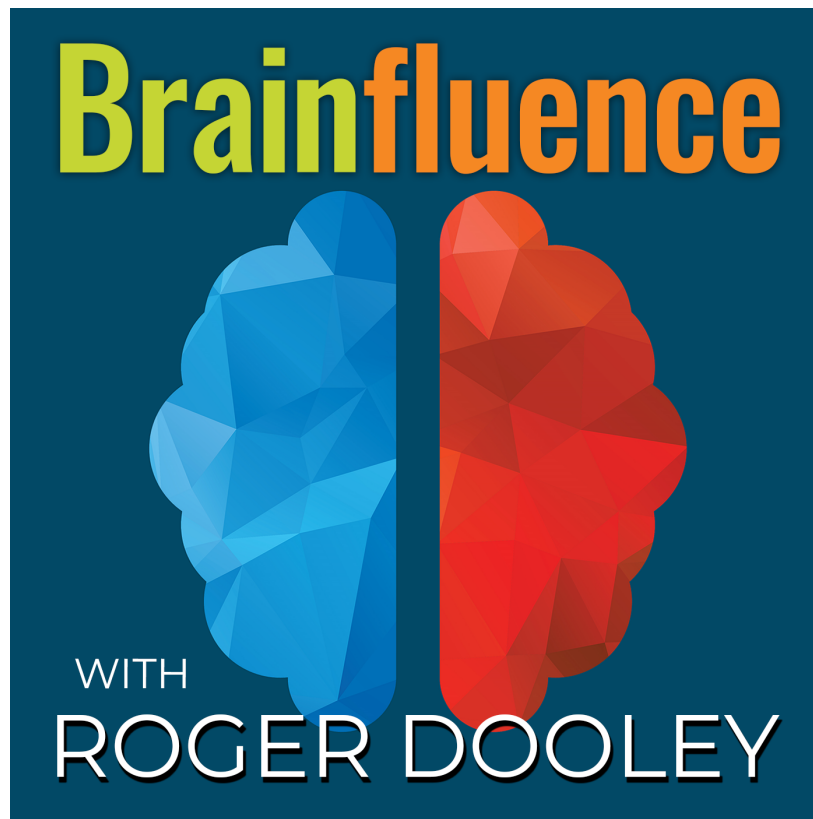


Cumulative Advantage with Mark Schaefer
<https://www.rogerdooley.com/mark-schaefer-cumulative-advantage>



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.

Some business authors write one good book and never really follow up with anything after that. Others write the same book over and over throwing in a few news stories and examples, but today's guest Mark Schaefer, my friend is not one of those. Every book that he launches has interesting new ideas and is quite distinct from those that proceeded it. So I'm really excited that he has a new book today. He is a globally recognized keynote, speaker, educator, business consultant and author. He's worked in global sales PR and marketing for 30 years and is executive director of Mark Schaefer Marketing Solutions. He hold seven patents and is a faculty member at Rutgers University. His new book is, *Cumulative Advantage: How to Build Momentum for Your Ideas, Business and Life Against All Odds*. Welcome to the show

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Mark, it seems like today we are all competing against all odds doesn't it?

Mark Schaefer: Yeah. I think that part of the title is extraordinarily meaningful to people today.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. And it's really symbolic, not just... the pandemic has certainly increased the odds, it seems against many of us. But just the increasing competition in everything. The competition to be seen, to get the word out. Everybody is creating content. Everybody's on social media. You've got people with millions of followers, eating up the bandwidth and so on. So it really is, I think a great message that, yes, you can compete against these odds. Mark, I love success formula books. I've had Albert Laszlo Barabasi, he wrote The Formula, which is a very data-driven science-based guide to success.

And Ryan Holiday, my fellow Austinite who also wrote a book called the Perennial Seller, that may not be his best seller, but it is really my favorite of his works because it talks about how to create work that lasts. And you come at it from a little bit different angle in this book, explain briefly how your formula works.

Mark Schaefer: What I was trying to solve here is exactly what you're talking about is that, we're living in this world of overwhelming information density and especially now. In the time of the pandemic alone, I heard that the amount of content published on LinkedIn doubled. And so I think what we're all preoccupied with, if you're a content creator, a business person, an entrepreneur, someone in marketing, how can we be heard? How can we be seen? How can we be discovered? And it can be really daunting.

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And I think what's pressing on people is, I'm doing everything I can. I'm doing great work and I still feel like I'm being buried. So it led me to this idea of momentum. How do we create momentum? If you're stuck, feel like you're plateauing, why does some people get to the next level and some don't? And it led me to this seminar research that really started in the 1960s about how people create momentum and how the rich seem to get richer. The poor seem to get poor. If you're one of those people who are rich, you just keep going. Unless there are countervailing processes that can level the playing field and get other people to build momentum. So that was my quest. What are those countervailing processes? And I went down some mighty deep rabbit holes to figure that out.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. Well, one thing that provates the book is something called the Matthew effect. I wonder, would you explain what that is, Mark?

Mark Schaefer: Well, it's so fascinating how this whole thing started. There was a famous sociologist named Robert Martin. I'm sure none of your audience has heard of them, because who can name any famous sociologists? Let's be honest. And... But in his field he was quite a superstar. He was an immigrant to America. When he was a little boy, he was growing up in the slums of South Philadelphia. And he couldn't even go to school. He had to work as a little boy to help his family just make ends meet. Each evening, starting when he was five, he would walk to the Carnegie library in Philadelphia and he would walk from the slums and into these big neighborhoods with all these big mansions, and he just wondered, how do you get there? Is there any way? We just keep getting poor.

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His father's business just burned down to make things even worse, against all odds he got a scholarship to Temple. Against all odds, got a scholarship to Harvard. Against all odds, gets his PhD. He's teaching at Columbia while I was at Columbia. The students tell him, "It's not fair. All these tenured professors take all the credit. They get more rewards. They get bigger offices, they get more step, but we're doing all the work. The rich keep getting richer. We keep getting poor, it's not fair." He said, "I know, but how can we prove it?" So he did this research and this led to this paper called, the Matthew effect. It hints at a phrase in the Bible, a verse in the Bible that talks about the rich get richer and the poor get poor. And he did his study based on Nobel Prize winners.

And he found that these were not necessarily the greatest scientists or the greatest researchers, but they had some advantage that propelled them into this momentum. And once they won that Nobel Prize, there was no stopping them. The momentum just kept going on and on and on. And so the cumulative advantage is an expression of this original paper. It's now been thoroughly researched in sports, education, technology, business, entertainment to show the people, it can start with some initial advantage if you play your cards right, leads to unstoppable momentum.

Now it doesn't always have to be money. Doesn't have to be even education. And the example from the book is Bill Gates. Bill Gates, how did he become Bill Gates? As a teenager, he had access to some of the first computer prototypes in the country. He was coding before anybody else. And that became his initial advantage that led him to... and he didn't just start with an idea and this is

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important. He pursued that curiosity. The timing was right for his idea. And of course he was the founder of Microsoft. So that's really how that idea got started and how it spread. But it's the science and the research has never really been applied to normal people's lives, their ideas and their businesses. So that's the code I tried to crack in this book.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, I think I figured out the problem with sociologists is, they are not marketers because clearly based on even his own research, he should've called that thing The Martin effect, made himself famous, gathered more research money and so on. And he might've won a Nobel Prize himself, who knows.

Mark Schaefer: Right. He probably be a Snapchat influencer by now.

Roger Dooley: Maybe I'm not sure, there are too many prompts that make that grade, but you never know it's possible. What are the stages that you described this process to become successful as your research showed them to me?

Mark Schaefer: Yeah. Sure. So there are these patterns of momentum that repeat over and over again, if you look at successful people, successful businesses. And one of the most interesting ideas in the book, and this comes from a researcher named Franz Johansson. He wrote a book a few years ago called, The Click Moment. That sounds like an SEO book, but it's really about this moment where something random happens to you. You're in the right place at the right time. You have a conversation that sparks an idea, or you read a book or you listen to a podcast or something changes your view in a random

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way that creates the spark of initiative. And so momentum always has to start with that spark. What is that? Initial advantage that you can drive and start to create some momentum? So that's, I think very interesting. I hope it gives people a lot of encouragement and hope that you don't need to be a millionaire to create momentum.

You just need to be aware of how these opportunities are being created all around you, all the time. Now it's important to not just have an idea, but pursue this curiosity and see how this idea, this competency, whatever you're working on can fit into the context of our world today. And I challenged people to think about strategy in a new way, instead of a five-year plan and 150 page document.

Strategy today is a function of speed, space and time. Because the world is moving so fast that these shifts, these fractures in the status quo are happening constantly. And every time there's a shift or a fracture, it's a business opportunity. And if you think about this in the context of the era we're in right now, Roger, I predicted last March. I said, there will be more startups in America than any time in our history because it's the biggest fracture in the history of... or one of the biggest let's say, in the history of America. There are just countless unmet and underserved consumer needs during a pandemic. And in fact, we did have more business startups than any time. If you find that opportunity, you burst through that scene with all your force, all your resources and get that momentum going.

Roger Dooley: Mark, I'm going to interrupt you for a moment. And while we're on this ideation phase of looking for the opportunity,

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one of the things that you described in the book is a unique brainstorming process that I wasn't familiar with. But to me, it struck me as a particularly effective way, because brainstorming has really gotten a lot of criticism in recent years as just being idea and effective way to come up with breakthrough ideas, because it just stand up with a lot of random stuffing thrown against the wall, people writing stuff down on whiteboards and not really good original stuff coming out, but most of the time. But your process that you described is quite different. Wonder would you to go through that? I think that's good takeaway for our listeners.

Mark Schaefer: I think it's one of the best idea generation techniques. And I've used it for a couple of decades now, it's called brainwriting. So everybody expects in a normal brainstorming process. You know why you're there, you're supposed to come up with ideas. So everybody has an idea at the beginning of the process. So you say, "Look, here's a easel pad, write your best idea at the very top of this easel pad, tear off the piece of paper and stick it on the wall and stand in front of it. Now move over one space." So now your brain is being connected to the person's thought process who was right next to you. And you say, "Look at that idea and improve on it. Now move over three spaces. So you're not following the same person you're mixing up mental frameworks.

You're not thinking out of the box, you're combining boxes." It's very powerful. It's also, I think the best case study for diversity you will ever see, because when I do these sessions, I try to go crazy with diversity, every kind of diversity, because that's how you get the best ideas. Now, so you shift these ideas. You keep improving on the

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ideas. Maybe you have a few other prompts thrown in there. You'd might do it six, seven, eight times. Then you say, "Go back to your original idea. Circle the best idea on that page." 98% of the time, they do not circle their original idea. In a period of 30 minutes, you're having fun. And what you've done is you have generated not just good ideas, but breakthrough ideas by iterating on good ideas and taking advantage of the diversity in the room.

Roger Dooley: Now that's such a brilliant approach. And I'm surprised maybe I've just lived a sheltered life, but I haven't ever been a part of one of those types of sessions. So that's a good one. So-

Mark Schaefer: Have you starred at Dell and Austin a few times?

Roger Dooley: Well, now apparently the Dell folks who have done that, and I didn't intersect, but regardless. So once you've got this ideation process underway, you talk about hitting the seam, which is a great football analogy for those folks who may not be familiar with American football, maybe describe both literally and figuratively what you're getting at.

Mark Schaefer: Well, I think it's a good analogy about how business develops today. Again, it's... business really doesn't really develop over some five-year plan. It's just like something that's happening now. So in American football, two teams face off face to face, literally face to face, strength against strength. Now the coaches are actually above the field, even in high school. In a booth, looking at the field, trying to find a opportunity. Is there someone on the other team who's tired? Are they mismatched? Are they out of place? How can we take advantage of this temporary fracture, go

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through that scene as long as we can, for as far as we can. And then we start looking for a new one. And that's really how we need to approach business today, is that these opportunities, the world is shifting and shifting and shifting.

It's not just economic shifts. It could be shifts in taste, in fashion, in culture, in spending habits. And what I just talked about with the pandemic, Roger, this is just the beginning. I wrote a blog post this week saying, marketing is entering the era of unintended consequences. There are going to be so many changes in consumer behavior, we never even thought of before. Starting with, what's going to happen to these children who are being socialized in different ways. They're being educated in different ways. How is that going to change people? How's that change spending habits?

One of the unexpected consequences, unintended consequences. When China came out of the pandemic, here's what they discovered, that e-commerce, the function of e-commerce in the family had moved to children because people couldn't go out, just like America. People are buying more and more and more online and the children who are very good at this, are taking that over for their parents and grandparents. Saying, we'll do it. We'll do it. We'll find this for you. We can find the best deal. Come on mom, just let me do it. The buying function in many families is moving to teenagers, who could have thought of that in the context of the pandemic? There's going to be millions of changes, large and small. And all of these are fractures, shifts and business opportunities.

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Roger Dooley: That's interesting because you think of going back to the previous century, the image of the 1950s or sixties, housewife, who was the principal consumer of the family. If you going to be advertising just about any household, good or food, that was what you wanted to be marketing to. And now you're saying that, maybe unexpectedly it's going to be the teens in the family, or even younger preteens perhaps are a key part of this buying function, at least for certain products, but not everything but for certain things that makes a lot of sense.

Mark Schaefer: Well, it happened in our family. My children took over the buying function for their grandparents, and just started sending them stuff that they needed. And they had never really used e-commerce before. So it's going to be fascinating. We've been through a long sad time, but from an academic perspective, there's never been more fascinating time to be in marketing.

Roger Dooley: One thing that we have in common Mark, that I'm probably 100% sure that you don't know about, is an interest in wine packaging. A few years back, more than a few now, but it was after the worldwide web had been invented, I began writing about boxed wines because I thought, or I predicted actually.

Mark Schaefer: Your pressions.

Roger Dooley: Well, maybe not so much that box wines are going to become the next big thing, because I noted that in Australia, which was a consumer wine market, not necessarily a snob wine market, at that point box wines in similar packaging had already taken over supposedly, according to... I didn't personally verify this, but statistics

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that I saw. I'd taken over half the market or something close to that, and so I said, "Okay, this could be an interesting thing to get into."

And it turns out, this is probably a 10 or 15 years after that, it's still a niche category in the U.S relegated to really inexpensive lines for use at fraternity houses or... what I envisioned was the confluence of the one glass of red wine recommendation that may or may not actually be true, but that was supposed to be good for your health at one point. And boxed wine packaging, which would prevent life from going bad so quickly. It seemed like a no-brainer. Well, apparently I was either too early or simply wrong, but you to have an interest in white packaging, explain your idea and why maybe hitting the scene didn't work.

Mark Schaefer: Yeah. It's a great illustration. It's a perfect illustration of the idea of how strategy has changed. So, I was like you, I had data, I had evidence, I had science behind me that showed the best way to package wine, not even close was in an aluminum can. The worst way to package wine that you could ever imagine is a transparent bottle with a cork top. It's the worst way to store wine, you could imagine. But there's an image and there's an emotion that goes with that bottle. So I was in the packaging business and I got nowhere. Everybody just turned their noses up at me, and here we are 10 or 15 years later, and this is the number one trend in wine packaging right now. The 10% of the wine market is now in aluminum cans. Why? Because, the demographic has a different aesthetic.

They have a different priority. They have a different way of living. They want to throw something in a backpack and

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go. They don't need a heavy bottle. They need something that's not going to break that can chill really quickly. It's the best package for the environment. So all those things we knew, the timing was wrong. The market just wasn't there yet, and it wasn't driven by a plan. It wasn't driven by a strategy. It was driven by a seam. And that's the difference in business today. I gave the example in the book of the Creating Strategic Leverage book, Creating Strategic Advantage book, about how marketing was all about finding your lane and staying in your lane for years and years and years. And today it's really, it's about speed. It's about awareness. It's about being nimble and when you see that shift, you charge through that shift and that's really what we need to be aware of today and in terms of strategy.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. And I think the speed point is really important Mark, because that can compensate sometimes for a size disadvantage-

Mark Schaefer: 100%.

Roger Dooley: ... where a big company is going to have massive resources, but they're probably not going to be very nimble. So if you happen to spot this market opportunity as an entrepreneur, or even as an entrepreneurial, perhaps in a big company that we've been given the flexibility to act, then you can be in that area much more quickly and establish your name before the big brands get in there and do their thing.

Mark Schaefer: Yeah. It'll be interesting to see if Clubhouse can do that. Clubhouse definitely, it was the right idea at the right time. It's a perfect example of how you create momentum and

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now the idea is, so actually this leads us to the next subject, right? Because initial advantage, right? Started this thing. Here's the scene, we're in a pandemic, we've got 20 million people unemployed, they're lonely and they're isolated. What do they want to do? They want to talk. So, boom! There's Clubhouse. Now they get... what's the next step? Momentum, awareness. How... you've got to create vast awareness really fast. In the book, I call this, the Sonic boom. It's not about a six month plan or a year plan. Nobody cares about that. If you're building momentum, you've got to hit it big and you've got to hit it fast.

Clubhouse did a lot of really good things. A lot of really smart things about how they celebrated emerging celebrities on Clubhouse. About how they increased awareness, because if you're on Clubhouse, you automatically get alerts on your phone. When famous people are in Clubhouse, then they went through this round of venture capital. And now they're on all the mainstream media and it's just booming and booming and booming. And now Twitter has created spaces, same thing as Clubhouse, bigger company, a lot of more money. But it's like, "Okay, well we got Clubhouse." No, but we have spaces. Well, no, we have Clubhouse.

So, right now, this is so interesting, Roger. Who's going to win? Facebook's going to do their thing. Twitter's done their thing. I heard actually there was another one coming out, right? Everybody here's what's going to determine who wins. It's not the best platform. It's not the best technology. It's not even the most money, who has the most momentum. Who can create the most momentum right now. And that's why there's not even any talk about

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monetization at Clubhouse right now, why? The only thing that's important right now is momentum. Build the user base, build the user base. We'll monetize later, we got a win this space. They found the seam and now they have to win the space.

Roger Dooley: Well, then that's certainly not dissimilar to what companies like Uber did. Don't worry about the profits later, just get that momentum going. And one example of even a mature market or fairly mature market, I think is the web conferencing market, where Zoom already had been building momentum before the pandemic hit. People think of Zoom is suddenly, wow, the pandemic hit and now everybody's doing Zoom. They were already accelerating past Cisco and Microsoft in that space primarily because of ease of use. And when the pandemic hit, you had these IT departments were faced with getting hundreds of users in their company online without spending thousands of hours in tech support, telling them how to make WebEx work. What's easy, Zoom's easy. And they just, it took off like a rocket.

Mark Schaefer: Yeah. But I just had this thought, when you and I were growing up in business, we wouldn't even entertain the prospect of starting a business without knowing exactly how we're going to make money, and when we're going to get money. We wouldn't even think of the idea, we would be embarrassed to talk about a business that had no plan of monetize for three years. I think that's a great example of how this world has shifted and how strategy has shifted, where it's not a plan, we're going to make this product. Here's our target market, blah, blah, blah, blah. Right now it's look, there's a shift. We got to go right now. Don't worry about anything else, build momentum, get

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through that seam. And that's where the world is right now. And, if we could send this story back to our 20 year old selves, we'd be going, "You got to be kidding me. What kind of a world is that?" But that is the world today. It's a world of momentum.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. And one of the ways of boosting that momentum is leveraging people with big followings. And you had some interesting stats in the book, Mark about how... when more famous people or people with big followings cheer your idea or whatever it is, it gets additional income beyond... it's a multiplier effect, depending on how many people are sharing that. So, great, great to be shared by one famous influencer. But every one you add, it goes up even exponentially, right?

Mark Schaefer: It does. And the credit for this research is Steve Rayson, a wonderful, wonderful visionary thinker and researcher. He was a founder of a company called BuzzSumo, which is now owned by Brandwatch, and yeah, yeah, I am too. It's one of the few platforms I use almost everyday. BuzzSumo is awesome. Steve interestingly, I think that was the second or third company he sold. And he actually is now getting an advanced degree in political science and he's writing books about political science. But back in the day, when he was doing research for BuzzSumo, he did a marvelous study that showed how things really go viral. And it's not like you think. It's not like the spider web, where a friend tells a friend tells a friend. What he talked about, what he discovered. And I call this the Sonic boom, is that it's in a very, very concentrated period of time. Where a lot of people with big audiences are all talking about the same thing in a very condensed period of time.

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So creating awareness about a business or an idea, a new book or whatever you're working on, it's not a six month rollout. It's two weeks or three weeks and you give it everything you've got to create that, again, you create that momentum and it's been shown time and time again to work. And I've personally experienced this as working for me. This is how I've launched my last few books, basing the idea on this research. And I knew it was working one day when I saw this tweet and a person said, I've seen Mark Schaefer's book mentioned four times today. I suppose I should go buy it. That's the Sonic boom, ladies and gentlemen. And so I've got different examples in the book of how that works.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. Mark, do you think this is a social phenomenon or is this partly or wholly an algorithmic phenomenon where the algorithms used by the Facebooks and LinkedIns and Twitters and so on, somehow pick up on this signal and amplify it, beyond what it might do otherwise?

Mark Schaefer: Well, I think it's a little of both, because of course the size of the audience, the authority of the person who's creating the content, that's going to fuel the algorithm. And I think that's why there is this exponential effect because of the algorithm start to sense that this thing is for lack of better words, trending, then the amplification just grows and grows. So it is a function of influence marketing and algorithms and content. And I have to emphasize that, you have to deliver the goods. You can't keep that momentum going. If you're not creating a great product, you can't trick someone into actually reading your book or subscribing to your service or you can't trick someone into loving you and loving what you do. So you've got to deliver the goods, but how do you create awareness for

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what you're doing? This idea of the Sonic boom is a big idea.

Roger Dooley: One other thing I found interesting as you get into connecting with people who can help you to that next step, which is another step in your process of getting... if you can get Oprah to put you on her show, you're probably a set a future or when you're doing something else, but when you are trying to make some of these connections and it's not necessarily going to be Oprah, but volunteering is a good example because is one way of doing that. Because I've certainly seen other people talk about how they got their start. You mentioned, I think Tim Ferris got his start in part by volunteering for certain activities when he showed up look and Valley. I think that one past guest did some work of volunteering for Tim Ferris and that helped launch his career. So yeah, it comes around as it goes around, but that's an often overlooked way because so often we are focused on, "Okay, I got to monetize what I'm doing." And you're not looking for non monetizeable things to do, even though they could be very helpful in the long run.

Mark Schaefer: Yeah, well, again, it was... I set the book up as this whimsical race, just between myself and Tim Ferris. And the reason I chose Tim is because as I was looking for case studies and different people I could feature in the book. I was like reading people's biographies, just trying to find different ideas to incorporate in the book. And look, Tim is big witness in all the media now and everything he touches turns to gold. But when you read where he started and he's very transparent about this, it's he's really... it was zero. It was... he was sickly. He had... and I'm not saying anything he hasn't said himself, he's been

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very transparent. He had health problems. He had psychological problems. He suffered from depression. He had financial problems and then he lost his girlfriend and he just chucked everything, went to Europe to try to find himself, had this idea for a book.

Pitched it was rejected 26 times. Now, could you ever imagine that 10 years from that moment, he'd be hanging out with LeBron James and Oprah and Hugh Jackman. And so when you dissect what happened, he followed this pattern exactly. You couldn't even write a better script. And again, he's very, very open about what he does and all his experiments to get to the next level. And it just follows this thing exactly. He was in the right place at the right time. It was a random thing, he wouldn't have written the book if he hadn't lost his girlfriend. Come on, it's amazing how these random events lead to changes in your life that can create new opportunities. He hit a seam, he worked on the Sonic boom.

He reached up, he had new mentors that were teaching him new things. And this gets to this idea of re-imagining mentorship, and you talked about how Tim volunteered and met these important people and he didn't go to them, "I want you to be my mentor. I want you to enter into this contract with me where you will help me for the next year." No, he just said every once in a while, he was like, "Hey, remember me? I met you at this party. Could I just ask you a question?"

And mentorship today is not about a long-term commitment, where you're teaching somebody how to do something. If you need to learn something, go to YouTube, you don't need a mentor. What you need a

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mentor to do is to open up new opportunities, make new introductions, help you solve problems that they can only solve. That is the fastest way to build momentum and get you to the next level. It's just to have someone make some key introduction that changes the whole landscape for you. And that's really, I think the key idea behind mentorship today, and there's an art and science about how do we approach that new idea of mentorship. And I think there's some great actionable ideas in the book.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, I could keep on going forever, Mark, but that's probably a pretty good place to wrap up. Where can people find you and your ideas?

Mark Schaefer: Well first, thank you so much, Roger, you're always so well-prepared you always ask me questions I've never been asked before. I appreciate that so much. You can find me at businessesgrow.com. We've been talking about Cumulative Advantage, you can find that book and all my books there, my blog, my podcast, and lots of other marketing resources for businesses of every size.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, thanks Mark. And we will list those places as well. So the other resources we mentioned on the show notes Page at rogerdooley.com/podcast, and go have text, audio and video versions of this conversation there as well. Mark, thanks so much for being on the show.

Mark Schaefer: Thanks so much, Roger.

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.

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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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