Thank you.

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