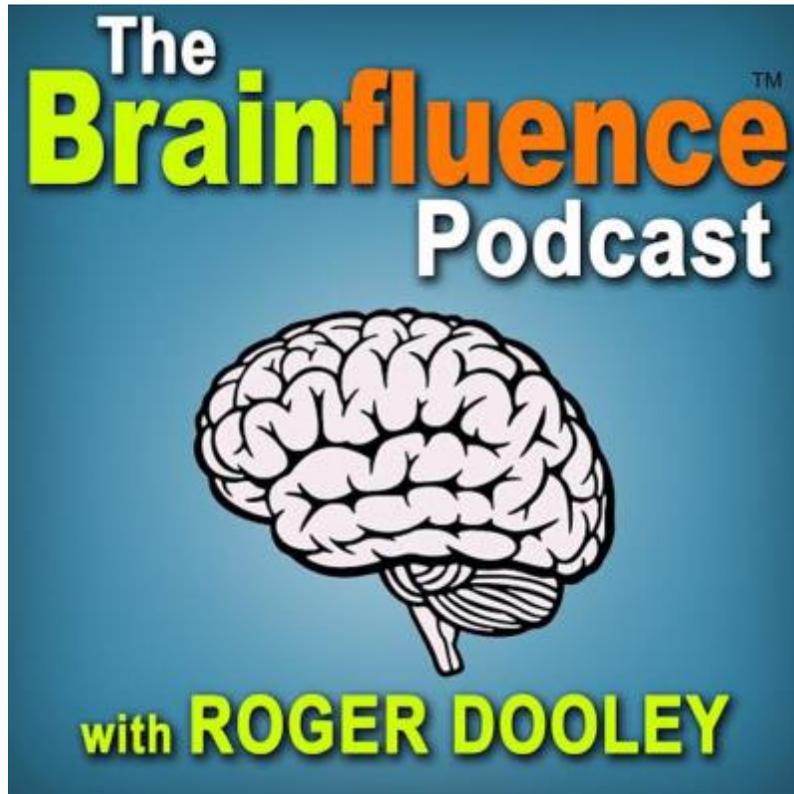


Win at Video with Vern Oakley



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**Roger Dooley**

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## Win at Video with Vern Oakley

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: Welcome to the Brainfluence podcast. I'm Roger Dooley. This week's guest is very timely. We're in an era when video consumption is exploding. More than 500 million hours of video is watched every day just on YouTube alone. Mobile video consumption is now half of all video consumption, and millennials are a big part of that trend, and various studies show that people retain far more information when it's viewed in a video, that people engage more with video content than other forms, and one study even showed that blog posts with videos get three times more links than those without, so it's good that Vern Oakley is joining us today. He's a veteran filmmaker who's the CEO and creative director of Tribe Pictures. Vern has created films for fortune 500 companies, nonprofit organizations, universities and their leaders. Including American Express, AT&T, Pfizer, and Princeton University. Vern's new book is Leadership in Focus: Bringing out Your Best on Camera. Welcome to the show, Vern.

Vern: Very glad to be here, Roger. That was a great introduction. Thank you.

Roger: Well, great. Vern, I threw out some statistics about video consumption. You've been in the business for a while. Did you see this coming? Crazy increase in the amount of video that's being consumed?

Vern: I would love to tell you that I was smart enough to have figured this out, but when YouTube started about 10 years ago I thought that it would be increases, and I know that people really like to watch videos, but this technology that allows us to watch videos over our mobile phones and iPads and such just wasn't there at that time. I did know it was coming because we were making a lot of films for AT&T Bell Laboratories, and we

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were creating and mocking up the future, but it's beyond even my expectations and projections.

Roger: Right. Well, you know I think in the early days of smart phones there was a general feeling that, well if you're going to do video maybe like for a video phone call, a Skype phone call or something, but who would want to watch, say, a movie on their phone? I mean, that's just crazy talk, right? Of course, as it turns out a lot of people are willing to watch movies and all kinds of other video content on their phone.

Vern: It's so true because actually I have two children, and they're three years apart, and what I observe ... My daughter's now 26, and my son is 23, is even that three years created different viewing habits because when my son got his first phone everything was on the phone. Whereas my daughter was sort of multi-screen. She'd watch television. She'd be on the laptop. She would watch things, so so much depends upon when you're actually born and what tool you started bonding with.

Roger: Right. For sure. You know, I'm an author, and my books are mostly words. Not even a lot of pictures, and as an online writer, again, who uses mostly words it seems like video is sort of encroaching on the written word and maybe supplanting it for a lot of people. Do you think this is true? I'm certain that books will be around for a long time to come, but is there an actual ... I mean, people only have so many hours to consume content. Is video replacing written content?

Vern: You know, the common sort of projection is yes. I think it's a little bit more complex than that. You quoted the 500 million hours of YouTube that's watched every day, and an interesting statistic about that that is 60% of that is how to, so people are trying to figure out, hey I can't get my snow blower started. I got a video today because I was trying to figure out how to get my Kryptonite bike lock to do, and when I looked that instructions that unfolded and were written in tiny, tiny type, I'm going like why am I doing this? I'll YouTube this. Our behaviors are changing in terms of the way we want to receive information, but I personally love books. I wrote one. There's 4,000 books published every day, so I don't

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think it's going away, but I do think that the mix of that and why you would choose to watch a video and why you would choose to read a book or something online is really changing.

Roger: Well, it had to be a little bit frustrating in writing the book not to be able to illustrate what you're talking about in the book. I mean, it would be great to ... You know, we had one of these sort of Harry Potter type books where you could turn the page, and the video would be right there in the page, so you could have that moving picture, but of course we're not quite there yet.

Vern: I love the way your mind works. We're closer to being there than one might think with some of the digital paper that's coming out right now, but I'm aware of the irony of writing a book about being on camera as opposed to making a video about being on camera, but we did link up on my author site to all the videos that are mentioned in the book, so it really can be an interactive experience, and when people start to look that eBooks then they can also see the video, so it's the way that we're starting to consume things that's becoming much more multimedia.

Roger: Let's talk about some of the ideas in your book, Vern. Before we get into the details let's set the stage. Is it fair to say that much of your work is focused on executive communication? That would be CEOs and executives who are communicating with employees or shareholders, or maybe are being interviewed by the press?

Vern: Well, a lot of our work is that, but we went through a number of book titles, and we really decided this was a leadership book, and that today whether you're running the local dog grooming service, or you're the CEO of a fortune 100 company, the requirements for leadership are very similar in that you have to be authentic. You have to be transparent. You have to make tough decisions, and you have to communicate well, but what's different in today's age you actually have to do that on camera. Not just in person, and there is that divide between being on camera and in person because when the light goes on a lot of people freeze up. I think the

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book really covers a lot of things whether it's Kickstarter campaigns or starting your own YouTube channel.

Roger: Yeah. You would think that by the time somebody reached a high executive position that they wouldn't really be intimidated by a camera. I mean, they've presumably had all kinds of life experiences at that point. Some of them rather difficult and challenging, but what is it about that red light that causes people to freeze up?

Vern: Well, I know for myself I freeze up when the red light went on, so I'm very empathetic, and I tried to write the book from that point of view. If you look anthropologically, it's easy for me to say, you know the ancient tribes don't like their picture being taken. They feel like you're stealing your soul, so there is something in our DNA and biology. That artifice between the lens and the person creates some kind of barrier.

I think a lot of people have trouble sort of taking off the mask whether they're in person or on camera, and that we are encouraged to sort of open up and reveal ourselves in person a lot more than on camera, and most people assume because cameras are so ubiquitous now that you should just be able to do it, but it is a skill. It does take practice. It does take a commitment, and so few people actually realize that, and I think that's the main issue.

Roger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I would guess that part of it is that the video camera is going to really show everything. The good, the bad, and the ugly. If you're doing a still photo shoot you know that you can sift through 100 different shots, and eliminate the ones where your eyes were half closed, or you had a weird expression, and pick those one or two or three that really show your best side, or at least what you think your best side is, but on video it's pretty much all there.

Vern: I think it depends. That's so true, but so much of it depends upon whether there's an editing aspect to it afterwards, and if you're on camera on television and you're live, what you're saying is absolutely true, but for much of the work that we're doing we're shooting multiple takes.

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We're trying to get the best performance out. We're coaching these leaders to smile, to reveal themselves a bit more, and then we go back into the editing room and take 30 minutes or 45 minutes and cut it down to a minute or two, so I'm always trying to encourage people, hey, mistakes are good, you're in charge, you don't like that take do it again, and that editing process really does change the equation you were just speaking about.

Roger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I want to get to the editing process in a second, but I'm curious while we're talking about being at ease with the camera, are young people, millennials and even younger millennials, more at ease than older generations because they've kind of grown up with video, and maybe they weren't necessarily recording corporate PR videos, but they've probably been doing various types of video conversations and sending people videos and so on.

Vern: I agree with your observation. I don't have the statistics on it, but I have found that the people who've grown up with cameras around them, video cameras in particular, are much more comfortable because their parents were filming them, and then when the selfie came in with the phones built into our cameras that created much more of a performance kind of culture, and that those people generally are much more comfortable being on camera. Not everyone because it is still a skill, but the thing is those people have had hours and hours if not years of practice being on camera versus people that may be in the boomer generation or the later millennials.

Roger: Right, so okay you started talking about editing, Vern, and one thing I'm curious about, you talk obviously in the book quite a bit about the process where you can add music and B-roll footage. Now, I'll let you explain what B-roll is in a second. I mean, obviously there are advantages to crafting a film video with a lot of editing. You can really get the best parts and make sure that you're communicating exactly what you want and so on, but do you lose authenticity if a production looks too slick? I mean, I kind of think that if a CEO wanted to communicate an important message about the business, maybe there's layoff or some major corporate transition

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that's taking place, that if it looks too much like a well-produced movie that it would seem inauthentic. How do you decide? Does that happen, and is there sort of an approach you take for different kinds of videos?

Vern: Absolutely. I mean, that's a really good point because ultimately we're in the business of making videos that have a purpose. We're making commissioned work. We're not making part films or home movies, so the people that hire us are looking to get a result from the audience. They want the audience to think a certain way, to do something, to donate money, or to buy into a cause, or to buy shares in a stock, or to come work for a company, so once we really look deeply into the audience is, and think about how they might be moved, that will determine what you're talking about, so you had a really good question in there about CEOs telling about a particular sensitive issue, and you don't want it to be too slick. A lot of times when there's an issue, whether it's the Domino's Pizza CEO came on camera, there's no B-roll, or John Mackey from Whole Foods talking about some of the issues with the Whole Foods. They're very simple. Perhaps even a little bit awkward, but the intent is I'm telling you about this problem, and I'm here to take the responsibility as a leader and owning it.

Of course, that's just one kind of video. A lot of the other videos that people might be making for their marketing purposes, or to come shop at your store, or to see things, and what makes video so special is it's a very emotional medium, and that it's perhaps the best way of communicating because it seems as close to real life as something can.

Roger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I still want you to explain what B-roll is, but when you talk about making it seem close to real life that kind of brings up the subject of mirror neurons, and why don't you explain how ... I wasn't really expecting to read about mirror neurons in your book, but explain how they relate to the effectiveness of video.

Vern: Sure. Mirror neurons is just something that we understand in our gut, but the scientific explanation is ... I'll give you an example. Let's say I buy a gift for my wife, okay, and that I'm so excited. I've been thoughtful about this gift. I know what she likes. I've gone out, and I've

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shopped for it, and I'm just excited to give it to her, and then when I give it to her she has that excitement, and we're almost mirroring each other in terms of the excitement that we have from the gift, so not only is the giver, but the receiver, has this thing, and here's where mirror neurons the science is really interesting is the person who, if they're in the room watching the exchange of the gift, they're having the same reaction. These neurons which are floating between all of our brains, we're all feeling a similar thing, and film has that kind of effect on people generally when it's well made.

Roger: Right, and I think the key point is that unlike other media when obviously if you are watching somebody in person and they do something, that's sort of the classic experiment that showed how mirror neurons work. That these mirror neurons sort of mimic the action of the person that you're seeing. Initially the experiment involved monkeys where one monkey was watching another one, I forget, eat a banana or something, and the video has the ability to create that same effect as watching in real life, and they're not going to get into the mirror neuron science which my own understanding is limited, but scientists think there's a good evolutionary reason for mirror neurons to exist, and the key point though is that they can be activated by video as well as by in person, so that is a huge advantage for video over the written word or audio alone.

Vern: I know you specialize in this neuro psychology and things like that, and I just find that the work that's coming out in terms of the brain in the last 10 years it's just been phenomenal. You know, my background is I actually started directing theater, and so many of these lessons are things that I learned while working with and directing actors, and we look at mirror neutrons, or you look at the work that Brené Brown has done or Paul Ekman or Amy Cuddy, you start to realize that the science is actually catching up with the art now and explaining what's happened in the art.

Roger: That's a great point, Vern. It's one I made for years when often there will be some discovery coming out of a neuro science lab, and if you talk to people who have been in any particular area for a while they say,

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well we knew that, and that's not uncommon because people have learned certain things just by experience, but now what the neuro scientists are doing, you're sort of explaining the underlying mechanisms. It's not as if they suddenly discovered a totally new phenomenon, but they're getting a better understanding of it. Let's jump back to B-roll for a second. Explain what that is, and how that can enhance a video.

Vern: Well, sure. Let's use an example. You're making a marketing video. You have a local pizza shop. The way a video shoot might work is you interview the owner of that, and they're talking about the quality of the flour they get, and the artsy tomatoes, and the kind cheese that they get from the local person, and that all these ingredients come together, so you take this interview where they explain that, and I hope our viewers are all getting hungry here, and that you would then cut to the shots of those ingredients, and that would be the B-roll. The illustrative footage that helps you to make the story come alive in a visual way that's put over the interview.

Roger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, and I think that probably ties into the effect of video on recall which there are various studies showing that recall of information in videos is much higher, but I think the way that's enhanced is by actually showing the top ... In other words, having a picture of the owner of the pizza shop talking for five minutes would not be nearly as effective at getting people to remember that they use fresh ingredients from the farmer's market compared to showing that owner shopping in the farmer's market for fresh ingredients, and then maybe even close-ups of the fresh ingredients.

Vern: Absolutely, and also if you look at the brain itself and the brain science, I believe about 70% of the brain processing power is used for visuals, so I think that's part of it also, and the other thing in terms of memory is that when you have an emotion attached to something your memory is much, much better, so film is very good at creating that kind of emotional connection when it's done well.

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Roger: Right, and how does music figure into that? Because it's probably something that many of our listeners might not really have a lot of experience with is adding music to a video, and typically many of the sort of simpler applications of video that you described would not necessarily have a music soundtrack, but it strikes me that used correctly music can enhance the emotional impact of the video.

Vern: Absolutely because I'd like to extend it not just to music but sound in general. I mean, I think Steven Spielberg, one of my favorite directors, says it's 50% of your picture is to the really high quality kind of sound, is that music has the ability to really stir us emotionally, so you can listen to one of your favorite Beatles songs, or you can listen to a great classical symphony, or my father listens to opera, or something that is even more current, a rap song, and we kind of associate and have those feelings of those emotions with it, and that's why so many TV makers, feature film makers, marketers, pull and license music from these famous artists because they are borrowing and paying for emotional connections that have been created through that music, so music is incredibly important.

Roger: Vern, statistically it's unlikely that we've got a lot of fortune 500 CEOs in our audience, but I know we do have a lot of people who would like to use video to communicate effectively. They could be sales videos or video blog posts where they explain an idea or something else, and they probably won't have a big production team. What are the most important rules to, regardless of sort of the level of production that you can afford, the most important rules to connect with an audience and to build their trust?

Vern: I think the most important thing is to truly understand the psychographic of the audience, and a couple of just broad points is are they positively disposed to your message, or are they skeptical? Is this something new that they've never experienced, so therefore it's complicated, and you're trying to simplify it, and that as we discussed earlier you're really looking for the authenticity of the person on camera to really buy into and accept the messages, so if you think about the audience and you think about being authentic on camera, incredibly important. Next

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thing I would say is think about your brand. Your brand voice. What you're trying to communicate. Are you a rough and tumble auto parts dealer, or are you artisanal and going to the farmer's market like the pizza maker we talked about? Is there a sense of artistry to you as a tailor? These kinds of things will inform the way the video should be prepared and shot, so I mean I've seen some bakery videos where the food just looks just so mouthwatering, and I've also seen some where you're kind of going, I wouldn't eat that.

Roger: I've seen some food photography that way, too. I mean, the best well styled food photography just makes your mouth water, but it's a narrow line between that and something that looks really kind of disgusting.

Vern: This is so true because they can tell this. I have a friend who's a food stylist food photographer, and she does photography for Outback steakhouses, and when her photographs go on the table they sell 11% more desserts, so it's that artistry to marry your marketing objective with the audience's wants, needs, desires, and I love the Roy Lichtenstein quote of the pop artist who talks about art is really organized perception, and that's what we're trying to do as artists working in the marketing field, is to organize the perception that that is a tasty dessert.

Roger: As far as the person who's on camera, are there any rules of thumb? Should they be looking at the camera? Should they be seated or standing? Should they be smiling? I mean, obviously smiling or not may have something to do with the context, in general, if you're trying to create trust and likeability. Are there some rules of thumb?

Vern: I think the most important one is to really be yourself. That if you are not a smiling person, and all of a sudden they keep telling you to smile you will look incredibly uncomfortable, and I have directed people that are like that, so what you're trying to do is ... I'll put it this way, not just to be yourself, but be the best version of yourself, or the best version of yourself, the most authentic version of yourself that is correct for that audience because I think we all have different levels of authenticity depending whether we're playing with our kids, taking a walk in the woods with our

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dog, or at the local school board meeting, so there are many different versions of us, and working with somebody to really capture that because that's what people want. They want something that feels consistent, and hopefully the decision is right for you to be on camera because you don't always have to be on camera. You could have your marketing video made without you being on camera.

Roger: Right. My friend Rand Fishkin of Moz has developed a big audience for his whiteboard videos where sort of like a professor stands by a whiteboard, and uses it to explain some important relevant technical topic, and it seems like this kind of prop would be an effective way to loosen up presenter. I mean, compared to saying, okay Rand sit at that desk and explain this. Instead of looking at the camera with somebody who's a talking head with sort of frozen posture. Instead you've got somebody who's up and standing and writing on the board, and plus that focuses the viewers on the content as it appears. Is this a good strategy, and are there some other strategies like that that sort of get people out of that talking head approach?

Vern: Well, one of the techniques that I talk about in the book is that when people do a walk and talk it's very hard to stay in your head, so all of a sudden it breaks down some of the barriers, and at a certain extent what your friend is doing with the standing up and drawing on the board is another technique. I think it's a matter of discovering what your style is. Discovering and knowing yourself and working with your film crew to bring out your best on camera. I do find that people that people have a little bit more energy when they're standing than when sitting, so that of course can change the whole dynamic quite a bit. You know, there's not one right way. So much depends upon where the location you're shooting is, and so these things all get to be discussed early in the pre-production process so that you can make a great video with whomever you're working with.

Roger: What about using an interview approach where another person is speaking with you versus just sort of addressing the audience directly through the camera? Are there places where one is better than the other?

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Vern: I think that the interview technique is one of the easiest for people that are beginning. Looking directly at the camera is a bit more of an advanced skill unless you actually have that sort of going right out of the gate, and so the interviewer who if you're looking to the side of the camera that allows you to have a personal connection, and the camera is just sort of recording that interaction. Frequently in the kind of videos that we're talking about today that interviewer is not seen like interviewers from 60 minutes or any of the sports shows would be, so that person is able to prompt you, prop you up, ask you to repeat your questions, help you to simplify things, so that's easiest. Where I find looking directly at the camera is most helpful is when you're trying to take the message in a direct important way to the viewer. Such as an apology video from a CEO. Such as we just finished some ethics and compliance videos where the CEO was looking directly at the viewer i.e. the camera, and that is kind of establish the personal connection.

I mean, I talk about in the book which I think is a great example. Some of the viewers may know Fred Rogers. Mr. Rogers' neighborhood. He had that technique of really looking in the camera which really engaged young kids in a really compelling way, so that certainly is a very powerful technique when done well.

Roger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right. Well, you have sort of simulated eye contact there where that person who's looking directly at the camera appears to be looking right at you, so I can see where that would be powerful, but I think it's probably also something that would make some people nervous to execute or difficult at least. I want to bring up one last topic, live streaming video. I know that's not necessarily your main thing. That's gone through some ups and downs. Just a couple of years ago Meerkat totally blew up at South by Southwest. I was driving my friend to the convention center, and while I was behind the wheel he interviewed me on live video, and in a minute or two we suddenly had hundreds of viewers, and it was so cool, and then within seemingly a few weeks it was also gone, and lately we haven't heard much about Periscope either, but Facebook Live seems to be growing by leaps and bounds and has had

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some pretty big impact with people capturing news events and streaming them live. Some really negative some stuff with people streaming crimes live and so on, but is there a place for unedited live stream video that obviously is going to have limited production values or no production values?

Vern: Absolutely. I think it will continue to grow as the technology makes it easier and easier, and so you talked about a couple things. Political events, it's going to be huge in that. There are people who are using it for some really terrible purposes as you referenced and that kind of thing. We have become a society where people ... It's what Andy Warhol said 40 years ago. You know, everyone's going to get their 15 minutes of fame, and there is this feeling that by putting it out on video or Facebook Live or these kinds of things that somehow it creates this reality or this moment that exists separate from the actual reality. Gives it sort of a dimension where we're on the other side of it.

Roger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, I guess I could see, for example, just comparing say ... Currently don't do videos in general. Say I had a particular topic that I wanted to explain to my audience who might be interested in that. I mean, I could do a somewhat professional video where I would be seated in a pleasing location with a high quality camera and then edit that for optimal quality, but not necessarily the production values of big corporate video, but it would be relatively professional, or I could do that exact same thing, do it on Facebook Live or use other technique like that and then make that available for posterity too, so that people who weren't there could also see it, and it seems like the second one would have a sort of, even for people who viewed it later, a sort of immediacy to it. I hate to use the word authenticity. I'm not sure if that's exactly what I'm looking for, but what do you think? Is there a trade off? Do you see one as being always better than the other, or are there situations where one might be better?

Vern: Sure. I think the way you have outlined it where there's something that's well crafted, scripted, well told, and repeatable, has a

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purpose in certain kinds of context, and we see that whether that's a television show or a TV commercial on the Superbowl, or some of the kind of films that we do which are extremely important in terms of mergers and acquisitions or recruiting. That all works. The other thing that you're talking about which is this live streaming which is raw authentic, really is quite compelling in that you feel like you're there. You feel like you're getting to see the good, the bad, and the ugly, and so that brings you right into the situation, and if that's the ... The situation sort of drives that, and that's what makes it so compelling.

Roger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Great. Well, let me remind our audience that we're speaking with Vern Oakley, author of the new book Leadership in Focus: Bringing out Your Best on Camera. Vern, how can our listeners find you online?

Vern: Well, the book website's under vernoakley.com, and the book is Leadership in Focus, and we have a number of videos that relate to the book. Also, my business is tribepictures.com, and you can see some of the examples of human resources and marketing videos that we've done for our fortune 500 clients, and Twitter is Vern Oakley also.

Roger: Great. Well, we will link to all those places, to the book, and to any other resources we talked about on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast. Thanks for being on the show, Vern. You've inspired me to think about doing some videos myself.

Vern: Excellent.

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).