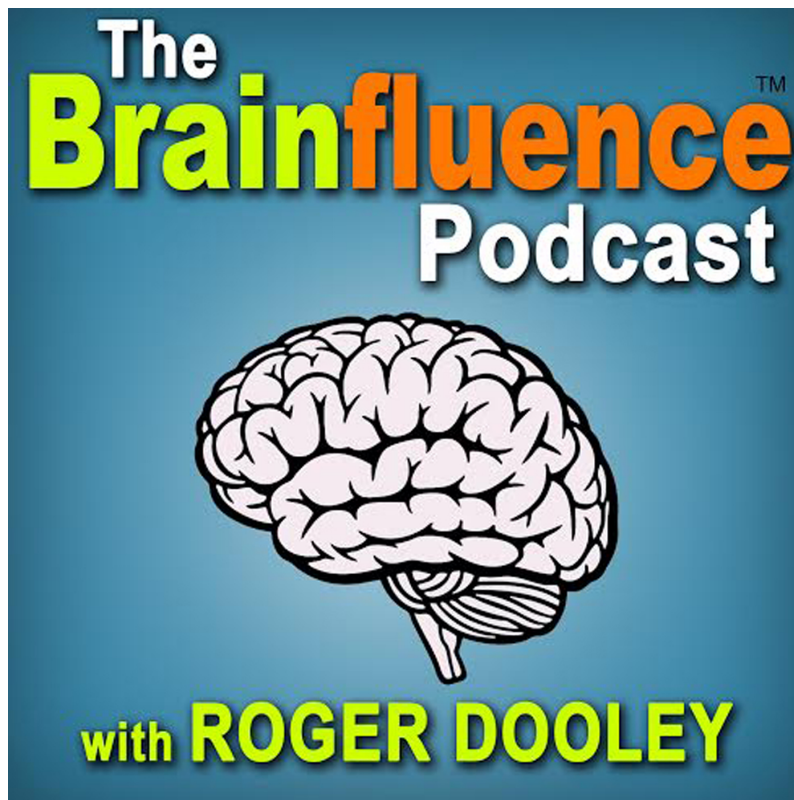


Clarity: Get Heard and Referred with Steve Woodruff

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/steve-woodruff-clarity>



Full Episode Transcript

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Roger Dooley

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

Roger Dooley: Welcome to the Brainfluence Podcast. I'm Roger Dooley. Our guest today is Steve Woodruff. For more than 30 years, Steve has consulted with businesses ranging from entrepreneurs to huge pharmaceutical companies. In the last decade, Steve's clear focus, if you'll pardon the pun in advance, has been on clarity. He helps businesses and individuals achieve clarity in their brand and craft messaging that conveys that. He's the author of Clarity Wins: Get Heard. Get Referred. Steve, welcome to the show.

Steve Woodruff: Thanks Roger for having me. It's a pleasure to talk to you.

Roger Dooley: Steve, you majored in psychology at Vanderbilt. Has that helped your craft?

Steve Woodruff: It actually has I-

Roger Dooley: You say that with an element of surprise in it. Like, who knew a college education could be valuable?

Steve Woodruff: Exactly. Well I went to Vanderbilt intending to become an astronomer, actually, and then I ran into calculus and physics and that was the end of that.

Roger Dooley: The dreaded weed-out courses.

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Steve Woodruff: Yes, exactly. But I took some psychology courses and I found that it fascinated me, and that's the way my mind worked. And it was one of the early indicators that I had, that you gotta run with your wiring. And my wiring was in the realm of ideas and analysis as opposed to facts and figures. I didn't exactly know how to articulate it back then; it was just the way it was. But I didn't really love math, but I really did like psychology. And because my mind works that way, it's certainly led into this field of consulting with businesses and people on clarity and what they're all about.

Roger Dooley: Interesting. Not that dissimilar to my path. I minored in psychology and probably minored in it because I managed to somehow, by the skin of my teeth, get through those weed-out courses and get an engineering degree. But despite that, I probably stopped doing real engineering just a few years out of school and always maintained that longterm interest in psychology. And ultimately it became, sort of indirectly, but through its focus in advertising psychology, persuasion, influence, and neuroscience, ended up becoming my career eventually. So interesting enough I guess.

So Steve, everybody knows the word clarity, but what does it mean to you?

Steve Woodruff: When I speak about clarity, particularly from a business point of view, I look at three elements of it. One is having a very clear understanding of, as I mentioned before, our DNA, our wiring, what we're all about. Many times we don't really understand that until we've gone through some decades of life and we've gone through engineering school and then decided three years later we're not going

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to be an engineer. Or lots of other experiences in the pinball of life where our strengths and our weaknesses are displayed. So for any individual at any company, there needs to be clarity of, understanding of how we're put together, if we're going to really end up doing our best work.

And then after that, we need clarity of focus and strategy. Given who I am and what I can do, where's the marketplace opportunity and where are the client needs that I can best take the recipe, the ingredients of what I am and who I am, and serve and do great work?

And then the third element is clarity of message, where we've got to learn how to communicate in a way that people can understand and remember in succinct, vivid, human-ready words. And I'm sure you've seen over the years so many businesses that communicated complicated jargon and commodity words and they all sound the same. And that's the quickest way to be forgotten, to lose business, and also, of course to not be referral-ready, because if people have no idea who you are and what you do it for, they can't refer you.

Roger Dooley: It's funny, Steve, that you bring up the words issue. We have something in common. There's a little Josh Bernoff in both our books. Josh wrote the foreword to your book and my new book, Friction, focuses primarily on topics like customer effort and organizational inefficiency due to complex procedures, too many meetings and so on. But I devote a little section to friction in writing, making the reader work way too hard by including meaningless buzzwords and convoluted sentences and all the sorts of things that Josh talks about in his book. And in fact I even

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have a little example of his type of work in there taking a really awful mission statement and turning it into something that actually makes sense to a reader.

And I think that's mission statements in general, because when you're talking about clarity, you are really kind of talking about a mission statement, whether it's a personal mission statement or a brand mission statement. And most folks don't even really think about that as an individual. But I don't know how many times I've seen a company's mission statement and it looks so confusing and complicated that any employer or customer reading it would say, "Well okay, these guys seem to have some lofty goals. Not quite sure how that relates to what I'm doing." Josh is very critical of that.

Steve Woodruff: Yes. Lofty is the word. A lot of those mission or vision statements are up in the clouds. And they sound good, they have a lot of aspirational language. But if you swap out a hundred different companies' mission/vision statements you suddenly realize that they all sound the same, because they all feel this need to make these wonderful noises.

But clarity to me is much more practical. You've got to get down into the day to day life of what exactly are we doing, who are we doing it for? Who are the bad guys in our marketplace? What's the narrative of our company and of our customer journey? And those phrases, those words, that language, is what employees and executives and potential customers and partners can understand and relate to. And most companies are missing that layer of clarity. I call it a keystone clarity document, that's human language that anybody can read and say oh, this is where

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we're going, this is how we align this company, this is how we speak. And most companies don't have it.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. While we're on the subject of Josh, he was a past guest on the podcast; we'll be sure to link to that episode. It was well received. And beyond mission statements, his advice is helpful in making any kind of writing clearer, whether it's an email or a report presentation. And it's really great stuff. So, anyway, enough of that.

Steve Woodruff: Well, Josh served as the editor for my book, and he was really my Sherpa to help me bring all my ideas into long format. And he was absolutely ruthless as an editor, which was exactly what I wanted. I wanted somebody who understood clarity, understood communication, and who would make me a better writer. And we had a great time; we both have very thick skin. So we had a really good time!

But I realized also, I'm going to refer Josh, I had to come up with a verbal shorthand for him. So I said, "Josh you're really the Mercedes of business book editors." He later changed it to Tesla, because he has a thing about Teslas. But that verbal shorthand is the way that we can try to compress and distill our message to create a picture, a memorable picture in people's mind, that conveys a bunch of meaning, 'cause we're stealing an existing memory hook. And for me, clarity always boils down to some form of analogy or word picture or metaphor that anybody can understand, and then use as a basis for a referral.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well I guess your own branding is an example of that, Steve, because you know, you could present

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yourself as a communication expert or a branding expert. But all of those things are a dime a dozen. Instead, you present yourself as the King of Clarity. So I guess I'm reading your strategy correctly there.

Steve Woodruff: That's correct. A few years ago on my Facebook Timeline, it was my birthday and Chris Brogan came on and said, "Happy birthday to the King of Clarity." And he came up with that term.

And I looked at that term, and I thought man, that's kind of ballsy! Do I dare embrace that? But I thought it was branding genius. And I decided okay, it's sort of against my New England upbringing to take on a kind of presumptuous title like that, but I decided to run with it.

And sure enough, it has had exactly the effect that I hoped it would. One of my clients even calls up, doesn't even introduce himself, he just say, "Hey King!"

Roger Dooley: Well that's great. But I sense it could be difficult for somebody adopt a mantle like that. If normally you're sort of unassuming, doing your work, trying to do a good job, to differentiate yourself in that manner could make some people feel uncomfortable. Have you had clients perhaps who have had those same reservations? And have you found a way to address those?

Steve Woodruff: Yeah. A lot of times people need outside encouragement. Just as I embraced what somebody else said about me. When I work with somebody and they tend to underestimate who they are and what they do, because this is one of the reasons why I do clarity with individuals and companies is, we don't recognize our strong suits.

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And sometimes I'll give them a rather aspirational or highfalutin name. Or if not that, say here's your corner of the marketplace, here's your niche. You need to plant a big flag there, and say this is mine. This is what I do best.

And that takes some boldness, but when somebody else helps you get over that hump and says, "Yeah you know what? That really is a strong suit, that really is an available niche," it's amazingly liberating. Instead of feeling like you're just another player who's saying the same words, you're carving out your own space. And that's my goal with individuals and companies, is let's find your unique space.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). When you're picking your space, I would imagine there's a tension between going really broad with that, or going into a niche. You know, how do you determine that? Because clearly you want to, perhaps, attack as big a market as possible, whether it's a brand or an individual. But at the same time, the wider you go the less you'll stand out. So how do you balance that out, Steve?

Steve Woodruff: I don't balance that out at all. I am absolutely committed to niche definition and niche marketing. So I think going broad is something that many companies, businesses do in the first few years, when they're just scrambling to make revenue, and also trying to discover who they are. So I have a little bit of tolerance for that. But ultimately, any business or individual that's going to grow has to move beyond a jack-of-all-trades, or a implied will-work-for-food message, to say here's what I do best, here's my strong suit, here's my niche.

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So I turn the word pigeonhole on its head in the book. Most people don't like the word pigeonhole, they have a visceral dislike. Oh no I'll limit my opportunities, I'll limit what I can do. But the fact is, and you know this with your background in brain science, people have a very limited memory capacity, and they will pigeonhole you or your business. You're going to get one memory slot. You're going to get a few words of metadata, a few impressions of metadata around it. And you're going to be in their pigeonhole. And whether it's accurate or not, it's going to happen.

So my point is, the more precisely we can define exactly what we do, who we do it for, what our niche is, and plant that in the memories of our audience, the more likely we are to get great referrals, to be remembered, and to do our best work.

So my message is get to know and embrace and love your pigeonhole. I do a lot of my work in the pharmaceutical industry, in the commercial training, sales training area. And what I've seen over 23 years in that industry is many people come out of it, hang up a shingle as a vendor or as a consultant. Fail, come back in, and a lot of them don't differentiate well. Particularly solo consultants, there's like an almost understood 12 to 18 month cycle where they're going to go back to work 'cause it's too hard.

But one gentleman recently was leaving a company, and he had a tremendous amount of experience. And we started talking about how he could differentiate in his market position. And we identified one area, he didn't know that this was an area of need, but because of my

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industry knowledge I knew this was an area of tremendous need, of doing highly customized, hands on, very fast workshops for groups that are going through quarterly sales meetings and this kind of thing. A lot of vendors do more generic, off the shelf, maybe with less experience workshops. But there was a place for him to sell himself as the hands-on guy, the doer, the experienced guy. He's regional, so he wasn't going after the entire industry, but his region. And he very clearly marked out exactly what I do, this is how I'm going to do it. And then to establish thought leadership, we discussed doing a series of videos where he brings some insights from the field, about a three-minute video. And he's done two of those and he's gotten over 1,000 views on each of these videos on LinkedIn.

And he gave me a glowing voicemail message that almost brought me to tears yesterday. Of gratitude and energy for how incredibly effective this niche marketing has been for him. And I have to say, as a startup consultant, he's done a better job differentiating himself than probably five dozen other companies I know in the industry.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. And that's important. If you've got a brand like McKinsey or Accenture or something, you can sort of rely on that, saying okay we're good at just about everything that you might want us to do. But for the unknown brand, establishing that difference is really critical.

Steve Woodruff: There's another company I was talking to recently, and I hope we do some clarity work with them, where they are competing with the McKinseys and the others like that. But they have chosen a very specific vertical niche as

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opposed to being a generalist. So in their niche, they have top to bottom expertise, and it's going to be really fun to position them and get their message straight, because they've taken one of the four differentiators that I use for defining your niche, which is taken a vertical market. If you have a vertical focus, you pick your vertical, and you don't try to do more.

And they're going to run with that. And so underneath them, they have a bunch of small players that don't have their scale. Above them they have all these big companies with big names that have scale but not the expertise. And I think they can clean house, being a premier provider in a single niche.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, even big names use that to some degree. Bain, for example, for a while, was the consulting firm for CEOs, you know. And well why would you rule out all the other opportunities, and the answer is those opportunities that you do include are really good, and definitely big enough to grow a business.

Steve Woodruff: The way I put it with people is look, there are 7 1/2 billion people on the planet. Not everybody is your customer. So, you're always going to have a subset. You may as well aim at the subset that you can do your best work, for people that have the money, the felt need, the felt pain. And you're going to niche down somewhere. You know, make it as precise as you can, so you're really doing the best work for the best customers. Don't try to do everything. Not every piece of business is good business.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What about a situation where, either an individual or more likely a company, has multiple

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revenue streams, that don't quite fit the same niche. But they're all important. Is there a way of trying to consolidate those into a single brand, or do you just focus on the niche-manship, or pigeonholing, in those individual areas.

Steve Woodruff: I am that person. So, I have a very focused consulting practice that's in, as I mentioned, commercial training in pharma, so that's an incredibly well defined niche with a very clearly defined audience. But the clarity practice that grew out of that work, 'cause that work is a referral matchmaking business, I'm the eHarmony of pharma training. I match up vendors with training divisions.

Roger Dooley: That's a pretty good tagline right there.

Steve Woodruff: That's my memory hook, is the eHarmony part. Took me 18 months to figure out the shorthand for that one.

So, part of that work was sitting down with vendor companies and doing what turned into this Clarity Consulting. It's figuring their brand out, figuring out their message. It's just something I happen to be extremely good at. And then it began to expand into other companies, other verticals, individuals with career transition. So, I have a clarity practice that now is kind of wide open, where almost anybody could conceivably be my customers. But then I also have this niche practice. Both of them though are really founded on the clarity message.

So what I'm doing is exactly what you described in your question. I'm actually bringing these two businesses together; they even have two different names: Clarity Fuel

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and Impactivity. I'm bringing them slowly together under the Clarity banner because that is the core underneath everything. And when you have companies that have multiple avenues or income streams, I always look for what's the core that touches all of it, that's where you build your differentiating message.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I'm wrestling a little bit with that myself, because my first book and most of my speaking engagements have been related to the topics in Brainfluence, which was a guide to marketing using techniques based on either behavioral science or neuroscience or psychology. My new book Friction also has its roots in behavioral science, but is really sort of getting into a different, more expanded area, because it gets into customer experience, it gets into organizational efficiency, even broader topics than that.

So, I've been wrestling, trying to accomplish that same thing that you're talking about, Steve, and okay well how do I define this in a way that isn't overly complex, that preserves the branding equity that I've got. But at the same time encompasses the broader areas? And it's not always easy.

Steve Woodruff: No it's not easy. In your case I think it might be easy, if I might put on my clarity hat for a moment.

Roger Dooley: This is my way of getting some free consulting, Steve.

Steve Woodruff: Yeah, exactly! That's happened before. So, the Brainfluence term is adaptable. Just because in the first case you used it for marketing doesn't mean it can't be used for all these other areas. Just looking at it from the

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surface, I would take that term and run with it, and just say Brainfluence, and customer experience, Brainfluencer ...

'Cause we talking about how to influence people. And that's more than marketing, that's more than sales; that is corporate alignment, that is collaboration. And if you can encompass it all under Brainfluence, you've got a gold mine there of branding equity that can expand infinitely.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay, well, I'm going to work on that. Still evolving, and I will keep you posted on progress, Steve.

So, one quote I really love from the book is, "The customer is tuned in to only one radio station: WIIFM." I think is a really wonderful little message. Why don't you explain what that means.

Steve Woodruff: One of the things that we have to recognize about human nature, and it's just simply the way it is, no matter how many ideals we want to put in front of ourselves, is we all care about number one. What's in it for me? WIIFM.

So, when we have a message for somebody, for sales referrals, a pitch, anything, we have to very, very quickly get to relevance. Why should I care? And this all has to do with the way the brain's filtering mechanism, the reticular activating system, works. The RAS is looking for what is new, what is interesting, what is relevant, what is surprising. Everything else gets filtered out.

So we've got about 15 to 30 seconds, in any website interaction, personal interaction, beginning the sales pitch, to gain attention and to show relevance. And this is

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where most businesses fall flat when it comes to clarity. They try to say too much, too many things, too much information, don't get to the point. And if you start getting me snoozing within one minute because I don't know why, you've lost me. And you've lost any opportunities I might bring as a referral advocate, because you ran out the clock without showing me why it was important.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. And I think that's a very general message, even beyond the topic of your book, Steve, because I don't know how many times, every day in my email I get pitches from people who want something from me. They want to write a guest post, they want to be on the show, or something. And probably 90% of them are explaining their needs, which they are like totally missing the whole WIIFM message, that if you want to get somebody's attention, you have to show how whatever you're offering is, you know, really going to benefit them.

And at least that will keep them reading for a second or two, as opposed to okay, I like to help people, but I'm getting 20 stranger requests a day, so I can't help all of these strangers, and therefore I'm just going to ignore them all. That's something that probably would be a good quote to frame. If there's one quote in the book, that would be on my wall.

Steve Woodruff: Well the book itself, a lot of it is aimed at marketing and business development, and branding. But the fact is, the clarity principles are universal, for all forms of communication. So whether it's teaching, whether it's preaching, whether it's writing an email, whether it's a 30-second ad, the concept of gaining attention, showing relevance, and having some kind of clear call to action, is

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actually a universal clarity formula for communications. Which is a branch that has started to grow out of this tree of clarity; I'm seeing that it's bigger than branding now.

And so, one of the most valuable things in the entire book is if you can change the way you approach what I call the first moment of truth, when somebody encounters you either virtually or really, in the first 15 or 30 seconds, that is the biggest impact you can possibly make on expanding your business and your influence. You've got to win the attention and the relevance battle.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, so, it kind of brings me to referrals. Because there too, I think there's got to be a WIIFM message. You know, rather than just saying, "Hey Steve I'd like you to meet Josh," I think a referral that has something, "Hey, here's a person that can save you money," clarify your message, "because he or she did it for me," immediately that is going to get the recipient's attention. But that's kinda drilling down. Talk about referrals and how that ties into the whole concept of clarity.

Steve Woodruff: Well, the funny thing is, if you stand in front of an audience, and you say, "What is your best way of getting the best business," everyone will say it's a referral. We all know it. We've all experienced it. And we've all made those referrals. And yet we spend this inordinate amount of time on advertising and marketing and social media and all these ways of making more noise, when really the best way to make business happen in referrals.

The point of my book is, how do we activate referrals? How do we turn people into advocates who can take our message, keep it in their minds, and then they can add

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value to others who are looking for something. So if somebody comes to me and says, you know, "I need someone," this won't happen with this word, but "Man I need someone to teach me about Brainfluence." And I'd go, "Oh, that's Roger Dooley," and I'd put you two together. Well I've just done a big favor for you, done a big favor for them. Strengthened my whole network. I've demonstrated some of who I am.

And I just believe with all my heart, and it's been my entire business approach for over 12 years that a referral network is the best way to grow everybody's business. It makes the pie bigger and bigger and bigger, and helps us in the goal of doing our best work. Because if my referral advocates are sending me the right work, I don't have to pursue the wrong work. And if I'm sending them the right work, because of a clear understanding, we're all winning.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And by referral network, I think you mean, not LinkedIn or one of these other sort of lesser known social referral network sites, but an actual network of real humans that you're connected with.

Steve Woodruff: Yeah. Those are tools. I use LinkedIn extensively and I use other tools. But I'm talking about a real human organic network of flesh and blood people. And even an introvert like me, and I am an introvert, can build an exceptional network by doing what you do best. And for me it's listening, it's analysis, it's connecting, it's helping. And over the years I've been able to build a very strong network that way. But I don't have to schmooze at large scale gatherings, which I hate, by the way. I'll go off in the corner, just find one person, go in a corner, and talk. I hate schmoozing.

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If you build a great network of great people, there's this wonderful serendipity about it. You never know which person is going to connect you to the next person that's going to bring a million-dollar contract. But if you're in there, always being a great advocate and connector for others, it will come back to you and it will come back big.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I think the clarity aspect, you really have to be at the top of mind, you know, for whatever it is that you do, because if somebody is asked ... You know, people think about referrals as saying "Gee Steve, I know that you know Josh, can you introduce me? And maybe I can do some business with him." That's okay referral, it's better than maybe just a blind email. But it's not nearly as effective as if the other party comes to the intermediary for recommendations, and blam-o, Roger's the first thing that pops into their head when that topic comes up. Totally-

Steve Woodruff: Well also, I want the referral to be intelligent. So if somebody says, "Hey I need an editor for my kindergarten coloring book; can you introduce me to Josh Bernoff?" Well, Josh is the very expensive, high end business book editor. So I'd say no, that's not a good referral. Now if all I knew was Josh is an editor, then I might make a stupid referral. But this is where the pigeonholing part comes in. If you introduce yourself at a networking meeting and you say "Hi I'm Roger Dooley, and I provide marketing solutions," and that's it. Marketing solutions. Well, 99% of the potential referrals you'd get will probably have nothing to do with what you do.

Roger Dooley: Right. And also, 99% of the people in that room are probably providing marketing solutions!

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Steve Woodruff: Yes exactly! So you become a competitor. Whereas if you have a niche, you can turn potential competitors into advocates, because you're focusing on your best work and you're not competing with them.

Roger Dooley: Total sense. You have any other examples, Steve? I imagine you have a few, that our folks can take home with them to say okay well I can see that being me or that being my brand?

Steve Woodruff: One of the most interesting ones for me was a corporate situation. So this was a gentleman, I had done his career clarity session with to try to help him figure out where he should go in his career. And as we met together, it became abundantly clear to me that he had this architectural mind. He built systems. He built curricula. He knew how to take this real big picture stuff. So some people in training are more on the dynamic facilitator side, and others are more on the outgoing side. Well he was this architect. We called it infrastructure builder, basically was how we hashtagged him.

Then when he took a position with a company that had a training department that was in complete disarray, it was like, this is a perfect match for you, Jason, because that's what they need. They don't need someone that can just carry on a preexisting structure, they need someone to build it.

So he went in and started building this. And we actually then did a clarity session for his department to try to define what is the value of this department to the rest of the organization? And we settled down onto three hashtags, three main points. And he built an organization

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and a culture based on clarity for that department to such an extent that it started growing, we had to do it two years later because it had grown in responsibility and he had gotten very visible in the organization and their responsibilities changed, so we had to do a second clarity session.

And so, boiling things down to a clear mandate and clear words is definitely beyond marketing and branding; it's for internal work in a company that wants to build an effective culture, and give people a clear mandate for their work.

Roger Dooley: That's probably a great place to wrap up, Steve. I'll remind our listeners, today we're speaking with Steve Woodruff, the King of Clarity, and author of Clarity Wins: Get Heard. Get Referred. Steve, how can our listeners find you and your ideas online?

Steve Woodruff: On Facebook I have a King of Clarity page. That's easy enough to find. My website is clarityfuel.com. And the short link to the book, which is on Amazon, is claritywins.org. So if you just type in claritywins.org it goes directly to the Amazon order page. And on Twitter I'm swoodruff, S-W-O-O-D-R-U-F-F. So, I'm pretty easily findable. If you don't remember any of that just type Steve Woodruff into Google and you'll find me.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well we will link to those places and any other resources we spoke about on the show notes pages at rogerDooley.com/podcast. And for our listeners reading, or downloading pleasure, there will be a text version of our conversation there too.

Steve, thanks for being on the show.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

<http://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast>

Clarity: Get Heard and Referred with Steve Woodruff

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/steve-woodruff-clarity>

Steve Woodruff: Roger it was a pleasure. Thanks for having me.

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 <http://www.RogerDooley.com>.