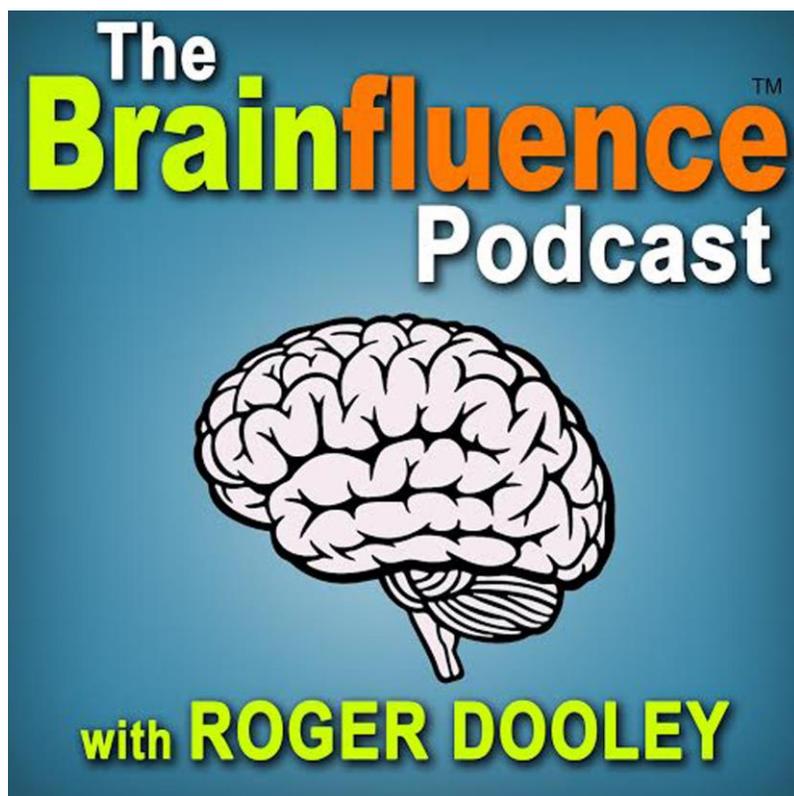


Ep #61: Jeff Goins Helps You Find Your True Calling



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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 and our guest this week is Jeff Goins. Jeff is a full-time writer based in Nashville, TN. He's the author of *The In-Between*, *Wrecked*, and *You Are a Writer*. His latest book is *The Art of Work: A Proven Path to Discovering What You Were Meant to Do*. Jeff, welcome to the show.

Jeff Goins: Thanks for having me, Roger. Good to be here.

Roger Dooley: Great. We have a few things in common. I spent five years in Tennessee and got my business degree in Knoxville. I'm in Austin, which claims to be the live music capital of the world. Do you think Nashville would dispute that?

Jeff Goins: Since I've lived in both cities, although I only lived in the Austin area for a couple of summers non-consecutively working at a summer camp during college ... Since I've lived in both cities, though, I can say that I think Austin wins. Nashville is Music City, U.S.A. and I think the business of music is here. But in terms of having really great local music, at least ... Last time I was there was 10 years ago ... I've heard it's gotten even better. But I've got to hand it to you, I think Austin wins that competition.

Roger Dooley: Well, we won't tell your neighbors you said that. I really enjoy it. I've been here about five years. It's always great. I come back into the airport after a long day of travel and there's almost always live music playing in at least one of the restaurants. You really feel like you're back in Austin

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where you step off the jet way and hear the live music. And guacamole is huge here, too, as you've probably noticed. I noticed you are a guacamole connoisseur.

Jeff Goins: Connoisseur, yes. It's really my claim to fame.

Roger Dooley: If you ever ran across HEB while you were here-

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Roger Dooley: Our local one has, in season, a big island in the middle of the store where usually two or three ladies who are chopping up fresh avocados right in front of you. It's really part of the whole "shopping as an experience" thing. I don't know how much of the actual stuff they make there but it really gives it that very authentic feel.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, totally. That's cool.

Roger Dooley: Jeff, you wrote a book about discovering your purpose in life. That seems like a really lofty goal. Something philosophers and serious thinkers have struggled with for centuries. What possessed you to go down that path?

Jeff Goins: It is lofty. I remember reading a critical Amazon review, which I don't necessarily recommend but sometimes you just can't help yourself. Somebody basically critiqued the book and said I don't know by what authority somebody has the right to write about such things. And when I read that I was like "yeah, I don't know either." That is a lofty thing. It is a big topic. I am very clear to say I think there is a lot of truth in the book. There are truths in the book. But the subtitle "a proven path to discovering what you're meant to do" it's a path. I don't necessarily know that it's the path. Although one of the reasons I wrote the book is because I found the conventional ways that people were

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talking about pursuing their career, chasing their dream, discovering what you're supposed to do with your life ... I found them unsatisfying and found that they weren't necessarily true to my own experience of my working a day job, feeling dissatisfied. Not hating my job, but feeling like I was missing something. That there was something more, like I think a lot of people do. And then feeling like there wasn't a lot of useful tips to help me understand even what that journey would look like. And how part of the journey is always going to be dissatisfying because you're in process, you haven't arrived. And to be able to make sense of that.

What I was really looking for was a map or a guide or something that said "you are here, and here's what you should be feeling right now, and here's the next step to take." So *The Art of Work* was me trying to scratch my own itch based on me really having to claw around for years and years. Failing quite a bit along the way to find what I really believe is my vocation. Or at least the beginning of that purpose. Finding a way where I can connect the work I'm doing with the needs of the world in what feels like a very satisfying but also meaningful connection.

The Art of Work is an attempt at articulating what that would look like at a 40,000 foot view at a more universal level. At 32 years old, I don't know that I have much authority to speak to such things, to the Amazon reviewers credit. Which is why the book is chock full of other people's stories from people that are 18 to 80 years old. Every day, ordinary people doing extraordinary things with their lives. Hopefully, in all of those stories, the reader can start to make more sense of their own story.

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Roger Dooley: I don't know that age is that big of an issue, Jeff. I know Ryan Holiday, who's here in Austin ... He wrote a book in the last year of philosophy and stoicism. I'm sure that was questioned, too. How do you have enough life experience to do that? I think having 50 or 60 years of life experience isn't always essential to see some basic truths. I introduced you as a full-time writer. That's relatively rare for me. Although probably the majority of my guests are authors, most are doing consulting work. They've got consulting businesses or some other major activity going on and writing is a sideline. Do you think that you've found your calling?

Jeff Goins: Yeah, I do think I have. But I'll say to that point, writing isn't the only thing that I do. In the book I talk about the portfolio life, which I really think is the future of work. Not having one primary vocation but really having your vocation be a bunch of different interests and skills that you cobble together into a portfolio. Into an assembly of different tasks and types of work that you do that ultimately make up who you are, that really make up your job description.

As we're seeing the freelance world continuing to grow ... I read a study that said by 2020 over half the workforce in America will be freelance ... We're seeing more and more people moving into less conventional careers. I think that's going to become the norm. But yeah, at the end of the day, I call myself a writer. I spend a lot of my day creating content in one form or another to then ... That gets distributed through various channels to my audience.

Roger Dooley: I like the portfolio concept. If I look back really at my life, in the last few decades, most of the significant things that I've done in terms of creating businesses or something

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useful have begun as smaller side ventures. Where I've had a main gig but some other things that were in an embryonic phase. Over time those things grew to the point where they were significant. I guess I'd encourage anybody to do that. I've had other authors express that same thing. Don't just do one thing. Obviously, there are certain times, if you're starting a new business, maybe you really do have to focus on that pretty heavily. But many times you can have these various activities that coexist quite nicely and may even be synergistic.

Jeff Goins: I think that from a business perspective it's smart to constantly be exploring new income streams. I'm actually doing under the radar consulting on the side. I just worked with a client on a project of theirs and had tremendous success. She asked me last night actually. She said "Why isn't this in your bio? Why isn't this on your website? This is what I do." Gosh, I don't know. Probably because it's in this embryonic phase that you mentioned. I didn't really have the words to describe it. I'm testing it out, under the radar, to see if it's something that I enjoy doing.

It's a smart business thing by also I think it's the way that we're wired. Most people are not wired to just do one thing again and again and again into ceaseless repetition for 60 years or something. I think most people, especially creative people like myself, tend to thrive with variety. I think too much variety is chaos. But too little variety, you start to pigeon-hole yourself. It can actually be stifling.

Roger Dooley: Right. Another author that I've referred to a few times on this show ... My regular listeners will be familiar with the reference ... Tim Ferriss. I found his Four Hour Work to be inspiring. Also listening to other entrepreneurs talk. They, too, found his work, or they cite his work as being one of

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their key inspirations in deciding to quit their day job and start a business. Or do something entrepreneurial. Not that any of them actually work for four hours. Do you think it would be fair to say ... I'm assuming you're familiar with the book?

Jeff Goins: Oh yeah. Sure.

Roger Dooley: That Tim is more focused on a lifestyle approach to work and your focus is more on the intrinsic rewards from work itself?

Jeff Goins: Yeah, I think that's a great distinction. I know Tim. I've had the pleasure of interviewing him a couple times for my own podcast. I love that book. I actually ended up reading it right after I quit my job. What happened ... I make brief mention of this in *The Art of Work*, although I don't say I read the *Four Hour Workweek* book ... Basically, I read the *Four Hour Workweek* and I was like "well I don't need to do anything." I knew I needed to do a little bit. It was very freeing because I realized I was spending a lot of time doing what he calls "work for work sake." Just doing it to do it because that's what you're conditioned to do. You go to work from 9 to 5, or 8 to 6, or 7 to 7, or whatever it is. And you just show up and you just do it. Not really thinking "what am I accomplishing today?" So I love that. I love the idea of the minimum effective dose. Putting in exactly what you need to get what needs to be done then moving on.

But I do take issue with work itself is not good. Or a necessary evil. Or a means to an end. I think work has inherent value. When people don't work, really bad things happen both emotionally, psychologically, and also societally to a culture. In a very small microcosm I experience that right after I quit my job. I had made

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enough money that I didn't have to do anything for the rest of the year. We would have been fine. My family and I. So I just took a break for two months and didn't really do much. Didn't really do anything that produced an income. Just kind of farted around, to borrow a phrase from my dad. Didn't have a project, wasn't really producing anything. I was checking email and writing when I felt like it and blogging a little bit. But there was no purpose. And I got really, really depressed during that time.

In the Four Hour Workweek, Ferriss actually talks about this at the end. When you work yourself out of a job ... And I think there's some really good concepts in there as I already mentioned. Don't just show up to do work for the sake of doing work ... But once you work yourself out of that there is a void of activity that you have to fill. You have to do something. Whether or not you call that work. I tend to think work is a good thing. But I reframe work as the thing that you do that makes you feel alive and also adds value to the world. You've got to do something. You can't just sit on a beach and drink piña coladas all day and actually feel fulfilled. I think most of us would not find that kind of existence very fulfilling.

Roger Dooley: No. Probably the worst work experience I had in my career while I was working for other companies was a period of a couple of months when there was an organizational shift in the company I was working for. I got assigned to a new group. Basically, while they were completing the reorganization and doing some other tasks, I basically had nothing to do. At first, I thought this was great. It seems like work in a corporate environment there's always too much to do. There's too many meetings. You're too busy and you think oh man, could I use a break. For the first day or two, it was pretty nice. I

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was able to organize my desk and stuff and catch up on some reading. But after a short period of time, it was just brutal. The thought of not having anything to do and just trying to read industry magazines. I filled the time as best I could. I did my prep for my professional engineers license. Took that test and so on. But I basically had to create it. I couldn't stand the environment. It was just so incredibly boring.

And I think, too, the other kind of bad work is work that you really hate. If you were going into the office every day, or wherever you work, and you just can't wait until 5:00, then that's probably the wrong thing, too.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, yeah. I think our knee-jerk reaction to work is "man, if I didn't have to work my life would be great. If I could just on vacation my whole life, it'd be great." As somebody who has literally tried that, I can tell you on the other side, it's not. And there's interesting psychology and various studies to prove this. Two of my favorite people that talk about this are Viktor Frankl in "Man's Search for Meaning." He talks about basically the three things that you need to have a fulfilling life. Basically you have to have a project to work on. You have to have something to do. It doesn't have to necessarily be some sort of income-producing project. But you have to have something. And I think Tim acknowledges that in his book at the end. You've got to fill the void with something to do, something purposeful and meaningful that's going to cause you to grow.

He also says you need to have a relationship. He talks about how his love for his wife kept him alive in the German Nazi concentration camps during World War II. And lastly he says you need to have this redemptive view

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of suffering. That whatever bad has come to you in your life, you can forgive your enemies, not dwell on the past. Move on, that sort of thing.

The other researcher psychologist I love who talks about this, kind of around that same era, is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. In his work "Flow," he talks about how happiness is really that place that's found in the tension between a really challenging activity that you're also competent at. He says it's where challenge meets competency. That's where you're excited. He says that when you're doing work that isn't challenging, as you mentioned, you're bored. Sitting on a beach is not challenging. That's boring. Ultimately that's going to lead to depression because there's no inherent value in it. There's nothing that feels satisfying about that.

Having a break is great. Cleaning your desk is great. But that's a respite from the work, not some sort of ongoing activity. Then on the other hand, if something's too difficult or it's not the right fit for you, i.e. a job that you hate, he says that produces anxiety. So satisfaction, meaningful work, is that place in between something that's difficult enough that requires you to grow, but not so much that you're not good at. I think there's some really interesting stuff in there about how we should approach our work. And even help us discern what kind of work we should be doing in the first place.

Roger Dooley: Chances are, not too many of our listeners have the luxury of saying "well, I think I'll try sitting on a beach for a few months and see how it works out for me." One statistic in the book that was really a shocker is only 13% of the world's workers are really engaged with what they're doing. The other 87% feel disconnected.

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Assuming our listeners are in that same proportion, how would you suggest that somebody who is not really feeling incredibly fulfilled at the moment go about finding what they should be doing.

Jeff Goins: I think the easiest thing to tell you, which would be wrong, is to quit your job. If 87% of the world's workers quit their jobs, most of society's structures would probably fall apart. I think that's unrealistic. That's one of the reasons why I wrote *The Art of Work*. Not just as a "here's how to quit your job" book. But here's how to live a meaningful life. Discover what you're meant to do and then build a vocation around that.

I think most people are going to have to make a decision if they're in that 87% ... which, I was, certainly, a few years ago. I've talked to lots of other people who are cubicle dwellers, pardon the expression, to full-time entrepreneurs-

Roger Dooley: Cubicles are a luxury these days. Now it's an open office.

Jeff Goins: Yeah, that's true.

Roger Dooley: It's sad to think that cubicles are starting to look good.

Jeff Goins: It's like the new corner office or something. I think you basically have two choices. One is to make an internal pivot. If you're truly dissatisfied with your job ... And that study that you cited was from the Gallup organization ... It was a world-wide study. They described disengaged as completely dissatisfied or just indifferent to your job. These are not people who love their jobs. They don't even really like them. They, at best, tolerate them. Which sadly, is almost 9 out of 10 people. Suffice it to say, the majority

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of people listening to this fit in that category. I certainly did.

I didn't hate my job, which I think is a really dangerous place to be. It's easy to be in a place where you hate your job. Because then it really is about making a significant transition. You quit your job. You find another one. You do something dramatic to get out of that situation that's toxic for you. If you truly hate your job it's not a good place to be.

However, most people feel like "is this it?" Is this as good as it gets, to quote Jack Nicholson? I think you basically have one of two choices. One, you can make what I call an internal pivot. A friend of mine, Amy Porterfield, was telling me about her experience when she was working for corporate America. Started getting really excited hearing all these stories of people like Tim Ferriss and all these internet entrepreneurs talking about quitting their jobs and living the good life. She was like "that sounds awesome. I'm going to do it. I want to do this." She was talking to a mentor about getting excited about basically starting a blog and having this online business that we hear so often about. And her mentor said "you're not ready. You're not ready financially. You don't have enough money in the bank. This is still kind of risky. And you're not ready emotionally." Her mentor told her to stay at her job and find an opportunity for the next year or two that would allow her to get paid to start practicing this thing that she wanted to do full-time and give her some margin to do it on the side.

So what she did was, she went to her boss and said "hey, I want to help with online marketing. I'm really interested in that. I'm working on this part of the business and I want

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to work on that part of the business. What do you think? I'm teachable. I'm hungry. I want to do that." And her boss was like "okay, that sounds great." So she moved departments and all of a sudden she got paid to practice what eventually became her craft. This thing that she did two years later full-time. That's what I call an internal pivot.

That's what I did. I wanted to write and speak full-time. I knew that blogging would be an important part of that. That's the way the world works right now. So I went to my boss. I was a marketing director at the time. I told him I wanted to write more. I was doing some of that but I was mostly directing all of our creative stuff at the organization. I said "how can I serve you? I want to do this more on the side. This will be a personal thing but how can I serve the organization? I built a marketing team for you, let's find somebody to replace me. Then is there some other way I can serve what you're doing?" We ended up creating a communications department, which we never had before. I spent the next 18 months taking everything I was learning online through reading various blogs and listening to various podcasts, and building that for our organization. As I was doing that, I was just getting to practice what is it like to every week create content through newsletters, blog posts, etc. Lead a team that represents the brand and voice of organization. Which was all wonderful practice for this blog that I had just started. I basically got to play around during my day job, learning things that eventually became my full-time gig.

It doesn't have to lead to that, but that's the second choice. You just quit your job and go on and do something else. Or I think the more conservative choice is

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make an internal pivot if there are options available for you to do that.

And I would say, for many people, although not everyone, those options are available. You might be thinking "well my boss would never let me do that." I've walked people through this. I've gone through this. I've talked to lots and lots of friends who've done it. When you have the courage to approach your boss and not just say "hey, this isn't fun, I want to do something else" but to say "hey, I notice a strategic opportunity for me to step into this position or this department or this thing over here and help grow the organization in this. Would you let me do that?" More often than not, if you make a great case for it, they'll say yes. I think that's a smart way to go from being dissatisfied or disengaged with your work to being much more engaged without making the risky decision to quit your job.

Worst case scenario, you end up really loving it ... I don't know if that's a worst case scenario ... One scenario is that you just end up loving it and staying with it. The other scenario, which has been true for me, it was true for Amy and other people, is you learn enough skills you realize, hey, I kind of want to do this for myself full-time. You just spent the past year or two or however much time basically acquiring the skill and learning on the job and getting paid to do it. Versus just launching out on your own and having the learning curve be that much steeper.

Roger Dooley: Right. And the key point there would be if you're doing this internal pivot, when you approach your boss or the powers-that-be, you want to put it in terms that show the advantage to the company. Not that you're bored and if you want to keep me around here you ought to do this.

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Jeff Goins: That's true.

Roger Dooley: As with any marketing effort, you tell the prospect what's in it for them, not what you're going to get out of it.

Jeff Goins: Yep, agreed.

Roger Dooley: You've got three big parts in your model. Preparation, action, and completion. Can you real briefly, Jeff, go through what those phases are?

Jeff Goins: Yeah, so The Art of Work is..

Roger Dooley: I realize you devoted an entire book to this so-

Jeff Goins: Sure, sure. It's big, right? That's why I tried to break it into three sections, then into seven chapters. The basic idea of the book is that you have a calling or a purpose. You have some work that you are meant to do. You will spend your life discovering that. But if you understand the path, which I try to lay out in the book through lots and lots of stories and research and anecdotes, you're going to have a better understanding of where you're at now and what the next step to take is.

The first part of the process is preparation. The basic idea there is, before you can do you have to learn how to be. Parker Palmer says that before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I have to listen to my life telling me who I am. Preparation is all about developing that awareness of who are you? What were you made to do? How has your life prepared you for this?

Some people think that you can do anything you want to do and that's the message of the American dream. I argue that that's not the case and that's actually good news. If you had unlimited choices available to you

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regarding what your vocation could be, it would be overwhelming. At the same time, you aren't condemned to doing what your parents did or what everybody around you is doing. I argue that there is a specific purpose for your life although there are lots of different opportunities for you to bring that into reality. Preparation is all about turning that awareness into intentional apprenticeship where you're learning from people around you.

Apprenticeship is this old world that we don't necessarily practice very much in most vocational contexts. It's this idea that there are people around you right now that you can be learning from if you would humble yourself and reach out to them.

The third step in that first part is practice. Engaging in intentional, meaningful practice. Daily if possible to start really building the skillset for you to turn your passion into something that's actually quality work. So that's preparation.

Action is the professional side of it, where you start actually doing it, not just preparing for it. In that part we talk about this term we use a lot that I think is a misnomer "taking the leap." Going full-time with your passion and trying to make a go at it in some sort of professional context. I think of it more like building a bridge. I think that that discovery of "oh I'm supposed to do this" actually happens in stages as you take one step at a time. As a part of that, when you leap out or take the next step, I think a lot of us think that's the end goal. If I could figure out what I'm supposed to do with my life and then take the leap and actually do it then I will have arrived.

I thought that, too. Then when I started writing full-time and I quit my job and I did all the things the right way and

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had enough money in the bank that I wasn't stressed or anything, I realized oh, this is just beginning. This is just kind of the middle of the process. And what came after that were a lot of mistakes and failures. As any entrepreneur will certainly attest to. When you start something you think I've got this figured out. And then you go, I didn't think about this, I didn't think about this, and oh my gosh this happened. Or at least that's been my experience. And in that-

Roger Dooley: I can assure you from my experience, that's the case, too.

Jeff Goins: It's good to know I'm not alone. In that stage it's full of failure. But all of that is really good. All that failure is teaching you things about what you should be doing, what you shouldn't be doing. It's moving you closer to mastery. Which I think most people think is the final stage in the process. I argue it's basically the penultimate one.

Then in completion, completing your calling. Finishing your life's work. It's really about legacy. It's about not just what you do but what you leave behind. The book is broken up into these thirds but really the first two-thirds are the majority of the book. The last part is really the most significant but in many ways, that's not the story you finish. It's the story you leave unwritten. If you have done a good job of doing great work, involving other people, being selfless and humble enough to bring other people along in the process ... Becoming a leader, frankly. Then in many ways the work you set out to do is really going to be carried out by other people.

I argue that not everybody does that. But the most meaningful lives are the ones where you leave a powerful legacy.

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Roger Dooley: That's probably something that not many folks devote a lot of thought to. They think about their career developing and get to the point. But what are you going to leave behind, if anything? Once you're gone is whatever you accomplished pretty much gone, too? I like the concept of not just leaving some sort of physical legacy like if you perhaps contributed to something in an organization. A charity built a wing on their hospital because you helped out. Also leaving sort of a living legacy behind of your ideas and things that you created through your leadership.

Jeff Goins: Yeah.

Roger Dooley: That makes a lot of sense.

Jeff Goins: I love the Jackie Robinson quote which really kind of inspired that section. "A life is not significant except for its impact on others." I think if I had to write a quick definition of legacy it would be that.

Roger Dooley: Great. Completion is probably a pretty good point to aim for completion here. Let me remind our listeners that we're speaking with Jeff Goins, author of "The Art of Work: A Proven path to Discovering What You Were Meant To Do." Jeff, how can our listeners find your stuff online and connect with you?

Jeff Goins: You can find me at goinswriter.com. That's like coins but with a g. G-o-i-n-s writer dot com. Sign up for a free email newsletter. You also get the first chapter or so of The Art of Work. You can read that and if it's for you, you can find that book at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, wherever books are sold.

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Thanks for doing this, Roger. It's great to connect with you.

Roger Dooley: Definitely. We'll have links to those sites and the other resources we discussed along with the text version of this conversation at rogerdooley.com/podcast. Thanks for being on the show, Jeff.

Jeff Goins: Thanks for having me. It was my 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.