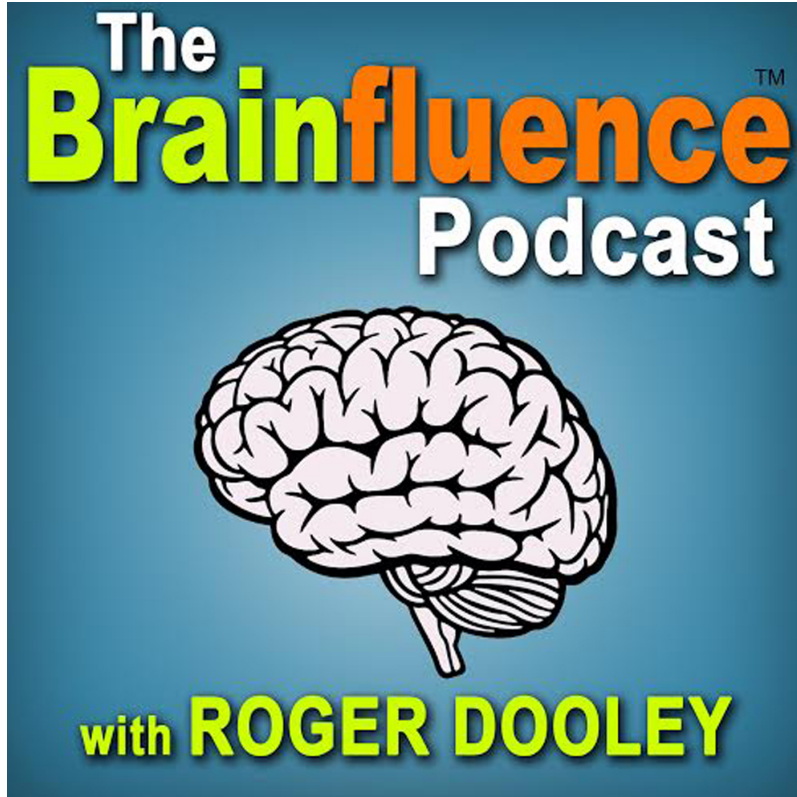


Brand Currency with Steve Susi, ex-Amazon Creative Director

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/steve-susi-brand-currency>



Full Episode Transcript

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Roger Dooley

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Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker Roger Dooley has weekly conversations with thought leaders and world class experts. Every episode shows you how to improve your business with advice based on science or data.

Roger's new book, *Friction*, is published by McGraw Hill and is now available at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and bookstores everywhere. Dr Robert Cialdini described the book as, "Blinding insight," and Nobel winner Dr. Richard Claimer said, "Reading Friction will arm any manager with a mental can of WD40."

To learn more, go to [RogerDooley.com/Friction](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction), or just visit the book seller of your choice.

Now, here's Roger.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to Brainfluence. I'm Roger Dooley. Today's guest spent 16 years as a creative in New York's digital agencies. Then Steve Susi became the New York City creative director for Amazon advertising. Within a few years, he became Amazon's first executive creative director.

He moved to London to weave creative operations across Europe, Asia, and Canada. In 2016, he even received an Amazon inventor award. Steve is now back in New York City once again consulting for iconic brands, and he's the author of the new book, *Brand Currency: A Former Amazon Exec on Money, Information, Loyalty and Time*. Welcome to the show, Steve.

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Steve Susi: Thank you so much, Roger. It is absolute honor and pleasure to be with you today, and thanks to your listeners for checking this out.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, it had to be a real culture shock going from the agency life in New York City to Amazon. Was there indeed a culture shock for you?

Steve Susi: I do express that in the book. I make the illusion that when college football players move into the pros, it takes a good six months for the game to quote unquote "Slow down" for them. The pace, as you might imagine, at Amazon is relentless. In fact, if you type relentless.com into your browser, it automatically redirects to Amazon.

They know that, and they are proud of it. The pace to innovate and to invent on behalf of customers is really, really rapid. The proverbial drinking from a fire hose. And in the agency space, I knew that when I moved on, people said, "You're crazy for leaving the traditional space to go digital." And then that was in '96, and then, "You're crazy to leave the agency space to go to Amazon." But I knew that it was going to be kind of like going to the gym. It would be good for me, but it would be hard at first.

And to immerse oneself in evidence, data and insights and analytics, I knew that it was the place I wanted to be to be able to see if I was really good or not. And so it kind of takes a big gulp for folks to leave the agency world where, let's say, attribution and being responsible for every move you make isn't necessarily job one. Well, it certainly is at Amazon, and I knew it would be the right thing to do.

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And then when I left, I had absorbed so much that I wanted to share it with world, because everywhere I flew around the world to deliver speeches at conferences, and we'd pack the place, because Amazon is kind of an enigma to many people, and how do they do it in so many different seemingly unrelated sectors?

And so yeah, it was dizzying that first few months, I'll be completely honest. It was just about asking questions, taking notes, remaining humble, because it was like that moment when you tip over the top of the roller coaster. And man, yeah, it was a culture shock, to say the very least.

Roger Dooley: I never even realized that Amazon had a creative agency in house that worked with advertisers. When I visit Amazon, I'm really not even aware of ads other than things like sponsored listings. I went today as I was thinking about your book, and looked at a few product pages, and I saw a tiny, tiny banner ad at the top of the page, which was typically, when, at least in the instances that I saw, an ad for Amazon itself or some other product or service offered by Amazon.

Steve Susi: That's the marquee. It's called a marquee.

Roger Dooley: Right. Was pretty, pretty small marquee, as things go. This looks like the classic 460 pixel banner ad, which on my screen, made it almost too hard to read. And as far as other ads on the page, mostly everything looked like a product ad. A little product thumbnail, a little description, maybe some stars and a price and so on. What kind of stuff did you work on?

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Steve Susi: So I lead a team called advertising design and user experience, which as you said, is the internal shop, where there's two different internal agencies at Amazon. One is called Day One, D1, and that they handle only Amazon's external marketing, and other forms of advertising initiatives.

And then ADX, advertising, design and user experience, works with hundreds and hundreds of the biggest advertisers in the world who want to communicate to Amazon customers both on and outside the Amazon universe. And they have to follow really stringent specs, guidelines and acceptance standards.

So early on, Amazon, early in the early days of Amazon advertising, it became pretty obvious to leadership that they needed some folks in house to help agencies and brands navigate what is a pretty, pretty sizable environment with, again, lots of strictitude, so to speak, on how one may present a message to the Amazon customer.

And so ADX was born, and I was the first CD on the New York, the ground in New York, to build that team. And it evolved so dramatically over my six year tenure, because we saw the value of being able to drive free cashflow to help the company afford more research and development. We used to hear all the time, "Keep doing what you're doing, because those marketing budgets that are coming in from the Sonys and the Nissans and the Chairmans of world are helping us develop new and better products for our customers."

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So ADX was born. In the early days, banners were pretty common. And then over time, we started to really focus on custom engagements, again, across the Amazon universe, and whether that be Fire tablet, Fire TV, mobile, Alexa, brand experiences, and on and on. So you're going to see less of a priority for the advertisers to present things like display ads and banners. And a lot of that money has gone to SEO, which has actually recently taken a big turn, kind of demoting organic search in favor of, as you mentioned a moment ago, sponsored ads and brand stores.

And so yes, you're seeing less of those kind of pop-up type, 300 by 250s, and more custom engagements on things like an Alexa, can you solve the mystery of Batman Versus Superman, and things like that, that bring a deeper engagement than any kind of little banner.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. So is there a tension when you're creating and running ads potentially on product pages? Because normally, if you were designing ads, you would test them like crazy to make them eye-catching and to maximize clicks, because you'd want to get maximum clicks, and of course, maximum conversion after that. But if it's on a product page, you don't want to sidetrack it. The customer is about to press that buy with the one click button. Does that tension exist?

Steve Susi: Yeah, it does. And it's a realistic, intangible component of our conversations, whether they be weekly business reviews, quarterly business, et cetera. And what we've termed advertising, really, and it comes from that ethos of everybody's your customer, every communication on

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behalf of a brand for the Amazon customer must be relevant, timely, respectful, and if we do our jobs right, advertising in Amazon and on Amazon anywhere is a customer service.

So that's what makes it different, and why brands would have to work with ADX, because this isn't the stuff that they could just build for Facebook and Instagram and throw it over the wall to Amazon. It has to be, it has to follow those tenants. And so yes, there is an inherent tension between grabbing somebody's attention away from that one click button, and doing our jobs and making sure that by using purchase and browsing history, that the ads will help them make better decisions.

But that's a great question, and it's at the root of why we heard, from the early days, that Jeff Bezos was not enamored with allowing advertising on the site, but he recognized that it could help us lower product prices and serve a customer need with information. So he piloted it, and low and behold, it has grown into a pretty sizeable element of the Amazon offering.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. So Steve, I really liked the book, and it underscores what's different about Amazon. There are a lot of things different about Amazon, I guess. But I think if I asked 100 Fortune 500 CEOs who they worked for, I would guess about 99 at least would say either the shareholders or the board who represents the shareholders. And now, we didn't rehearse this. So I might be surprised by your answer, but if I asked Jeff Bezos that question, what do you think he would say?

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Steve Susi: He would say you. You are the only thing that I care about. Zoom your cultural lens so far into the customer that by definition, the shareholder and the competition do not exist within the frame. That was the approach to every single thing that we do. And this book serves as a guide for folks to be able to use these practical applications to become kind of an Amazon of one, and spread that ethos of humility and customer comes first.

And Bezos has lots of famous sayings, and told so many people, "I don't care about the damn shareholders. They need to be patient. If they're not interested in taking the long view, we don't need them buying our equities. We're in this for the long haul." And those folks who did invest, say, when everybody used to nickname Amazon amazon.org for kind of issuing shareholder value, are now extremely happy with their patients, because the longterm has been met and is continuing to be met.

And that goes to tell you about all of those CEOs out there. They are number one concern with please the shareholders, which I, in the book, called PTS. But you need to convert that to PTC. It is everybody is your customer, and sure, the shareholders are on that list, but they're way at the bottom.

Roger Dooley: Well, I think that statement that you snuck in there, that shareholders don't exist, competitors don't exist, at least by comparison to customers, that's something that is really so profound that I don't know of any other company that takes that same attitude. Everybody says they're customer centric, the customer comes first. But as we both know, when push comes to shove, you still have to

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make the numbers for the quarter, for the year, or whatever, and you know that customer experience improvement might get pushed off until the next fiscal, and that does not happen at Amazon.

Steve Susi: And further to that point too, it is an absolute mistake-ridden enterprise. But I'm saying that with a wry smile and a big, big positive, simply because if you make a mistake while doing your honest best to improve the customer experience, all is forgiven. That's also something that's not common in big organizations and Fortune fives, because innovation is the price, or mistakes are the price of innovation.

And so, it really starts the hiring process, and I go through that in detail. They call it the loop, and the leadership principles provide the framework for the question library, the interview question library. And everybody on that loop has to agree that the person, the candidate, A, raises the bar, has to be better than 50% of the people in the existing organization, and B, can prove through their responses to these scenario-based questions that they have the customer first in mind.

Arrogance is not tolerated. Humility is coached and rewarded. It's hired, promoted, developed. And if you don't show it, it's unfortunately terminated against, but the customer must be first. And that's why this book is 260 pages. Because I really wanted to go deep into the every single day hacking the human system, as I call it, where you build a culture and that culture is universal.

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When I would go to the Tokyo office, or I would go to Munich or Paris, everybody sang from the same songbook. I've never seen anything even close to that. I've heard some things like that about, say, Walmart, but it is drilled into you even before you join the company. And when you get there, you have to demonstrate those qualities and characteristics or you won't last long.

Roger Dooley: Talk a little bit more about the hiring process. I thought that was really interesting, that portion of the book that talks about the bar raiser, and some of the other things that are kind of a unique terminology used in the Amazon process.

Steve Susi: Yes, to be fair, it has been chronicled in Brad Stone's famous book, *The Everything Store*, that Bezos brought this hiring approach from DE Shaw, the programmatic trading house on Wall Street, when he left that company and drove to Seattle to start a book company and begin his pursuit of the everything store.

So you, for instance, there are almost always six people on your loop. It lasts the entire day if you're a candidate and one person must be a bar raiser. This is somebody who has proven they have an eye for top talent. They live and demonstrate the leadership principles of which there are 14, bias for action, frugality, customer obsession, ownership, invent and simplify, it goes on and on. And each person is assigned either one or two leadership principles. Each LP, leadership principle, comes with a big bank of interview questions.

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And if this person doesn't ... It's not ticking off boxes by any means, but you can tell, and we have to take extensive notes and then input them into the internal system for the debrief, which happens a day or two after the loop. And you have to be able to prove that this person demonstrates those leadership principles better than 50% of the existing organization.

And it's a self-policed system, to be fair, simply because if you hire a dud, everybody's going to say, who was on that person's loop? And your performance reviews absolutely take that into account, the quality of hiring and developing the best, which is another leadership principle. If it's a popularity contest, or a beauty contest for the person that you're hiring, you get the crack at performance review time.

So it's an extremely gravely serious approach to organizational development, simply because we all know the bigger a company gets, the easier the hiring standards can decay. And this ensures that that can't happen.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. You talked about humility. One thing that is interesting about Amazon is that everybody flies economy, and not just domestic, but international, which, if you did not have a sense of humility, if you had a sense of entitlement, I think you might look at that as you were sort of scanning what this job might be like and say, "Hey, I've flown to the far East before, and it's, those 12, 14 hour flights are brutal. I'm simply, I don't want to be a part of an organization where probably, at least at the executive level, most companies would pop for business

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class at least, and become a much more comfortable ride."

So that probably, they may lose a few candidates because of that policy, especially if somebody's going to be doing a lot of international travel. But at the same time, it does sort of enforce the humility and the overall sort of egalitarian principles.

Steve Susi: Absolutely. Senior leadership is not exempt. Bezos is extremely proud of this, and as I wrote after I de-boarded a plane from London to Tokyo, I wrote, "Your knees might swell up, but your ego sure won't." And it's because it's a nonstop reminder, and I talk about frugality in there. You just learn to get on with it. It's what makes the company, what keeps prices low for the customer.

And it's uncomfortable for a lot of big companies to think that way, simply because they're afraid they're going to lose people. But think about the people that you would lose. Those people prioritize things like business class over economy because the culture did not mandate that folks think about others rather than themselves. And you just simply wouldn't be happy at a company like that.

There is no Google free lunches, there's no such thing as big parties at holiday time. In my experience, we always had our holiday parties in January, after Q4, because it was less expensive. And so you just learn.

Roger Dooley: So no party in the middle of the Christmas rush.

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Steve Susi: No, no, exactly right. And so, it's those notions that led me to the four brand currencies, because if a company like Amazon can prioritize the customer's money, information, loyalty, and time over its own, it requires an enterprise-wide commitment to humility, and that means folks must be hired, developed and promoted according to those principles.

And when you're thinking about money first, that means you're thinking about shareholders, not your customer. When obviously, information security is incredibly important for companies of all stripes, but giving customers more and more information than they can get anywhere else, that's valuable for their decision making. Loyalty's the amplifier currency, money's the most popular information. It's the most powerful, and time is the only finite currency.

And it just kept hitting me over the head at working there that all of our goals and programs in our performance reviews seem to be tied back to one or more of the currencies. And why I wrote the book.

Roger Dooley: Well, it certainly seems to be working for them. And you talk about information, I think that Amazon does such an amazing job of giving you not only product information, obviously, they were the first to really do reviews right, much to the dismay of some of the sellers or publishers in their book days who didn't like people saying bad things about their products, or why you don't want to put bad stuff up there.

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But that was certainly brilliant. But even simple things like being able to look at your order history, going back as far as I know, to your first order. I've found stuff that I bought eight years ago. I said, "Maybe I need another one. It finally wore out." And most, if I go to my cable TV provider, I can't see my bill from eight months ago. That's gone. You're going to have to pay a fee if you want us to resurrect that document.

It's not like storage space is incredibly expensive these days. But it's that answer, that, "Hey, this is something that people would find useful." And I don't often look at five or seven year old orders, but once in a while, I do. And it's really nice to have that there.

Steve Susi: Absolutely. And obviously, the reason why wherever I spoke during my time there, the venues would be packed, is because unfortunately, they're kind of a notoriously secretive company. So they spend all of their information energy on the customer. They're not really a chest beater. It's a humble brand. It's a humble company. They'd rather spend their time and energy on ensuring the customer has the most information.

Then they release their quarterly reports and everything like that. But a lot of people just are not aware of the level of detail. Information of all forms is used to improve the customer experience. And I talk about that where when you give the customer more information, they're more likely to give you more of theirs. And of course, there's so much of it that's completely confidential and off limits to anybody. No one's allowed to see a lot of that stuff.

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What is accessible is there for one reason, and that's for us to be able to get better. I come up with this illusion of the mirror company versus the window company. A mirror company is looking at itself, and it's not looking out the window at the customer. And data provides that window. So information is so valuable internally as well as externally. It's kept safe. One data breach could destroy a company anymore. We saw what happened with Yahoo a few years ago. So that's job one.

But from there, the notion of giving the customer as much information, I mean, who in the world thought of giving customers free pages of a book they haven't even bought yet simply because they could get that in a bookstore? They can open a book and start to peruse it. Well, Amazon offers that on my book. You can go ahead and look inside. It's called look inside. So it was just all these different ways that customers can feel that they're making a better choice.

And that subliminally enhances the brand experience, which is why more people have Amazon Prime today than go to church every week, or own a gun, if you believe Scott Galloway of L2 Gartner. So it's a ... And I think information plays a vital role there.

Roger Dooley: Well, definitely. And I wonder if you could talk about the way they balance security of the customer information and user experience. Because I visit many sites that apparently, the securities are, has sort of taken charge of user experience, and it makes a site very difficult to use. You have crazy password requirements, and they log you

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out after 15 minutes, and they do this and they do that, and it creates a lot of user effort.

And Amazon seems to eliminate a lot of that. But those protections are there. If you try and do something, like if you ... I decide to send you a brand new TV, and I had never shipped you anything before, something would kick in and say, "Okay Roger, you need to prove that you're really Roger." But when I click that one click button, it just magically appears 40 hours or 24 hours later.

And since you were directly involved with user experience, what's your take on it? How do they manage to strike a much better balance than other companies doing? And I've never changed my password, by the way. I've still got the same lousy password I set up a dozen years ago.

Steve Susi: Qwerty? Q-W-E-R-T-Y?

Roger Dooley: Oh, hell, no. Now I'm going to have to change it.

Steve Susi: Oh, geez. Cat's out of the bag. Actually, I bring that up in the book simply because Amazon is a single sign on universe, and you can elect for two step authentication if you want, but basically, with its single sign on universe comes some challenges. For instance, you're logged in. So for instance, at this moment, I have probably seven Amazon devices that are all signed in.

Now, that's not a problem, because I live alone. But if I had a child, there's a big concern there. So there's lots of ways that they approach because simply in the early days

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of shopping on Fire tablet, kids were ordering stuff from their parents' order history, and it would just show up, and they would, of course, the customer service folks would get an angry phone call and they'd have to kind of send the order back, and it was a pain.

So there are many safeguards. Another big reason why Amazon's web services has become the juggernaut it is is because using an elastic cloud that has military grade authentication or authentication and those services which have been trustworthy, has that, I believe they've really cracked that code. But it is an ... The hackers only have to be right once. Amazon has to be right every single day, and there are armies of engineers that are dedicated solely to that.

So it is a valid question that you'd raise. Well, how can I have all of these devices all signed on simultaneously and make that secure? After a while, it will log you off on some certain devices, but they plan for that years and years, probably two decades ago, we're going to build an ecosystem and it's got to be 100% secure.

Now, they've had their challenges. You heard recently that there were some Alexa engineers that were permitted to listen to actual voice recordings from the system to be able to improve that. So it's doing it for the right reason, but there are a lot of folks that feel that that's a creepy breach of trust. And so there are always going to be these challenges for big tech. But I think so far, Amazon, on the whole, has done a great job, especially when you're dealing with a million page views a second. The volume is dizzying at that company.

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Roger Dooley: Yeah. And I think the experience is phenomenal, and it's, to me, this is all part of the customer first orientation. The companies that have these really onerous security requirements to use their website, they're really putting their own interests first, because they know it would be really bad if they got hacked.

People would lose jobs, and you know the company's stock price might go down. And so to prevent these potentially bad occurrences for them, they put in extra locks and keys and safeguards that end up actually making things difficult for the customer. And Amazon, it's not like their security is weak, but they've done a better job of balancing than anybody, I think.

Steve Susi: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And I even spend part of the manuscript shaming the legal departments of the world, simply because what they've done is obfuscate the customer's recognition and understanding of their policies by putting in tons of legal language on purpose, and shame on you if your legal department is doing that, because it's not customer centric, and it's self centric.

We all know that legal is there to protect the company and that's absolutely acceptable, but there are ways to go about it so that something that's serious and important isn't also destroying the customer experience. Because people will have a hundred other choices, and it takes the tap of seven keys plus dot com to go to one of those other choices.

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I think that some companies out there are going to learn the hard way that it's not about protecting yourself first. That's important, but it's not everything.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. My friends Bryan and Jeffrey Eisenberg have written about Amazon as well, and they always talk about the amount of testing that Amazon does, constantly running as many as, perhaps, hundreds of AB tests, or other types of tests, on their site all the time. And by and large, users are unaware of this. Maybe once in a while, they might notice something, but explain, I think that kind of relates to the two way door concept. Explain what that is.

Steve Susi: Okay. Two-way door is a Jeff-ism, as they say at Amazon, where you are looking under every single rock you can to identify where a user experience can be improved, or indeed, for the first time, an objective can be met, which is why they seem to be going into all these different kinds of businesses.

Well, there are goals and programs wrapped around doing something unprecedented to improve the customer experience. Okay, so a two way door. You use data to uncover these areas where the customer experience stands to be improved, whether or not it is an existing product or it's a future product. And you run through that two way door, and you test it, and if it works or if it doesn't, your responsibility is to come right back through that door and tell everybody. Tell everybody you can so nobody wastes their time making the same mistake if it doesn't work.

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Those who understand that you've had a successful test and that this is going to warrant some more, say, time and energy with one of your goals or your programs, they also don't duplicate efforts and thereby waste time. So it's all done in the spirit of go ahead, and you may break eggs on the way to an omelet, but just tell everybody and make sure that you can provide evidence that it's on behalf of the customer.

It's not for you, or for you to win an award or get a patent. I was lucky enough to be on a team where we invented numerous new products, one of which was patented this year, and it was all because I read a report in operational planning season one that we weren't fulfilling our advertisers' goals in a certain area of our offering. And it wasn't about pursuing a patent, even though I was really excited to be on that team and lead that team to the patent. But it was more along the lines of use information.

Be honest, we all make mistakes. Vocally self-critical is another leadership principle, but if you can prove you're doing it for the right reason, knock yourself out. And so a lot of companies don't generate that level of forgiveness if the customer is doing something honestly to make something better for you or for your loved ones or perfect strangers. If I can make it better, I have full license to do it, and I don't even have to ask.

Also, there's a Jeff-ism, 70% of the data is usually enough to make an informed decision. So that speaks to the bias for action leadership principle, which means you're not going to sit around and ask and wait. The customer experience is out there to be improved. Go now. Don't

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even ask. Build a program around it, which is what I did for that one product that got patented, and didn't even ask any permission. And it works.

And so I think anybody listening to this podcast can apply these simple, straightforward notions in their workplace and watch the trappings of winning, of success, spread like wildfire. They're straightforward principles, but because of human nature being what it is and people wanting to fly first class and all those other examples, it may not be the easiest to implement straight away.

So I implore the user to start doing those things on their own, and then not asking permission, just doing it on their own, making sure that they are communicating out with results, whether good or bad. Then you're going to see other people follow suit, and I call that hacking the human system. You can hack all of the technological systems you want, but if you don't have consensus, which is the currency of leadership, you're not going to go far. So that's one of the reasons I kind of think of this book as a guide, because it just shows you how to implement those things.

Roger Dooley: You know, Steve, I start my Friction book with a very short fable about a CEO that decides to get out of the cost cutting death spiral to meet the quarterly and annual numbers and instead focus on customer experience and simplifying internal processes too. That is fiction, unfortunately. I guess I should add that the rest of the book is fairly typical nonfiction with a little theory, and a whole lot of examples and stories from real people and companies.

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But I'm curious. It'd be nice to believe, I think, that there are CEOs who are, in fact, doing that. Have you encountered any companies that do have as relentless or even are approaching that kind of focus on the customer as Amazon is?

Steve Susi:

I do know that, and I've heard quite a few folks who have a sizeable amount of internal experience at Walmart. It's keeping the prices lowest for the customer, is their ultimate leadership principle. So I know that they demonstrate those things, but it's more on the lines of saving money. Do I see other companies? I think what the direct to consumer revolution has shown us is that there are smaller, nimble companies that can create great products.

You think of Dollar Shave Club and Casper, and legions of other companies like that that are using data, staying humble, finding something to improve, improving it and not gashing the customer with maximum margin. Keep margins low so that your position in the market is defensible. Keeping, putting, making prices high actually invites competition.

So the DTC folks out there, the Warby Parkers and the Bombas, did such a great job of doing that, and I have a feeling they're going to continue to unseat a lot of the Sertas and Seeleys and Gillettes out there who are big, established monoliths with practices over a hundred years old and aren't willing to move as quickly or able to move as quickly as the customer expects. And so we're just going to see this continue on and on. I have a feeling

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these little companies are going to be the Davids to the Goliaths.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. And some of them are moving into retail, as well, now. Have started off in purely digital, but now they're opening retail outlets and taking the competition directly to some of these older companies.

Steve Susi: Exactly. Same with Amazon too. Just announced that they're going to have a new grocery brand. So they understand the value of a first person sensory experience, because it's tough to tap a honeydew online. So yeah, but they're making, as Amazon is wont to do, they're taking it slowly, reviewing all the data, and making the best decisions with their customer's money.

Because at Amazon, it's not Amazon's money, it's the customer's money, and what are we doing with that money to better serve them? And again, that goes back to the humility principles. So yeah, you're seeing that are now taking it to them in the physical space as well.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. And I think your example of Walmart is interesting, because they do have that very sharp focus on low price. I guess the only problem I would have with them is that, first of all, being the lowest price is a difficult niche to defend, at least from a pure loyalty standpoint, if somebody comes along and undercuts. Of course, their whole effort is, if we're the biggest on the planet, nobody can ever undercut us.

But I've seen some ratings of their customer loyalty surveys, and they are at the absolute bottom of the list.

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And also, the other area where they fare very poorly is on customer delight scale, where the customer experience in their stores is just really not great. Where, with Amazon, I use an example of a few years ago in Texas, they began charging 8% sales tax, which previously, we weren't paying.

So for me, it was an 8% price increase right out of the gate on Amazon that I did not have on all online vendors. A few, yes, if they had outlets here, but many others still were not charging sales tax. And I expected my behavior to change, but it didn't change, because I just found it so easy to do business with Amazon, and it was such a good experience, and they were so incredibly reliable, and I trusted them so much that I almost never shopped around the way I thought it was going to.

And yeah, to me, that is a truer type of loyalty than one that is based on either purely having the cheapest price, or even maybe having some product feature that nobody else has, but ultimately somebody else might have.

Steve Susi: Absolutely. There's also, there's a visceral attraction. When you see that smile box on your doorstep, people generate oxytocin. This is neuroscience. It's proven. Just like when you see these Apple fanboys, when they, in MRIs, they're testing their brainwaves, it generates the same response as religious zealots do approaching their house of worship. There's something to be said about that so that you can absorb A, mistakes, because we're all going to make them, and B, things like an 8% increase.

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Because you don't have to think, yeah, it stinks I have to pay 8 cents more per dollar to be able to get those swimming goggles, but I know they're going to be here on time, so I'm willing to eat it. And I'm not saying they're doing that to take advantage or manipulate or hold a kind of unfair leverage over a customer, but everything else they seem to do, they do it really, really well.

Oh, you work for Amazon? When I used to work there, and folks would say, "I love it so much." How many times I've been told, "Oh, you guys have to name a wing and your offices after me, because I live off Amazon." So I used to say the promise of Amazon isn't only online, it's on your doorstep. It affects people's lives and they can depend on it. So that's their ability to absorb mistakes, or things like the negative press they've recently received on the HQ2 story.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, that was an interesting bake off they had.

Steve Susi: It really was. And I don't broach the subject in the book simply because that happened after the release, but there are ways that even Amazon, I'm not an apologist for Amazon. It's a company of humans that are flawed like the rest of us, and they're going to make mistakes. But I have a feeling that that culture that they've built internally, which seeps through the walls of the conference rooms out into the world, isn't going anywhere anytime soon.

And so there are ways to kind of get past the hiccups, like things like the HQ2, or they've got a bad reputation on the question of paying taxes. But I know for a fact they're

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following every word of the law. So maybe the law needs to change.

Roger Dooley: Right. The tax code encourages businesses to do specific things by giving them breaks, and you can't criticize Amazon or any other business if they do the things that they're being incentivized to do. People then think it's an outrage, because gee, their tax bill is zero, or it's really low. That's the system, and the system may be wrong.

If all these corporations are paying no taxes, then maybe the system itself needs to be fixed. But anyway, that's probably a pretty good place to wrap up. Today, we are speaking with Steve Susi, author of the new book, *Brand Currency: A Former Amazon Exec on Money, Information, Loyalty, and Time*. Steve, how can people find you?

Steve Susi: Well, if you want some of my information, I would be loyal to you if you visited, took a moment and visited brandspankingnewyork.com. It's a portfolio site of mine. You can learn a little bit more of my background, and you could just Google search my name, Steve S-U-S-I, and I'm maybe the only Steve Susi out there, so I'm easy to find. And you can search for me on LinkedIn, as well.

And I'd love to hear comments or just thoughts from your listeners who, if I know anything about the podcast sphere, these are among the most intelligent there are, and I just wanted to say again, I really, really appreciate your time today, and your information may not involve money, but you have my loyalty.

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Roger Dooley: Great. Well, thank you, Steve, and we will link to those places and to any other resources we mentioned on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast. And we'll have a transcript there, as well. Steve, I don't think I'll ever stop urging our listeners to be more like Amazon, and thanks for being on the show.

Steve Susi: Thank you so much, Roger. Have a fantastic day, and I love your work.

Thank you for tuning into this episode of Brainfluence. To find more episodes like this one, and to access all of Roger's online writing and resources, the best starting point is RogerDooley.com.

And remember, Roger's new book, *Friction*, is now available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and book sellers everywhere. Bestselling author Dan Pink calls it, "An important read," and Wharton Professor Dr. Joana Berger said, "You'll understand Friction's power and how to harness it."

For more information or for links to Amazon and other sellers, go to RogerDooley.com/Friction.

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