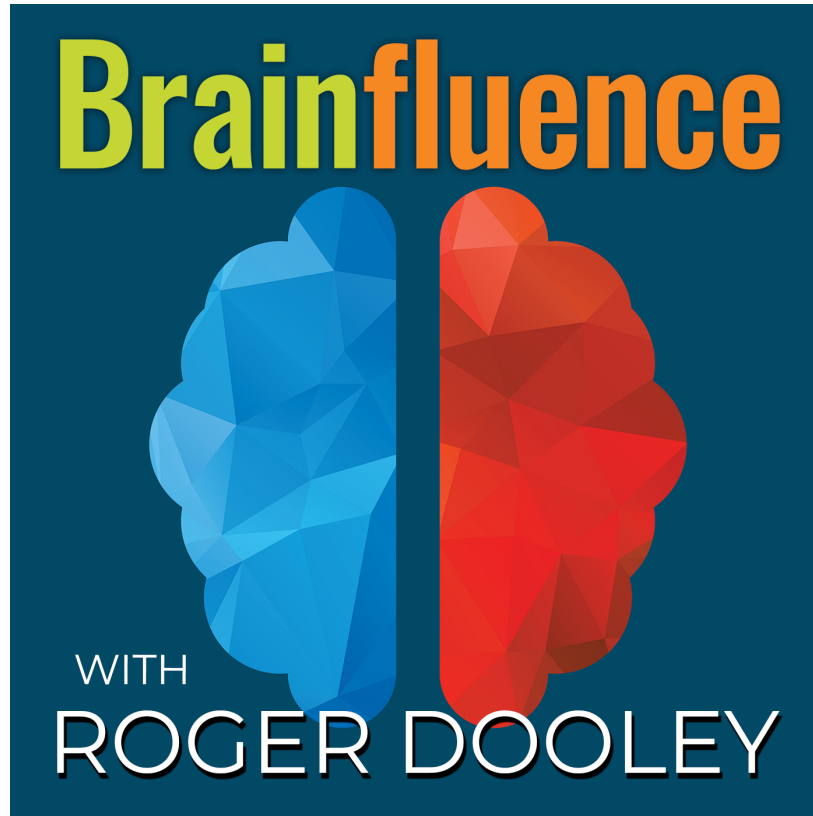


The Long-Distance Teammate with Wayne Turmel

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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."

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Now, here's Roger.

Roger Dooley: Welcome to Brainfluence. I'm Roger Dooley.

Today's guest, you could say, has been preparing for quarantine life for many years before the pandemic hit. Wayne Turmel was president of greatwebmeetings.com way back in 2005 when web meetings weren't usually very great. He's co-founder of the Remote Leadership Institute and the author or co-author of multiple books, including *The Long Distance Leader* and the new title, *The Long Distance Teammate*. Welcome to the show, Wayne.

Wayne Turmel: Thanks, Roger. Thank you so much for having me today.

Roger Dooley: I do remember web meetings actually were not very good. What made you want to focus on meetings back then?

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Wayne Turmel: It wasn't so much meetings, I came up in this industry teaching and coaching presentation skills, "Stand at the front of the room." I remember very vividly somebody coming up to me about 15 years ago and saying, "All of this is great, but I only talk to real people four times a year because there's this new thing called WebEx." I realized that for something that even back then I knew was going to revolutionize the way we work, nobody was teaching people the communication skills that went with it. They were showing them, "Which button do I push," and, "How do I load my slides?" But they weren't talking about how do you become an effective communicator using those tools? So that's where I started to put my specialty and my expertise in writing and coaching and like that.

Roger Dooley: Did you feel like you were ahead of the game at some point there and that maybe you were too much of an early adopter?

Wayne Turmel: Until about a year ago this week, I felt like the crazy guy with the sandwich board who was walking up and down the street saying, "The end is nigh," and now I need a new sandwich board that says, "Told you."

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, you can be too far ahead of the times and to me, that was it. Early WebEx was not a great experience, but I'm curious, you've obviously seen, suddenly, this whole space achieve massive adoption. Adoption was increasing over the years, certainly, even before the pandemic hit. But then when the pandemic hit, I know Zoom quadrupled their paying customer count and just everything went crazy. I'm curious whether in the last year, Wayne, you've seen any significant changes in the

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way people use the tools or the tools themselves that just weren't there for so long?

Wayne Turmel: Yeah. I think there's a few things that have happened, obviously. Zoom literally went from hardly any paying customers, no big companies were using it, to a verb in six months. I think a few things are going on. Number one is that the hundredth monkey has used Zoom and so before the pandemic, a lot of people were reluctant to use their webcams for all kinds of reasons ranging from, "The Russians are spying on us," to, "I just got back from the gym," to, "I'm working from the north end of the dining room table and I don't want anybody to know." So I think that there was the Rubicon was crossed and now people are just, they may not be happy about using webcams, but it's now standard and everybody is used to it and so that's never going back. I think that's an important distinction.

The second thing that I think has happened is people are understanding the importance of connection. One of the reasons that webcams are so useful and powerful is that at the end of the day, we need human contact and our brains are wired for face-to-face communication. One of the things that's happening, psychologically, to a lot of people is that while we were going down the isolated, feeling lonely at work thing for a better part of a generation, it's reached critical mass. One of the things that we're experiencing is a lot of people are feeling isolated, disconnected, disengaged, and webcams, as silly as they are, make a huge difference in connecting us to the people that we work with.

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So there's a line between Zoom fatigue, "Oh my gosh. I'm on webcam all day, I'm exhausted," because being on webcam all day is exhausting for all kinds of psychological and physiological reasons and it's important. So now it's not, "Do we use the webcam?" It's, "When do we use it? When is it smart? When do I not need it?" And that's a different conversation than we were having nine months ago.

Roger Dooley: I know I began doing quite a few web meetings back probably, oh, ten-ish years ago because I was working with a large company that acquired a business of mine and had to attend meetings and really the engagement at these meetings, it tended to be pretty low. You heard all kinds of clattering in the background with people typing and doing email and such. Most people weren't on cam because they didn't want to see that they were distracted or wandering around the room or doing who knows what? It seems like that has maybe changed a little bit. People are maybe getting a little more focused on making meetings count. I don't know if you agree with that, but it's like, "Okay, this is something that we're all having to do now and we're all maybe trying to be a little bit better at it." Whether you are running the meeting or attending the meeting—

Wayne Turmel: I think we're doing a little damage control. One of the things, and this happened during conference calls when nobody could see me playing Minecraft while I was supposed to be on the call, and it's funny because I have clients who people didn't want to use webcam because, "The company's just using it to spy on us. They just want us to make sure that we're really working." But the fact is that meeting culture in business was badly, badly broken.

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If you were on a conference call, as long as you checked in and said, "Hi, Wayne's here," your job was done. There was no follow-up.

A lot of times you'd have the meeting and people didn't do their action item or they weren't participating or engaging. So it started a while ago, but certainly over the last six months, when we realized that this was not all going to be over by Memorial Day like we were told it was, people are now taking it seriously. They're saying, "Oh my gosh, this is ... " It's funny, meetings are both the number one thing that can drive productivity and number one drain on it. Both those things can be true and so I think people are now looking at, "How do we meet? Why do we meet? What's the difference between a good meeting and a bad meeting?" Like everything human beings do in business, the results have been uneven.

Roger Dooley: Right. You actually co-wrote two different books, one for leaders, one for teammates. They're really just different sides of the same coin, because I think fundamentally, Wayne, it comes down to real communication, whether you are a leader or a team member, it's basic communication skills and empathy and all the things that go into being a good communicator. But they do come from different angles, if you are the meeting organizer and the one who is telling people to show up at a particular time, or whether you are one of the show uppers who maybe didn't necessarily want to be there, but you got to be there.

How do you bridge this divide? How do you keep people from tuning out? Because in any given meeting, chances are a very tightly-focused, a very short meeting, maybe

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you can keep everybody super engaged because you're narrowly focused on one thing. But even if you're talking about the same project, when you start talking about the other guys a little piece, "That may relate to mine, but it doesn't quite relate to mine right now. Maybe I am going to go back and check my email or send a text or something."

Wayne Turmel: Well, that's why we call the book *The Long Distance Teammate*. We were very conscious about the fact that being a teammate has a psychological and emotional connection to it that just being a member of a team doesn't have. Anybody can answer to the same boss as somebody else and you can do your work and you are a member of the team, but that doesn't make you a teammate. That implies that there is a level of give a hoot, that there's a level of engagement, that you have relationships and care about the people that you work with. One of the things that remote work, whether it's work from home or other locations can do, is limit the amount of brainstorming and collaboration. Well, where does that happen? That happens in meetings. That happens in online discussion groups. Well, if you are not actively engaging with those, you are not contributing to those things and that's something that you decide to do for yourself. Your boss cannot engage you. You have to be engaged.

Roger Dooley: Right. I find that an interesting topic because something that I write and talk about quite a bit, I talk about customer engagement, but employee engagement too and how, for a variety of reasons, employees tend to be disengaged on average. Even when we were all showing up in person at our place of work, there was really an employee

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engagement crisis. Now that we're all in our own little worlds with distractions and kids and pets and other issues going on, it's potentially even a bigger issue, but it's always been viewed as, "This is the company's job to fix. It is the boss's job to fix," because often the reasons for disengagement really go back to the company or the boss. They have bad procedures in place that irritate people that show that they aren't trusted, that they aren't valued, they don't communicate effectively and all these things that will clearly create disengaged people. But you make the point that there is some shared responsibility that lies with the employee too, to create that engagement.

Wayne Turmel: There is probably a three-beer conversation and coffee is the wrong beverage for this conversation in the great scheme of things. At the end of the day, what we're discovering is true engagement is intrinsic. We have all worked lousy jobs, but there were people that were really into them. It didn't necessarily work for us, but Joe manages to show up every day and look like he cares, God love him. There are plenty of things that companies can do to make it really easy to disengage and Lord bless them, they do them and on a fairly regular basis. But at the end of the day, we decide, "I am going to engage or I'm not. I'm going to care or I'm not."

The thing is that when we all worked together, a lot of the social and psychological things that help us engage happened organically, right? We started to like and see the same people all the time, and we kind of liked them, and "I had a really good friend who worked a couple of desks over and ..." One of the impacts of working remotely that we have not even begun to deal with yet is

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that traditionally, for the 100 plus years, 60% of our social interaction came at work, right? Whether it's seeing Bob at the coffee pot or talking to a customer or being in meetings, but we saw other human beings and we interacted with them and we've all stayed in really crummy jobs because we liked the people we worked with. That social component is really important to engagement.

If all you're doing is focusing on the tasks and you have no relationships, no social connections, no stake in the success of the rest of the team, it's really easy to disengage and just do what a lot of people who work from home do, which is, "I'm just going to focus on my work on my tasks." We talked to so many people who are feeling like their careers have stalled and for the first time, they're looking at maybe getting a different job and because they don't have that connection anymore. Well, you either choose to build that connection or you don't, right? If the company is going to have virtual coffee meetings, they're trying, right? They're trying to have the virtual coffee. Now it's up to you. Do you participate or not?

Roger Dooley: Well for ages, I think is one of Gallup's criteria for employee engagement is whether you have a best friend at work and chances are, your best friend isn't going to be a Zoom contact. It may be, but if you have not interacted in person either before or at all, or maybe even for a year, chances are that simply isn't going to exist. So maybe there will be some new sorts of friendships that will evolve, virtual friendships. But, and of course those have existed for years, but it just doesn't seem quite as powerful. What do you mention about that?

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Wayne Turmel: Well, it's funny about that, though. I don't want to let that go by-

Roger Dooley: Okay, go ahead then.

Wayne Turmel: There's a couple of things that are really interesting. One is that when we went into the pandemic, if you look at the second quarter and get employee engagement scores for employees when people went home and it was panic time, engagement went way up. Net promoter scores, employee engagement, however you measure them, for the second quarter of last year, engagement scores were through the roof. What that means is people were trying and they cared and they were putting everything into it because it's a crisis and we come together in a crisis and we know we have to work harder and so we do that. So it is, in fact, doable.

You mentioned my previous company, greatwebmeetings.com. During that time, I had a podcast and I met this guy named Kevin Ikenberry, who I didn't know from Adam, but we started this six-year email, occasional phone call exchange. Lo these many years later, he's bought my company and we worked together and we built this relationship. I don't think there's a year where we've seen each other more than three or four times in a year, so those relationships can be real. Now they need to be supported, when you can, by real-life contact. But almost a third of long-term relationships, right now, started virtually.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's funny you had mentioned that, Wayne, because my own business venture in the higher ed space was started in that same way where I had been

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corresponding with, initially, one person who was an expert in this space and I was less of an expert, but more of a digital and business guy and we chatted about stuff. He provided helpful information. I provided him with a little bit of help, with some of my expertise. We ended up co-founding a business and I don't think, it was probably three years in before we even met in person, which is pretty bizarre.

People that we, subsequently, explained the origin to were just shocked by that. It's like, "What do you mean you weren't in the same city? When did you see each other?" "Well, we didn't." Actually, most of our interaction was email. At that point, this was even before your great web meetings thing was going and WebEx probably existed at that point, but it was probably even more primitive and awkward-

Wayne Turmel: It was expensive. It was clunky.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. It was sort of a heavy duty business tool. Even before that, you could go to a Kinko's or something and use their video conference room at great expense if you wanted to do a virtual meeting or you had your corporate boardroom set up with cameras and microphones and such. Everybody didn't have a webcam and a mic on their desk, so-

Wayne Turmel: Well, that's a really important point, though. Can you imagine surviving this pandemic 10 years ago?

Roger Dooley: 10 would be difficult; 15 or 20 would be almost impossible, you would think. Somehow, we probably would've muddled through, but we would not have had

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the facility to keep our businesses going the way that we have.

Wayne Turmel: Well, and it's always been possible, right? Genghis Kahn ruled half the world had never held a Skype meeting, so it can, in fact, be done, right? But the effort that it takes and the sheer force of will, but now it's so much easier. So now it's about choosing to engage. "Why do I care?" Right? One of the reasons so many relationships start online is it's people who are looking for relationships, right? "I'm seriously looking for a relationship. I'm not finding them at work. I'm not finding them at the local bar, so I'm going to find somebody else who says they're looking for that," right? The team's going to come together. "Does everybody care about the work? Do we get to know and like each other? Are we building the social connections that make us care?"

The teams that do that are the ones that are succeeding. It can, in fact, be done, but it takes the company and the leader creating the right environment and then you have to have people who want to be there and are willing to engage. One of the things that I can't believe in more is that there is a selfish, which is the wrong word, component to being a good teammate. Are you getting what you need out of it? One of the things that's vastly underrated, for example, according to HR studies, working from home, or the ability to work from home at least part-time, is the most requested perk.

Roger Dooley: Well, we all got that, didn't we?

Wayne Turmel: Yeah. We all got that. Hey, how's that working for you? But interestingly enough, after about six months, that's no

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longer seen as a perk. But what happens is a lot of organizations are saying, "Well, if you choose to work from home, you have chosen working from home and lifestyle over your career track." So before the pandemic, a lot of people who chose to work from home or work remotely were finding their career stymied. "I wasn't getting the promotion. The suck ups in the office were getting the good assignments." That was a thing and it's going to be a thing as we start to return. Well, are organizations and leaders thinking about, "Am I really including my remote people?" Because if there's no chance for promotion, I'm not getting the fun assignments. They get at pizza their meetings and I'm sitting out here by myself, after a while, I am not going to feel as connected to that team.

Roger Dooley: Right. You still have that attitude, though. Not that long ago, I was affiliated with a big company and there was a person who initially worked for me and then, ultimately, when I was a consultant, I worked for her. She was one of the most committed, motivated, skillful people that I know. But when they were moving part of the operation to a different place, the big boss of that operation said, "Now, we can't have somebody in that position working remotely." It was just so insane and she ended up getting a great position with another company and doing very well at it.

But it was such a short-sighted thing. You talk about visibility and as a remote person, you do have a lower visibility, if there is an office component. Right now, everybody's remote so we're probably on equal footing from a visibility standpoint. When you start filling up the offices, though, there will be that in-person visual divide.

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Of course, even now, you have some people virtually who are, perhaps, more visible. What is your advice to people who want to maintain their visibility, but not in an obnoxious way or a way that looks odd to their co-workers or their boss?

Wayne Turmel: Well, that's essentially the problem, is there's a huge chunk of us that were taught, "Keep your head down. The work will speak for itself. Don't draw attention to yourself," whatever. But the fact is that the organization and your leader aren't consciously ignoring you or being malicious. It's literally out of sight and out of mind. If you are not participating in meetings, if you are not taking part in group activities, if you're not being forthcoming with care, talking to your manager on a regular basis and saying, "Hey, how am I doing?" And soliciting feedback, you are not being hated on. You're just not being thought of and that's something that we need to think about, "How do I stay visible?"

If I'm choosing not to use my webcam, I'm intentionally missing out on the psychological and neurological connections that happen when we see other human faces. If I decide that getting my email done is more important than participating in this meeting, my voice is literally not being heard. People are not thinking about me so that when somebody has a question, are they going to go to me or are they going to go to the person that they were just talking to on that meeting? One of the biggest dysfunctions of a remote team is exclusion.

It's not, "I'm being mean to you." It's that. "I'm literally not thinking about you," and so you're not getting invited to that meeting. You're not being considered for that

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assignment, whatever. So there are some guidelines and we talk about them in the book. When you put yourself forward, it's about the team. You want to use 'we' language, "I'm presenting this idea because we need to do this better." Right? So it comes from a place of supporting the team. It's not, "Look at me. Look at me. Look how smart I am." It's, "Hey, you know what? The way we're using Slack, did you know there's this cool tool that we can use and maybe we can use that to solve this problem?"

Roger Dooley: So a lot of we language would be one way of doing it.

Wayne Turmel: That's one way-

Roger Dooley: So you're visible, but you are not, "Look at this wonderful thing I did," or, "I think this is the way we should do it."

Wayne Turmel: Yeah. You have to participate in meetings if there is value that you can add. If you're having coaching conversations with your manager and they're all flustered and busy and they've got a list, and all their job is to check off the list of stuff they need to talk to you about and they're not raising something that's important to you, are you being proactive in raising that? "Hey, you know what? At the beginning of the year we had a development plan. I don't know where I can go with this. Can you help me?"

That's the kind of question that we are responsible for getting an answer to, because it's going to slip your manager's mind in all of the 1,001 fires that they're putting out. So we call it 'ethical visibility,' being visible in a way that is ethical and supportable and doesn't make you a self-serving weasel, but it makes you engage. It makes you more visible to your manager, which in turn, gives

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you a positive feedback loop. It makes you visible to your teammates as somebody who's adding value and somebody who can be a resource.

So it's a virtuous cycle of positive feedback that keeps us engaged and it turns out we like the people we work with and they're pretty smart and I get the positive feedback that I need to stay engaged and positive in my job. By the way, there's a promotion coming up and I might actually get it. So I'm going to put in that little bit of extra effort. When we get down to what is engagement, it's the discretionary effort that we're willing to put in, right? Why are we willing to do that?

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative) That kind of brings up a related area. You mentioned Zoom coffee hours or coffee chats and of course, we've got the Zoom happy hour, that after work break where everybody gets together. It seems to me like that presents a visibility dilemma because you probably don't want to be the one that doesn't show up at that happy hour for visibility reasons. On the other hand, should companies and bosses be careful about scheduling these things, because I suppose if it's in the middle of a work day or at during the work day, then people won't feel like you're impinging on their time. But in general, do you think that these kinds of mostly social events are productive for companies?

Wayne Turmel: They can be, and I'll give you a perfect example. I am a grumpy old man when it comes to things like icebreakers and forced fun. It makes me crazy. I hate that stuff, but one time we were having our team meeting and Kevin asked everybody, "What's your favorite candy?" And, "Really? We're going to waste time doing this? I got stuff I

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could be doing." Right? But I suck it up and I tell him my favorite candy. A week later, I get this Amazon package and it's a three-pound bag of Gummy Bears. There's no return address, no hint as to who sent it, just this three-pound bag of Gummy Bears shows up on my doorstep. Well, it turns out that Kevin had taken this little silly activity and turned it into something that, how do you not love a guy who sends you Gummy Bears, right?

Roger Dooley: Right. Although, had you anticipated it, you might've chosen dark chocolate-covered almonds or something a little bit fancier than Gummy Bears. I can't imagine-

Wayne Turmel: Do not disrespect the Gummy Bear, my friend. We love what we love. What can I tell you?

Roger Dooley: I guess. If that is truly your favorite, then by all means.

Wayne Turmel: But here's the thing, it was a really nice thing. I'm not a big fan of impinging on people's personal time, but once every month or two, we have a virtual lunch. Now, because I'm on the West Coast, it's a virtual breakfast, but we sit and have that social time. What we don't do is, "Hi. You've been working for eight hours, staring into a camera all day. We're going to make you do that for a couple of more."

Roger Dooley: That makes a huge amount of sense.

Wayne Turmel: I am a huge proponent of building social connection and activity consciously into the workflow because there is a tendency, both as a team and as individuals, for work to become extremely transactional and if the only time I talk to you is, "Hey, is that report done?" As opposed to, "Hey, how are you doing? How are the kids? Sorry about your

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team," whatever. Those kinds of conversations that are what build relationships and make us like each other and all that good stuff. It's really easy when we work remotely to become purely transactional. While in the short term, that gets stuff done, in the long-term, it erodes our relationships and then we start having this engagement problem where if everything I do is just task-oriented, at some point, I disengage.

Roger Dooley: I'm curious, there are a variety of meeting tools that are available now in the major platforms. You've got breakout rooms, you've got whiteboards, you've got polling, in your experience, and the price modes I ran across one the other day, I don't recall what it was right now, but I was like, "Huh, I never heard of that one, but it sounds cool." I'm curious, which of these actually seem to work in real life as opposed to a cool-to-have feature that ends up feeling awkward? Which would you encourage people to use, even if it's a little awkward, the first time that in the long run can produce really good results?

Wayne Turmel: Well, and that's the problem, right? People tend not to use these features. The standard rule in software is 80% of people, are you going to use 20% of the features? When you're presenting, and this goes back to presentation skills and all that good stuff, it's a little bit like when you're driving a car in the rain late at night and you're looking for an address, so you have to turn down the radio so you can see better. There's a tendency in our brains to want to shut out anything that's distracting and so we tend not to use a lot of these features. But a lot of them chat, whiteboard, they're so helpful. But the way to think about it, I think, is to stop thinking about it being virtual. If we

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were having a meeting under ideal conditions, what would be the right way to run that meeting?

If I'm doing a town hall of 100 people making an announcement, I'm going to use a different set of tools than if we really need to brainstorm the answer to this problem. If we really need to brainstorm the answer to this problem, we're going to have everybody's mics open. What would we do in the meeting room? We'd have a flip chart or a whiteboard. We'd let everybody have at it. People would be having side conversations. You can use the chat for that. In *The Long Distance Leader*, our last book, we said, "Rule number one is: Think leadership first, location second." The same is true of your virtual meetings. If you could craft what's the best way to address this situation, then you start thinking about what are the tools and facilitation techniques and things that can make that happen?

Roger Dooley: Do you think that virtually people need a little extra nudge at times, though, because-

Wayne Turmel: Yes.

Roger Dooley: ... if you're sitting around a table in a conference room, the person who is leading the meeting or speaking at that moment can pretty well gauge whether everybody's involved or paying attention, where virtually it's a lot easier to tune out. So there's almost, it seems like, an incentive to say, "Okay, well, I'm going to do a quick poll of what you think on this," just to snap people back to attention.

Wayne Turmel: Here's the thing, and we can get really granular on this, so be careful the rabbit hole that you open up here, but I'll

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give you an example. If we're sitting around in a conference room, easily 50% or more of the facilitation is being done with my eyes. I look around the room. You're giving me the little head nod. Bob is giving me the Scooby-Doo face, you know, "Huh?" So, obviously, I need to check in with Bob and see if he has a question. Alice looks like she's going to explode if she doesn't say something, so I can point to her and I know that this person is going to be next and it's all happening in a heartbeat.

Now what happens online? There is a time delay that if we don't account for, we're going to miss out. If you've ever been on a, "So anybody have anything to say?" Crickets, crickets, crickets. "Okay, fine. Let's move on." Well, think about what happens. I'm sitting at home. I don't know that I'm going to be asked for my input, but all of a sudden, "Okay. So who has something they want to say?" I'm sitting in there going, "Do I have something I want to say? Yeah. Oh, but somebody else will probably go first. Oh, nobody's saying anything. Oh, I'm on mute."

It takes longer for people to respond and they can't do it with their eyeballs, right? So if we don't build in those checkpoints, even if it's a simple matter of, "Okay. I'm going to stop right here. Thoughts? Comments? Anybody have anything they want to say?" If I don't intentionally build in those breaks, they're not likely to happen because I'm driving in the rain, trying to find an address, right? So building those in consciously, because that's the equivalent of looking around the room and seeing if everybody's tracking.

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Roger Dooley: Right. Well, I think that is a great tip to end on. Always allow for that time lag. If you're going to break, if you really want input, leave some extra time and don't be a self-serving weasel, of course. So, Wayne, I really appreciate your showing up. Why don't you tell people where they can find you and your ideas online?

Wayne Turmel: Yeah, absolutely. First of all, if they're interested in the book, *The Long Distance Teammate*, they can just go to londistanceteammate.com. There's all kinds of resources and tools specifically associated with the book. For everything else we do, remoteteamwork.com. We've got a blog, we've got downloadable resources and, of course, all the ways that we work with clients to do that. You can connect with me on LinkedIn, waynetrumel, T-R-U-M-E-L. If you want to find us, you can find us. We are not hiding.

Roger Dooley: Great. Okay. Well, we will link to all of those places on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast, where we will also have audio and text versions and video versions of this conversation. So, Wayne, thanks for being on the show.

Wayne Turmel: Thank you so much for inviting me, man. This has been a lot of fun.

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."

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For more information or for links to Amazon and other sellers, go to
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