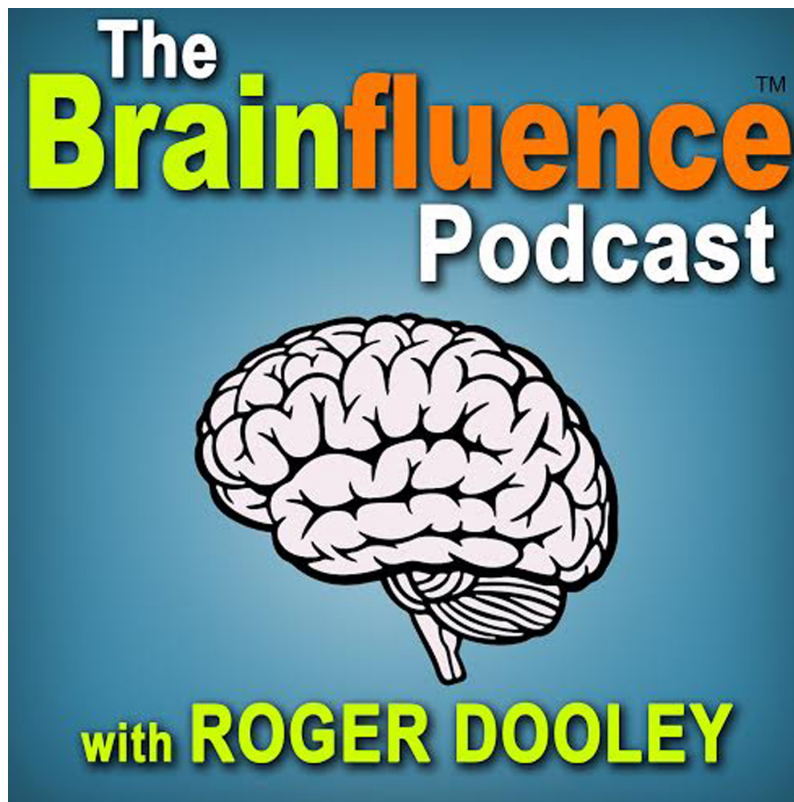


How to Win at Zoom with Nick Morgan

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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, and I am delighted to have today's guest back again on the podcast for the first time in video format. It is Nick Morgan, who a couple of years ago penned this really fascinating book, *Can You Hear Me?: How to Connect with People in a Virtual World*.

Now, you might think that Nick saw the pandemic coming, and knew that we would all be communicating by Zoom or various other mechanisms like that, but actually he didn't. This is something he'd been devoting thought to, wrote a book about it, and now it is really an essential guide to communicating. And that's one reason why I'm so delighted.

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Let me introduce you as Nick Morgan, and you are a speaker coach and speaking expert. Tell me a little bit more about what you do.

Nick Morgan: Yeah. Thanks, Roger. First of all, it's great to be back with you. It's fun to have this chat, and the only way we can connect with people now really virtually.

I've been running a company called Public Words since 1997, and we say we help people tell their stories. We help people develop the ideas that then become speeches, and books, and websites, and other forms of thought leadership. To use a fairly suspect phrase that seems the best one we have. So, there are a lot of thought leaders out there. People who have things to tell the world that they believe is important, and that will change the world, and we help them do that.

Roger Dooley: Well, certainly communication has changed. So much has changed. I was corresponding with a friend of mine at Carnival Cruise, and a year ago who could have imagined that the entire industry would be shut down, like nothing, no business, zero, nada. It's absolutely crazy.

And I guess in the communication space, too, has been upset. Maybe not quite as much, but these days in person meetings are pretty much out of the question still. Maybe we're edging toward having them back somewhat. Conferences are all virtual, and we're using just about only electronic communication.

So I'm curious, well, and ironically enough, I guess I should add as we were connecting, we actually had difficulty here with Zoom because the technology still is

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not totally transparent. Somehow we were both in a room waiting for each other, but could not see each other. And finally after a few little clicks and changes, we got together.

But I'm curious, you've probably been doing a lot of this lately, too, talking to people, having meetings, and such. What are the biggest mistakes that you see? Whether it's Zoom, or Skype, or ... I'm going to use Zoom for shorthand because in the last few months, Zoom has become like Google has for search. Any kind of a web conference is Zoom. But what are the biggest mistakes you see people making, Nick?

Nick Morgan: I think really the biggest mistake can be summarized by a phrase, which is 'don't fight the last war'. Apparently generals are famous for fighting the last war, re-fighting the last war. And I think this phrase originated during the Vietnam War when the generals who had been successful in World War II were still trying to fight a land war similar to what worked then, and didn't work in the jungles with the sniper situation that they had in Vietnam.

So, we're all fighting the last war, and it's harder for us actually because we're unconscious about it. So, we naturally communicate face to face using this envelope of intent that is incredibly important to us, but we don't think about it consciously. What we humans care about is each other's intent. We care about that a lot more than the specific words you might use.

And so, if you come up to me with a smile on your face, and you shake my hand and say, "Nick, it's nice to meet you," then I believe you, not because of the, "It's nice to

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meet you," phrase, but because of the smile on your face, and the warmth of your handshake, and just your general body language as a whole. We still communicate as if that's how we were communicating even though we're communicating online. And I'll give you a very specific instance of what I mean.

I often ask people when I'm talking about this challenge, "How many of you sent the following email? Good job, nice job, great job, with or without an exclamation point. I don't care." 100% of people have sent that email, anybody in a workplace. They send it to their colleagues, or if they're a boss, they've sent it to their direct reports.

And I'll say, "Don't worry. It's not a trick question. You're nice for sending that email. It's a good email to send. Don't feel bad about it," right? And I'll say then, "But would it surprise you to learn that 60% of the time that email is taken as sarcastic?" And when I was talking about that when the book first came out Face to Face, I would get an audible gasp from the audience. Online, I don't get that audible gasp.

But I delve into it. I found what people were honestly thinking was, "Wait a minute, how could the other person be so stupid as to misunderstand my obvious intent to tell them that they'd done a great job?" Well, I started saying, "That's an understandable feeling, but it's the wrong question. The right question is 'how can I make my intent clear?'" And when you send a two word email, the intent is not clear because it come with that envelope of warmth and friendliness that your face, or your handshake, or your body language might convey. Absent the friendly envelope of intent, then we don't know how to receive it.

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And if I'm in a bad mood, or I'm in a hurry, or if I don't know you all that well, I could just as easily decide that your intent is sarcastic. So, that's what we're talking about here.

Roger Dooley: I guess maybe that's the role that emojis are supposed to play. Although emojis have a long way to go. They vary across platforms, and some platforms are very hard to use. But I think that's potentially one way that you could clarify that intent. A little bit more than with just the words.

Nick Morgan: Yeah. I'm a big fan of emojis, and it's something I talk about with audiences all the time. And I frequently get pushback from people who are over about age 40, 45, or so. Because they'll say-

Roger Dooley: That would include anybody in this conversation.

Nick Morgan: Yeah, exactly. They say-

Roger Dooley: All I need is sarcasm emoji right there.

Nick Morgan: Yeah, right. Exactly. Because I say it's not dignified, or it's insufficiently business like, emojis belong somewhere else. But anybody under 45 or 40 is already using emojis. And so, it's just a generational thing.

But emojis are a very simple way to put basic body language back in. They're crude, yes. And I would say stick to the simple, direct ones like the smiley face. But if you send that email, "Nice job, great job, good job, smiley face," nobody's going to read that as anything but the friendly email that it is. So, that's the way to do it.

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Roger Dooley: Right. Well actually, you bring up a good point because I'll want to focus mostly on Zoom and related tools. Email is still the primary way we're communicating. For every Zoom conversation I've had, I've had, I don't know, 100 email conversations or something. And that's not counting all the one way email communications, but just where I've had some sort of an exchange back and forth with an actual human. So, email is in this age even more critical.

Nick Morgan: Yeah. And it's good to remember that, that we're using every day a virtual hierarchy of communication. And at the base is written forms of communication, whether it's email or text messages, or if you use Slack, some sort of office productivity tool. And that is by far the way most of us communicate most of the information we send to each other.

And so, that is important, and it's also the worst form of communication for intent because few of us are Shakespeares, and it's hard to get our emotions across in email. And as time has gone on, we get more and more of it, and so we have to skim and triage more, and send shorter emails than we used to. And as a result, the opportunities for misunderstanding get greater and greater.

So, email is the base. Then, there's audio conferences and phone calls. That's a little better because you can check to see if you've been understood. Or if you've misunderstood something, you can get clarification. And then, at the top is video conferencing. And that's the best, but it has the issues that I'm sure we'll talk about. Chief of which is Zoom fatigue, which is so widely reported on and complained about these days.

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Roger Dooley: What do you think Nick about combining video in an email? I've had this a few times, either via social media, like LinkedIn, or an email where somebody sends me a video to play, which ostensibly is to maybe enable some of that face to face feel, and for them to convey more accurately what they want to convey. Usually, it's a sales pitch for something, so it hasn't been that effective. But I'm wondering if that's something that you think we should all be doing more of or not?

Nick Morgan: Well, I think you're absolutely right to voice the slight suspicion or concern that they always seem to be sales pitches, those little video inserts. I do have a group of friends who send each other audio clips instead of emails embedded in an email, and that has the advantage of you hear the warmth of the voice, and it feels a little more personal, and whatnot.

It has the disadvantage frankly of it's harder to triage that, or it's harder to skim that. And that's my problem with video, too. So if it's going to be lengthy, then video is not the best format. For lengthy and a lot of information, unfortunately the written word is best. But for brief messages and just sort of a friendly face, there's nothing wrong with that provided you've got nice, robust software, and it all works, and it doesn't hang up the receiver trying to make it work.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. So, getting back to Zoom and its ilk, one of the challenges is the inability to do a lot with gesture. I know when we're communicating in person, we tend to wave our hands around a lot. Where here, either you can't see the person's hands, or their hands look giant, and weird

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and bizarre. That really limits communication. Is there a way around that, or do we just accept that's the way it is?

Nick Morgan: Yeah. It's one of the limitations of video conferencing is because of the way we tend to sit, and you tend to get head and shoulders as a result. Bringing your hands up takes a little bit of work. And the result is that it looks less energetic than a person would look delivering the same information face to face. And so, it's a good reminder that you should make an effort to bring those hands up, and wave them around, and whatnot because that conveys energy. And when we can't see somebody's hands, we think they're not as deeply engaged in the conversation.

So, that's not a good thing. And that is one of the reasons. There's several. That's one of the reasons why video conferencing, Zoom conferences as we call them, feel flat and tiring after a while is because we don't see those hands. We want to see them. Bring your hands up, wave them around. But it feels a little awkward. It feels a little self conscious, right? And then, you end up watching your own hands on your little picture, and that's distracting. Yeah. All of this takes work. It's not simple.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. And it's also the fact that most webcams are very wide angle, so they exaggerate anything that's closer to the screen. Even if it's just a few inches closer and it looks five times as big.

I guess I've seen quite a few mistakes. I'm wondering if you've got any basic recommendations for the environment. I've seen people who are back lit, so they look like a shadow person in front of a window. People have crazy distracting backgrounds, or stuff going on,

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noisy things. And sometimes we have no choice. We've gotten accustomed to, even when a CEO's getting interviewed, having a dog barking in the background, or other distractions like that. Do you have any suggestions for how people can control the image they present to others, whether it's a one-on-one or a meeting of multiple people?

Nick Morgan: Yes. Actually, I have very strong feelings about this, so I'm glad you brought it up. This is a little soapbox for me to climb on at this point.

Roger Dooley: Don't stand on it. You'll be out of your—

Nick Morgan: That's right. I'll go above the webcam. The issue has to do with a sixth sense that we all have, and most of us are unaware of because they don't teach it in school. It's arguably the most important sense. It's called proprioception. And what that is is your brain 24/7, awake or asleep, keeps track of where you are in space, and where the people around you are in space.

And so for example, if you share a bed with a partner, this is the reason, and proprioception you can thank for not rolling over and whacking your partner in the face with a random hand. That's how you're able not to do that.

Roger Dooley: So, if my wife whacks me occasionally in the middle of the night, hers is broken?

Nick Morgan: Yeah, it's deliberate. Yeah. And you might want to bring it up in a safe context, yeah. But why it's important in the video conferencing sense is that proprioception helps us keep track of where we are so we don't bump into things, and where other people are around us so that we can

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take evasive action if they come at us in threatening ways, or decide they're friendly and we can relax. All right.

So, the proprioception sense wants to know where the people are, you and the people around you. As you and I get on a Zoom call, as we are now, what happens is our proprioception sense says, "Oh, Roger's pretty close to me because he looks like he's about an arms length away. That's where I've got my computer now." And yet his head's the wrong size for being that close. And so, my proprioception sense goes, "Whoops, I can't tell where this person is." And as a result, it goes into low stress mode. I have a fight, or flight, or freeze as we call it technically, response.

Now, that's where Zoom fatigue comes from. So, if you spend all day doing Zoom, your body, you should understand, your body is in a low stress mode. It's a panic mode you might want to call it, or adrenaline mode. And it's not super high. It's not like the heart pounding kind of thing. You're running away from a grizzly bear. It's not that kind of level. But it's low, but it's there nonetheless. And over time, that just simply wears you out. It's like being on high alert for a long period of time.

So, what can you do about this? You can do as I've done in my hastily arranged basement office when the pandemic hit, so it's not a beautiful space, but what I did was I put up pictures on the wall there because your brain thinks it knows how big pictures are. And so then, it can calibrate. It gets a little three-dimensional depth perception. So, it can calibrate where I am, and you think, "Oh, I know those pictures are a certain distance away.

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Nick's standing. He looks like he's X distance away from those pictures, therefore I know how close he is to me."

So, I'm actually doing you an enormous service, Roger, by putting those pictures up. I'm dressing the set as movie directors and theatrical people call it. And they've been doing that for years, by the way. They know how to do it. If you think of everybody's favorite TV program, Friends, if you think of that Friends set, it is designed precisely so that you don't have a panic response.

In other words, you can tell how far away those four or five nice people are because you know how big a sofa is, and the primary object in the picture is always that sofa there in the coffee house, right? And behind that, then there's a space, and the wall, and there are things on the wall, and there's a bar over on the other side. All those things are designed to dress the set. To give you a sense of depth perception so you know how far away those things are.

Of course, movie directors and TV set dressers also play with those things sometimes to deliberately distort your sense of depth perception. They make monsters look bigger, or they make people look smaller, and that's for fun, and for scariness, and all that sort of thing. But on the whole, what they're doing is trying to create a sense of believable depth perception. If you do the same thing, you help the other person relax in that situation because they think, "Okay, I know where Roger is. I can relax. He's not some weird wrong size so that I can't tell if he's too close, or too far away, or whatever."

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Roger Dooley: Right. So actually, if you were in a very small room, which you might or might not be, you would make those pictures smaller behind you to make it appear that you're in a regular size room.

Nick Morgan: Right. I could play with the size.

Roger Dooley: Not much like in Lord of the Rings. Ian Holm famously played Bilbo, and the comment I heard was, "Yeah, he's actually an excellent actor. Unfortunately, most of the world thinks he's three feet tall." And that was all done by perspective. It wasn't done by digital editing, they just changed the perspective of him and the one he was next to, Gandalf for example.

So yeah, I guess while we're talking about your home studio set up here, are you standing, Nick?

Nick Morgan: Yeah, I'm standing and I do that-

Roger Dooley: Yeah, go ahead. That's great because it lets you create a greater sense of energy I suppose.

Nick Morgan: Yes. Yeah. And what happens when we sit is we fall into the slump of the average person sitting in a chair. So, I do it to keep the energy up, and to keep focused, and that kind of thing. If I do a whole day of Zoom calls, it does get tiring. But presumably, it's good for my blood pressure.

Roger Dooley: Right. Yeah, there you go. Yeah. Yeah, I saw a keynote delivered by a pretty famous keynote speaker, and it was a typical video keynote where he was fairly energetic with his mannerisms and whatnot, but it was pretty evident that he was sitting there, and I'm pretty sure that the experience was not as good as it would have been had

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he been on a stage in front of me walking around, and gesturing, and so on. Because he had to stay in the field of view of the camera, couldn't move around.

And seated just tends to be a little bit less energy. Although obviously if you're in an all day Zoom conference, maybe you don't want to be standing the whole time. But if you are on a short call, or if you are maybe doing some kind of a presentation, that definitely works.

How would you rate the trade off between having more of you in the picture so that you've got more gestures and upper body, versus not seeing your facial expressions perhaps as well?

Nick Morgan: That's a challenging one. There's no perfect solution to that because we react to where you are in relation to the camera, according to a vernacular we've learned over the years from the movies. And so in the movies, we have head and shoulder shots. So, this is kind of you're in my personal space. This is conversational, right?

If I come close to the camera like this, then it looks like I'm in your intimate space. And we do that in movie closeups and TV closeups when the two people are about to kiss, or they're having a very intimate conversation, or if somebody's crowding the personal space such as the drill sergeant is yelling at the private, or something like that, you get this in your face thing. So, you can't get too close.

On the other hand, if you get too far away, then to your point, the facial expressions disappear. And that's the problem with the reduced size, and that's one of the main

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reasons why Zoom over time gets tiring is because we don't see enough of the face. So somewhere in there, there's a happy medium. It's not here, and it's not here. It's about there, and that's about the best we can do.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. It may depend, too, on the nature of the thing that you're doing. If you're going to be in a web conference with 20 other people, and you're all little, tiny squares on the screen, probably being closer is better because otherwise people won't even be able to tell who you are. On the other hand, if you are doing a solo presentation that a lot of people are going to be watching maximized on their screen, then you can probably afford to step back and still be seen pretty well.

Nick Morgan: Yeah. Head and shoulders is a good rule, but I like to be far back enough and have enough space so that I can bring my hands into play for the energy message that it sends.

Roger Dooley: Right. What advice do you have, Nick, for working with visuals? I know that I tend to be, when I present in person, I tend to be a very visual presenter. If I'm doing 50 minutes for a keynote or something, I might have up to 200 slides for that. So, it's very quick, punchy. No text heavy bullet points or anything like that. But I just like the impact and the memorability I get from carefully choosing images to go with what I'm saying.

When I'm doing that online, typically you may have either a head in the corner type of presentation, or you may have a side by side screen. The keynote that I saw that I mentioned with the relatively famous keynoter was a split screen. But unfortunately, when you take a two screens

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and put them side by side, and they're both 16 by nine format, you end up with a narrow band of content across the middle of the screen, and neither screen is that big. What's your recommendation for folks who want to use visuals or have to use visuals in communicating with other people?

Nick Morgan: The best analogy to think of is that a video conference is not really like a stage. It doesn't work well if you think of it that way. And so, the standard format that you have with a speaker on the stage who can move around, the audience can see him or her. And then, I make giant images on either side of him or her, which can either show a closeup of the person if it's a big stage, thousands of people, or the slides. And that's a very standard format, right? And that works very well when you're in a space.

If you think of the online version of that as the same thing, the analogy then it's not going to work as well. Because to your point, when you start slicing things up, this real estate's pretty small already. So, that isn't as effective.

The way to think of it is as TV, and how you divide up a TV screen. So, TV has a series of images that cut away to different angles and different things, but they keep the focus on people. They don't use stills a lot. Things are always in motion on television because the idea is to keep your energy of focus and attention. And so, I would urge people to start using little video clips, less visuals, more video, and more face, and try to stay animated, and keep the energy up.

The problem with visuals is, and first of all, to your point, they have to be very visual because as soon as you make

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that screen small, it can get very hard to read a complicated, fussy slide with lots of written information on it. So, don't do that. That's the worst sin.

And I see now executives really struggling because they give these information heavy briefings to the board, let's say, okay? And so, they're used to packing a lot of information on the slide because they've been told, "You can only get five slides." You've got to hand them to the board the night before, right? And so they can read them.

And so, they put dense amounts of information on that because they know the board will get them as a printed out thing typically. Well, you put that on a video conference and the result is terrible. It's often small enough that the poor viewer can't even read it. And so, you leave them worse off than had you had no slide at all.

So, make sure they're like your slides. They're very visual, they have minimal amount of text on them, and you cycle through them pretty fast, but motion is better. So, I would say let's all up our ante, and start using video and our faces.

Roger Dooley: Okay. Here's another topic that I think you can probably tell us something about, Nick. I am sure you do training online occasionally. You did training in-person, too, I'm sure. But when you're adapting from in-person training where you're going to have people in a conference room for four hours, six hours, maybe longer, hopefully not too much longer than that, how do you adapt to a virtual training session? What can you do so it doesn't just become deadly boring and tiresome?

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Nick Morgan: Yeah. You have to think about it differently. The two big things that happen on audio or video conferencing is first of all, there's a democratization effect. So, it's an ugly word. But what it means is if you're leading a workshop, right? You're the person standing at the front of the room, you've been introduced, you have all the materials and whatnot. So, you're the star of the show. But in a video conference, you're just another note on that computer linkup, right? And you may be the most important one, but not for long.

And so, you simply have to allow the democracy to flourish. You have to bring other people in. So, you have to involve them, and that means using the chat function, and the polling function, and all the ways in which they can comment. Because they will and they need to stay engaged. So, that's the first thing.

Second thing, you have to divide them up into subgroups. And for anything to be engaging for any length of time, people have got to be putting in as much as they're receiving. And to do that, you need to break them up into rooms of six or fewer. The breakout rooms like you can do on Zoom and all the other video conferencing software have something similar. If you don't do that, then people are going to drift away. You can't sit there and just passively absorb information forever on a computer screen. People just aren't wired that way. We can't do it.

Roger Dooley: Right. No, I've tried it on the receiving end.

Nick Morgan: Yeah. We need to be working. We need to be involved. We need to be helping shape the story that we're telling

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ourselves. And so, that's the two most important ways to do it.

Roger Dooley: For training situations, is there a better tool than Zoom, or does that seem to have most of the functionality that people need?

Nick Morgan: I don't get into particular recommending one or another. There's some that seem to be more robust for larger numbers of people, like the Microsoft one. I hear a lot of people saying good things about that. Zoom, of course. We have to give it credit. It grew by some idiotic percentage, right? From one week in March to the next week in March when suddenly everybody had to stay home, and the usage just went skyrocketing. And they had a few glitches, but to their credit they've really they've grown and they've added the whatever it is that they need to add to make it work.

So, I give Zoom high credit for stepping up. They had some, as everybody knows, some safety issues, and they added security, and that kind of thing. So, I would say that for me, it's they're all pretty much the same. And there's some that I hear, the technical people tell me, handle large numbers better than Zoom does, but I'm not the expert on that sort of thing, the technical aspects.

Roger Dooley: Had my Friction book come out this year, undoubtedly Zoom would have been a case study because it's phenomenal what they accomplished. When you look at their competition, they're competing against Skype, which is a Microsoft product, people like Cisco with various web conferencing tools, and all these enormously powerful

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and tech savvy companies, and Zoom simply made it easier for people.

Some people will say, some critics say they made it too easy, and bypassed some security stuff that they ended up fixing later on, as you mentioned. But that is really the secret to their success. The other tools are there, but Zoom was just so easy that people used it. And once they had the volume going, they did fix some of the flaws, and I'm sure they're going to keep improving the product. Just a phenomenal case study in how a small competitor can displace and disrupt much larger ones.

Nick Morgan: Classic. If we needed any more proof of the great thinking of Clayton Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, that's what he talked about. How a small, cheaper, faster moving, innovative startup could come in and steal business from the big, established companies who never see it coming because they don't think that the competition is, they see it as a fly and they just got out the flyswatter, and imagine that's all they have to do.

In this case, it was exactly what happened. Zoom was cheaper, and easier, and more convenient. Convenience always wins. And the public was willing to give them the time to step up, and fix their problems, and grow as they needed to grow. So yeah, it is a great case study. It will be a great case study. Too painful to think about now, but a year from now that will be the one everybody will be studying.

Roger Dooley: For sure.

Nick Morgan: Yeah. I have to say they did a great job.

The Brainfluence Podcast with Roger Dooley

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

How to Win at Zoom with Nick Morgan

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/nick-morgan-zoom>

Roger Dooley: And so, I'm going to reach down here and remind our audience that today we are speaking with Nick Morgan, communications expert and author of the book about communicating via digital means, *Can You Hear Me?* Which was written before the pandemic, but only by a very short time. And it's extremely relevant. And we just scratched the surface of the knowledge you're going to get from that today, so I encourage you to pick that up.

And if you want to check out any of the resources we spoke about or reach Nick, first, Nick, where can people find you?

Nick Morgan: Our website, PublicWords, with a D, .com. And there's a response form on it, like all other websites. There's tons and tons of free information there. There's a chapter of the book you could download for free so you can read more. Yeah, so that's the place to start.

Roger Dooley: Great. And also find a link there to your *Power Cues* book, which is an excellent book about how to convey authority in your communications. A little bit earlier book, but that was the first one we spoke about a few years back.

Nick Morgan: That's right. Thank you.

Roger Dooley: And also excellent.

Nick Morgan: Thank you.

Roger Dooley: We will link to Nick's books, to any other resources we spoke about, and we'll also have a transcript on the show notes page for this episode at [RogerDooley.com/podcast](https://www.RogerDooley.com/podcast).

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Thanks for tuning in. And Nick, thanks for being on the show.

Nick Morgan: Roger, as always a great pleasure.

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](https://www.RogerDooley.com/Friction).

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