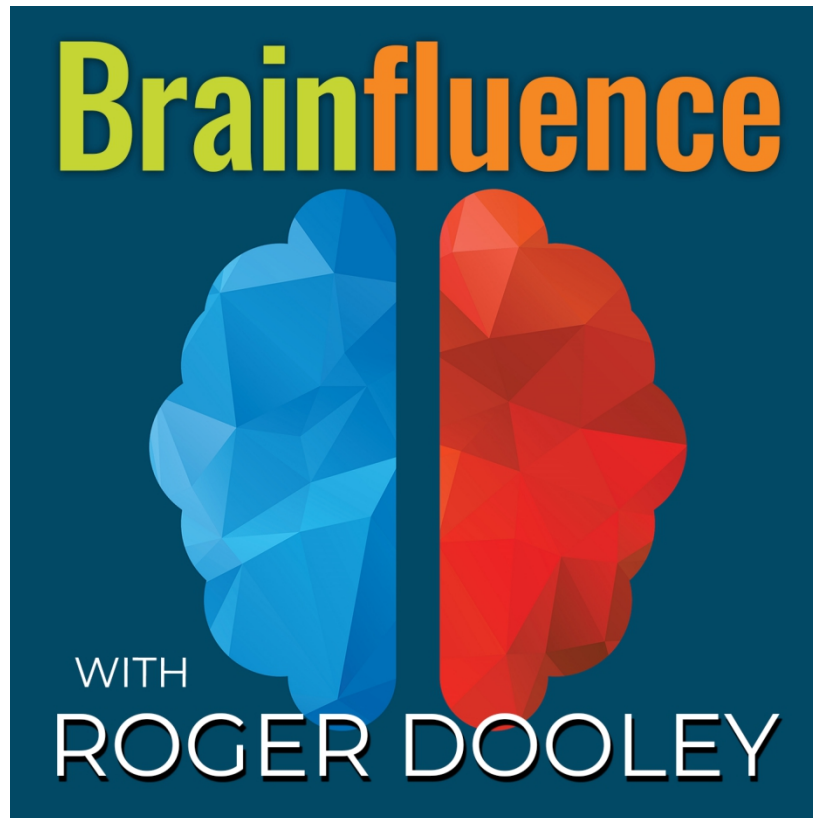


Winning Digital Customers with Howard Tiersky

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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. Howard Tiersky is a successful entrepreneur and thought leader in digital transformation. He's been named a top 10 influencer in that space by IDG and Enterprise Management 360. Howard is the founder of two companies that enable large brands to win in the digital world from the Digital Transformation Agency and Innovation Loft. And he's the author of The Wall Street Journal best selling book, *Winning Digital Customers: The Antidote to Irrelevance*. Welcome to the show, Howard.

Howard Tiersky: Thanks so much for having me, Roger. Pleased to be here. I'm a big fan of your work.

Roger Dooley: Well, thanks. And I think we all want to be more relevant these days, because irrelevance is the one thing that will do many brand. So there's so much to cover in the book. And I love the way that it is a kind of exhaustive step by

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step guide to a digital transformation process or customer experience enhancement process in the digital space.

Really soup to nuts, it's got all these great little graphics in it that have in some cases, little barcodes on them, so that I can get that in the picture there, probably a little bit too small to see but a little QR code actually that my people either access the information or share it on social media if it's something rather pithy.

Roger Dooley: And so it's really, I think, a pretty good digital experience for something that's printed on actual paper. To begin with, you started off with talking about customer love for brands, how does customer love differ from loyalty or perhaps even mere behavior?

Howard Tiersky: Sure, sure. Well, one of the things that we've observed, and we've done a lot of analysis as well to prove this is that one of the factors that is the best predictor of successful financial performance of a company as measured by revenue, profit, share price, growth is the emotional connection that customers have to that brand, the passion they feel for it, the connection that they feel.

Howard Tiersky: And you can use different terms. I use the word love to talk about... We do a lot of customer research. And when we talk to customers, and we ask them how they feel about Starbucks, the word love often comes up. When we ask them how they feel about Delta, how they feel about Apple, how they feel about Nike, Disney, the word love often is spontaneously coming from consumers.

Howard Tiersky: Now, of course, the word love can mean a lot of different things. I love my wife, not exactly the same way that I love Starbucks, of course. But nevertheless, that term for that

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strong feeling of emotional connection comes up again and again. And I think the word loyalty is an interesting one because, of course, if you look up the word loyalty in the dictionary, loyalty can be described as an emotion and we think of soldiers on the battlefield who have that strong feeling of loyalty for each other.

Howard Tiersky: But that's not how we use that word in business today. When businesses talk about the idea of loyalty, they're talking about something different from the kind of emotional connection that I'm talking about. They're talking about a behavior, the behavior of repeated transactions. So if I fly United Airlines three times a month, they are going to say that I am loyal.

Howard Tiersky: And if you use that behavior based definition, fine, I'm loyal, do I feel loyalty towards the brand? I might, or I might not. I might fly them because I live near Newark Airport, and they're the closest tab and they fly where I want to go, and they have the right schedule, just like I go to the gas station that's six blocks in my house, because well, they're six blocks in my house, do I feel an emotional connection to that Chevron station? Not at all, not even remotely.

Howard Tiersky: So I just think it's important, believe me, we want this behavior called repeated transactions. There's no question that we want that behavior, but that's a different thing from an emotional connection, so I use the word love to make that distinction. And then further went on in the book and in our research to look at what inspires customer love because it's one thing to say, it's great to have it. He could say, "Well, this shirt, people love Disney,

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but how am I going to get them to love my brand? I'm an insurance company or whatever."

Howard Tiersky: And in fact, any brand can inspire customer love. And we've defined in the book a kind of a three step recipe if you will, for inspiring love.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I think that's a distinction that I make too. I sometimes refer to true loyalty, which is kind of a synonym for what you're talking about where your loyalty can be tested. Like I was a United 1K for five years running up to the pandemic, and I would appear to be a super loyal customer. I would never fly another airline. I didn't have a lot of love for United, and if the CEO of Delta said, "Hey, Roger, we'd like you to try our brand, we'll do everything that they'll do for you for you," I would probably say, "Well, okay, we'll give it a try," and contrast that with other brands that I'm loyal to like Amazon Prime where I have not found anything that could really shake my use of that, because of the entire customer experience.

Roger Dooley: Not just the fast delivery, not just the ease of ordering, we put all that together, their trust in me. When I return something I get credited instantly. They don't wait to check it out before they get it back. That, to me is true loyalty. So there's been, begin early in the book talking about some of the digital disruptors, the Ubers of the world where they pretty much come in with a radically different experience, digital experience based on current digital technology. You couldn't have had Uber without smartphones, and how they disrupted traditional brands.

Roger Dooley: Do you have an example or two of a brand that was an established brand with a sort of a long history of legacy

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business that really successfully executed if not in a disruptive way in the digital world, at least to become as digital as you could be in that space.

Howard Tiersky: Yeah, I'm really glad you asked me that. Because yes, and I will give you some. And most of my work is with large, let's call them legacy brands, great classic brands that started long before the digital world. And sometimes when you look around and you look at the companies that seem most successful, whether that's Facebook, or Google, or Amazon, or Uber or Airbnb, and it can look like only those companies that were sort of born digital are the ones that are successful, and everyone else is doomed.

Howard Tiersky: And so when you're executive at a large, classic legacy company, you can get a sense of hopelessness, like how can we ever transform. But that is a fallacy because while it is true that still to this day most large classic legacy brands haven't really found their path to being fully digitally transformed, here are some that are, or at least who have to fulfill your definition, they're really knocking out of the park in the digital world.

Howard Tiersky: Let's look at Disney. Now Disney struggled for a long time, I don't know if you remember, Disney bought Infoseek and invested all kinds of money in the early digital years with limited traction and limited success, but they persisted. And now about a year ago, I guess it's been, Disney launched Disney Plus, which is a competitor to Netflix and Hulu and such. And in, I believe it was the first four or so months of Disney Plus their subscriber base equals that of Hulu, and was 50% that of Netflix. They've been in that business for almost 10 years.

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Howard Tiersky: And they continue to sustain excellent subscriber acquisition and retention. And so there's just one example of a brand, and that's not the only way in which Disney's done well in the digital world. But that's a brand that really has done an outstanding job of it.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, that's a great example. We've had John Padgett on the show. He was the guy that led the magic band team that pretty much digitally transformed the park experience to eliminate bottlenecks, to try and distribute to folks and eliminate just little bits of friction from payment to getting your meal order in and so on, just a lot of little things that had to seem crazy at the time to say it was a billion dollar investment for Disney, for Walt Disney World.

Roger Dooley: And to say, we're going to invest that kind of money for something that you can't see, it's not a fantastic new ride. It's not a huge attraction that's going to bring us millions of new visitors. It's just the sort of the plumbing, but they did it and it's worked out very well for them, created a much more seamless experience.

Howard Tiersky: Yes, yes, absolutely. Another brand that's doing an awesome job today is Walmart. Look how they kind of came out of the first number of years of Amazon's dominance, Walmart was, of course still successful due to their huge retail footprint and the fact that a large percentage of the goods that they sold were very much of the go to the store and buy them nature, whether it was low end apparel or grocery type items.

Howard Tiersky: So in the first few years their threat from Amazon wasn't as great as for perhaps some other type of retailer, but certainly then especially after their acquisition of jet.com,

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they have really taken the bull by the horns and they are now one of the top eCommerce sites in the world or certainly in the United States.

Howard Tiersky: So that's certainly a classic legacy brand that's done well. And you know who else has really done well? And I would kind of put them on the same level, but both FedEx and UPS who if you think about Federal Express, there was a time when most of their business came from delivering documents, overnight delivery of contracts, letters, even memos. There was a time when everything before email, now I'm really dating myself. But that was in business, every company was sending out tons and tons of FedEx is sending messages and memos back and forth.

Howard Tiersky: And of course, email really decimated the business of sending that type of correspondence. And now, almost every contract I get today is a DocuSign. The whole need for Federal Express to play that role has been, I don't know what... I think when I did a mortgage refinance, they had to Federal Express me some papers, so once in a while, but not nearly very often. But what they saw was the growing opportunity for eCommerce delivery.

Howard Tiersky: And so they reorganized their whole business, and they made acquisitions of external companies like UPS ground, and they enabled all kinds of sophisticated technology in the B2B world to be an outstanding partner to eCommerce providers who were all of a sudden having to ship all these products, whether it's Amazon or the multitude of other companies that are doing that.

Howard Tiersky: And so they've taken a huge piece, and really, both FedEx and UPS have done a beautiful job of capitalizing

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on that. And now, of course, that's by far the largest part of their business and a great example of transformation and adapting themselves to where the world was going.

Roger Dooley: Well, if you look at the other end of the spectrum, Howard, a blockbuster is one of those sort of iconic examples of companies that just failed to see what was coming, the light of the tunnel was an expression train headed their way. But you were actually there for at least part of the end, right?

Howard Tiersky: Yes.

Roger Dooley: I think what happened there is actually emblematic of what happens in a lot of companies where you have executives that really are resistant to change. I know that this will shock many of our listeners, because certainly their executives are resistant to change. But I think we do encounter that fairly often. So to tell the blockbuster story, but perhaps even expand to that, how can we communicate with executives today to show them that change is essential?

Howard Tiersky: Yes, yes. Well, thank you so much, Roger, for bringing up one of the great failures of my career. Indeed, I was there a couple of decades ago as kind of a high price consultant helping to create the vision, the digital vision for the future of blockbuster. We created a vision, which in many ways looks a lot like what some of the leaders in that space are doing today, but we were complete failures at getting that vision to be adopted and supported by the management.

Howard Tiersky: I should say, there were people that were part of the management who brought us in, so it wasn't that there

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wasn't anybody there, there were definitely, and by the way, super smart people running blockbuster. This was not like a clueless bunch of people. And some of them really saw the need for digital. In fact, they all saw the need for doing something with digital. Nobody was against an R&D project, we should be looking at this, this is the future.

Howard Tiersky: At that level, everyone's like, "Sounds great, sounds great." But then when all of a sudden, you bring forth a vision that might say, "Hey, in 10 years, we might not need stores anymore." All of a sudden, it's like, whoa, wait a minute, slow the roll. And essentially, as you said, I think really blockbuster... Blockbuster was run by people who for lack of a better way of putting it, they were retail store people, that was their career, that was their passion, and that was their expertise and their value to the organization.

Howard Tiersky: 35 years, or whatever it was, running retail stores, and they would give you a long list of all the different retail chains that they had been a part of, and played management role in. And that's a lot to be proud of. And then when all of a sudden someone puts a vision in front of them, and they mean that the whole business can be focused on a completely different way of delivering its services, well, that doesn't sound so good.

Howard Tiersky: People think to themselves, where's my place in that? That might be good for the company, but that doesn't sound so good for my career, either consciously or, of course, in your work, you talk all the time about decisions that we make are so subconsciously driven. So it may not always be even that those people are sitting there

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machiavelliantly thinking I'm going to undermine the company, but that their emotional response is not good, and then they rationalize that.

Howard Tiersky: And one of the rationalizations I often heard and there were multiple reasons. Listen, those were early days. So there were challenges back then that were sort of digital rights management issues and studios were worried about piracy. So it wasn't as easy or as obvious as it is today that this was the future. But still, it really did seem likely that some variation of that was where the world was going.

Howard Tiersky: But one of the points of resistance that I often heard is back then, when I was working with them, it was after the point that blockbuster had gotten rid of late fees, you recall that, because of course, that was a huge point of friction, customer pain, and they did recognize that they needed to do something and they got rid of late fees, but that was a huge source of profit for them albeit at a breakage model right at the expense of the customer.

Howard Tiersky: And it was very hard for them to make money on the movies themselves because the studios had negotiated such a huge portion of that profit for themselves. So what they were left with is their main driver of profit was candy because you'd go into the store, you'd rent two videos, blockbuster would make 20 cents profit on that or whatever else, but then you'd buy one of those giant Twizzlers in a bucket of popcorn. And they'd make \$8 of profit on that.

Howard Tiersky: So it was really all about the candy in terms of their revenue model at that point in time. So all of a sudden,

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you say, "Hey, great news, we can deliver these movies streaming right to people's homes," and what I would hear from people... In fact, we'd get this look like don't you understand our business? And what I hear is this phrase all the time, you can't stream candy.

Howard Tiersky: And there was this mindset that well, since you can't stream candy, this doesn't make any sense for us, this will not work. And while that was true, and even to this day I know of no way to stream candy, even though they do in the Willy Wonka movie. But putting that aside, because that's not real. Obviously, you can't stream candy. But if you look at Netflix annual report, you won't see one single line item of revenue for candy.

Howard Tiersky: So clearly, there was a path to a successful delivery of video to the home that doesn't rely on candy. And of course, I'm simplifying the story a little bit not everybody said that. But it's just emblematic of how the rationalization that people make as to why something... We can't go down that road because here's a reason. It's not a reason that's completely crazy, it's an obstacle. But it's an obstacle to where the treasure lies, it's like that old thing about I'm looking for my contact lens over here, because the light is better.

Howard Tiersky: The light is better, but you're not going to find it there. And I don't think no matter what blockbuster might have done with improved stores, whatever else or guinea pig commercials which were great. Remember those awesome guinea pig commercials they did to try to get people in the store? But God, when the world is changing, you have to change with the times or else you'll be irrelevant.

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Roger Dooley: Howard, I guess the candy thing explains why none of the big movie theater chains who are also in the business of delivering movies to consumers even attempt in streaming, because wow, they can't stream the candy, they can't stream popcorn or sodas. And actually, the winners in that industry, if there are winners seem to be the ones that have sort of doubled down on that aspect of it and are offering things like alcoholic beverages, meal service, and so on in a dramatically improved customer experience in the theater.

Howard Tiersky: Good point.

Roger Dooley: I mean, theoretically, they could have too, but admittedly, it is hard to obsolete your own business, to say, like people all... You mentioned Kodak. And of course, they're the other classic example of a company that could have been the leader in digital photos, but didn't do it. But obviously, in one respect, you have these film guys who were good at running film plants and distribution systems and so on. But also, you're saying you've got this huge cash cow, and you're basically going to put a gun to its head and shoot it, and you're going to hope that whatever grows out of that replaces it and say, that's a tough thing to do.

Roger Dooley: But certainly there are some organizations and jumping back to the airlines where you recount one experience in your book about a very frustrating experience trying to check in, in a lot of my talks and workshops. I use examples from that industry too of websites that just are horrible, they log you out. They don't recognize you at inopportune times, and you've got to re-authenticate

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yourself, just all this crazy friction that you simply don't see at smart companies like Amazon.

Roger Dooley: That never happens at Amazon, but this isn't reinventing their business. This is just smoothing the process. Why is it the company executives don't see that their customer experience is being damaged? And how do you sort of pierce through that and get them to realize that, hey this may be the plumbing, but we need to invest some serious money in it.

Howard Tiersky: Yeah, well, there's different layers of that. But to kind of talk about the layer you're talking about, which is kind of like all the little things in an experience that can add up to create frustration, even when the overall experience might have been the result of massive investment and massive care, and they're really trying to do it right. But there's just issues that come up that really get in your way.

Howard Tiersky: I think the reality is that, first of all, it's hard. It's hard when you have a sophisticated product. Let's take the airline industry for example. We work a lot in travel, and it's hard to create a great experience because it's complicated. It's a lot more complicated than selling a pair of shoes. You have inventory that's changing all the time, prices that are changing all the time. Flights, sometimes the change and just all kinds of reasons why just the logical back end to something like that is complicated.

Howard Tiersky: Now, that's not an excuse by any stretch. The customer doesn't care that it's difficult. All they care about is that you're giving And that level of elegance that they expect. But I just want to start by acknowledging that it's not easy, and whenever you create something new, whenever you

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have a digital property that you're constantly changing and updating, there's always the potential for planting what I call confusion or frustration bombs.

Howard Tiersky: You've added some awesome new feature, but in the process, you've just reorganized the buttons or you've just changed something or you've just add a line of instruction or whatever else. And you think it's helping, but you may have unintentionally created a problem in some other way. And so those are a couple of the reasons.

Howard Tiersky: And the third reason is that a lot of executives and leaders of brands that have big digital properties, they don't necessarily use them. I mean, just as an example, one time I was hired, we were hired to do the whole new booking reservation process for a big resort. And so we had to present to the CEO, and I think it was the chairman of the board of directors, if I remember correctly, and we've been working on this project for a long time. But we were told, okay, you've got 10 minutes of this two hour long meeting, but like we were just one agenda item.

Howard Tiersky: So just come on there and just tell them what the new vision is that your team is working on. So we're like, "Okay," and we looked at what do we want to talk about, and we made a decision, we said, "We're just going to focus on..." We had already mapped out the current process and all the problems and then how this new vision was going to solve all the problems. We only had 10 minutes. And so we decided to just show them what the future vision is.

Howard Tiersky: So we, it was me actually, stood up there and I explained and I said, "Here's how it's going to work." And you're

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going to be able to search across all the different resort properties and book something but you can change your booking later, very easily. You can go in and do all these things, showed everything you're going to be able to do.

Howard Tiersky: And when I was done, I was sort of disappointed that people didn't seem that enthusiastic because I was like, "I was enthusiastic." And finally, the CEO says, "That all sounds logical, but isn't that pretty much how it works today?" And I was like, "Oh-oh." Because no, if you wanted every property you had to search separately, run a different search for every property. And then once you made a booking, if you want to change it, you had to call the call center. There were all these points of pain that we had solved, but nobody in the room even knew about those points of pain. Why?

Howard Tiersky: Well, I don't really know. But if I had to guess, I would guess that if the CEO wants to stay at one of his resorts, which I'm sure he does all the time, he just says to his assistant, "Hey, get me a room at the resort." He's not going on to his own website and trying to book something and waiting at the call center. So part of it is just that awareness. So what do we do about that? I think the answer is several fold.

Howard Tiersky: First, I call it basic hygiene. Anyone who's running, and this isn't only true of digital, but I'll just focus on digital, anyone who's running digital properties of any scale needs to be going through them and having them professionally assessed. I would say at least annually, but ideally, quarterly, if they're changing a lot, doing what's called a heuristic analysis, which is where an expert just goes to every screen, every workflow, and looks for

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possible problems, and then also usability testing with users where you sit across from a user and you say, "Okay, book, a rental car, book, a hotel, buy a pair of boots, whatever it is, and observe the challenges and issues that they may be encountering, and you document those and then you prioritize those, and you put them in a list of things to look at. They may be technical glitches, they may be user interface issues, whatever they maybe, but unless you have that rigorous process, it's so easy to miss things."

Howard Tiersky: And then you need to create a burning platform, you need to be able to go back in to whoever is going to fund that and agree to put some attention not only on creating bright new shiny objects, but on fixing all the sort of detritus that's been left behind by prior projects. And one of the things that helps us a lot with that is video because when we do usability tests, we video that whether it's on Zoom, or whether it's in person, and we have usually the two video version, we have the person's face, like you see now my face, and then you have the screen where even if it's a mobile device, and then we put that sort of picture in picture.

Howard Tiersky: And we're able to show clips, because if I go to people and say... Let's say people are trying to book a vacation, and we say people are confused by the calendar widget and sometimes they make mistakes, and they pick the wrong dates because they find the interface confusing. It goes to exactly what you talked about Roger, which is emotion. That's logical. Well, people are confused, we should fix it.

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Howard Tiersky: But when I show you a video of a person sitting there looking at it, confused, they try something, it doesn't work. They're like, "What the F." Then they're like trying again, it doesn't work again. And they're like tearing their hair out, and you get to see the emotional impact you're having on people. It's so much easier to build a burning platform, and sometimes you're like, "Turn it off, turn it off. We'll do it. We'll do it. We'll finish the project. Don't make us watch that anymore. We don't want to see people suffer," but a little bit of that giving a window into the suffering that you're inflicting on people, it helps get people on board.

Roger Dooley: Right. Really I think the video concept is so important because it's one thing to say, we find that there is a friction point here where customers are hesitating for 15 seconds where it shouldn't take more than one second. But to actually show somebody with a perplexed face and perhaps rage clicking or swearing screen, I think it's so much more impactful. We had Martin Lindstrom the branding guru on the show a couple months ago. And he talked about some ways of building that executive empathy. In one case, he put the executives in... They thought they were going to workshop and they were, but the workshop was sitting in a hot, noisy room for an hour because that's what the customers were having to do when they went to one of the facilities, one of the service locations for this brand, is a telecom company.

Roger Dooley: And of course, telecom companies are infamous for terrible service, because they tend to be monopolies. Some really crazy stuff like that. One of the things that I like in your book was the concept of workshop, a multi day workshop involving 20 executives and 20 call center reps, which to me is kind of novel and almost unheard of

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to take that many people who are key people in their own ways because you're typically getting the more experienced call center reps who can talk about the experiences more authoritatively than somebody who started the day before, and of course, executives to take them out for that one to interact.

Roger Dooley: Explain that process. How do you, first of all, convince folks that that was a good idea? But then how did you break down those barriers because if I'm a call center rep, I'm sure there's a range of personalities, some people can be very outspoken no matter who's in the room, a lot of others only say, "Wow, this guy is the group VP, so I'm not going to say anything bad." How does that work? How do you make that work?

Howard Tiersky: Yeah, sure. Well, foundational to everything we do is that understanding the customer is critical to business success. I just believe that's the first rule of business to be honest. And why? Because the number one indicator of a successful business is that they're getting the customers to do what they want them to do. Isn't the only thing in business, you can optimize your purchasing and do other things, but if you are getting your customers to do what you want them to do, you've probably running a pretty good business, and it will cover up for a lot of sins in other areas.

Howard Tiersky: And if you are failing to get your customers to do what you want them to do, it probably doesn't matter what else you do. Blockbuster might have had a great finance person doing your bookkeeping fantastically well, they might add a great ERP system, doesn't matter if the customers aren't doing what you want them to do. And so

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my experience if you want to influence somebody, you have to understand that. And so understanding the customer, I think, is foundational.

Howard Tiersky: And so one of the things that we always talk about and if we're doing a workshop that's focused on the customer experience is key question is well, who... It can be the voice of the customer, who understands the customer in this room? And there's a great definition Malcolm Gladwell gives, I think it's in his book, Blink, I recall correctly. And he's talking about, I might be wrong about which of his books, but he's talking about what it takes to become an expert, like a virtuoso violinist, or an expert in appraising art, whatever else.

Howard Tiersky: And his research showed that it's 2000 hours. Sorry, no, no 10,000 hours. When you spend 10,000 hours doing something, that's the point at which you are truly an expert. And he saw that same thing, whether it was being a soccer player, or anything else, that was the point at which you became an expert. Now, obviously, it's not, precisely 10,000 hours, but that was the result of his research. So if you have somebody who has been sitting in your call center, talking to your customer 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, for five years or more, they are an expert, they are a professional soccer player at understanding your customer, they are a virtuoso concert violinist in understanding your customer.

Howard Tiersky: That is a huge asset. And by the way, if you look at many of the top executives, and you say, "Well, the chief marketing officer," you'd think that the chief marketing officer understands the customer, and you'd like to think that he or she does, but how many hours has that chief

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marketing officer spent with customers in the last couple years? And the answer is usually very, very few. They're friends that say, "Oh, this is what I don't like about your stores." And so they can be overly influenced by a small amount of data.

Howard Tiersky: And that argument, you asked me sort of how we make... We make that argument. We say, "Listen, it's great we've got all these top executives, but how many of them qualify as customer experts?" And the answer is usually zero. And so it doesn't mean they don't have any knowledge. But let's avail of ourselves of some of the expertise in the room. You just want to pick the right ones.

Howard Tiersky: First of all, you want to pick the ones that have been around long enough that they qualify as experts, not someone you hired three weeks ago, or even two years ago. And then secondly, yes, the other two criteria we look for is we usually go talk to the call center, people, managers of the call center, we say, "First of all, we want the people that are good." They always have stats on customer satisfaction. Do you want the ones that are successfully interacting with customers? Why? Because They're the ones who have the most effectively processed what they've learned about the customer into something they can apply.

Howard Tiersky: If someone spent five years talking to customers, and they still aren't satisfying customers, let's not talk to that person, let's talk to the one who's figured out how to use their knowledge to be better at serving the customer. And then yes, we want people who are going to be articulate, outspoken, et cetera. And then it's also part of how you set the event up. You don't put the executives up on a

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stage on high ideas, and then tell the call center people they're going to sit on the other side of the room.

Howard Tiersky: You treat everyone as equals you. They're all dressed the same. We like to encourage everyone to dress casually. Everyone's wearing the same attire. We start with some icebreaker activities, we mix people up into random groups, we don't treat the senior vice president in the event any differently than we treat the person off the call center, we tell them they're all one team, and we're here together to solve a problem. You know what? It works great and my heart is warmed when I see the guy from the call center or whatnot talking and the senior vice president with his notebook open asking him a question after question and taking notes and all that. It's a fantastic thing.

Howard Tiersky: And the funny thing is, they don't need to be in our workshop. These are their own people. I mean, I'm happy to be a facilitator of that sort of thing, but these are treasure troves of knowledge at their own organization that very often companies just aren't turning to those people for the expertise that they have. So whether it's in a workshop or another format... And we'll do surveys, and we'll do interviews, and we'll do other formats as well leveraging these people I call customer experts.

Howard Tiersky: And one last thought about it, which is, it's not just the people in the call center. That's one example. We did a project for AAA around roadside assistance, and we rode with truck drivers to understand what they know from being we've gone to car dealerships, and spend time with people who have been car salespeople for 10 years

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understanding how they sell cars so that we could make the website for the car company better.

Howard Tiersky: We spent time with people at malls who've worked the customer service desk in a mall for a decade to understand how they interact with customers all day long. So there's lots of people... Security guards can be amazing people with knowledge of customers. They see customers going by them all day, every day, what challenges do those customers have? So you probably have a lot of people within your any given organization who are these customer experts, and the call center is one place to look, but there are many more.

Roger Dooley: Howard, I'm convinced that some brands really don't want to hear from those people because of the quality of the experience, and they don't want the real information. I was dealing with my internet service provider a few months back, and I had an incredibly frustrating in this case, it was a chat experience. But the call center type experience with a person who was very trying to be helpful, but she could not tell me the speed of my internet service that I was paying for because I was doing some work in my home network and wanted to make sure I was setting it up right unless I found a four digit pin that was located on the paper invoice, which of course, I didn't have. Or I could download a PDF.

Roger Dooley: Now, I didn't know how to download a PDF. And eventually, after 10 minutes of hunting around, I found it in and got the number, but just an incredibly frustrating, time consuming experience for question that you should have been able to answer instantly. She already authenticated me once with phone number and other stuff.

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So finally, I never do these post conversation surveys, but this time I said, "Okay, I'm going to tell them what I think. This was a horrible experience." And I was expecting net promoter score or something like that.

Roger Dooley: No, they asked me about the agent, was he or she courteous? All these questions about the quality of the service I got from the agent just about that person. They never asked about their policies, their experience, they didn't try for customer effort score, which was off the chart in that particular transaction, none of that stuff. And I'm pretty sure that the people in that marketing department would not want a bunch of their customer service reps to be in a meeting with the CEO when it's a, yeah, you know what the customers are talking about? This is what they're saying, we can't help them because they have to hunt down a stupid number that they can't find because they don't know how to download a PDF.

Roger Dooley: I think sometimes it's the executives themselves that don't want that information, but somewhere somebody in the organization dies. Hopefully the CMO, the CEO wants to improve service regardless of how that reflects on the job that's currently being done.

Howard Tiersky: I understand what you're saying. I guess I'd say a couple things. First, is I have a story to build on your venting. One thing that happened to me recently was with another big telecommunications company is I was unable to place an order. I'm already a customer, and I'm trying to upgrade my cable service. So I tried to place the order and it's just spinning. It won't work. Like it's just broken.

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Howard Tiersky: So I go to chat. So I'm trying to chat. So first of all, the person has no idea who I am. Even though I'm already logged into the website, there's no sense of like, oh, you're already logged in, so I have to tell them who I am. Okay, fine. And then he says, "Well, I need your phone number." And I'm like, "Okay," so I enter the phone number, and he goes, "Well," this is by chat, "can you please enter the phone number this way, digit, digit, space, digit," but listen to how they wanted to enter it, like digit, digit, space, digit, digit, space, digit, digit, space. I have to enter the phone number in the chat that way, like I can't put all three numbers, the area code together. So my response is like, "Are you joking?"

Roger Dooley: That's like an IQ test or something.

Howard Tiersky: Right, and I have to answer like two zero, for the first two digits, the zip code of the area code and then a space and then like, one, nine, which is the last digit of the area code and the first digit of the phone. So I'm entering the phone number that's completely bizarre way. And of course, because I'm me. Like, "Why have you asked me to do this?" And he says, "Well, I need this phone number to look up your account, but the security protocols on our chat will not allow you to give me a number that's more than two digits long, so I need you to enter the number in this way because otherwise it blanks it out and I can't see it," he said.

Howard Tiersky: So first of all, that's a pretty stupid security protocol that prevents me from telling him the information he needs to help me. And number two, it's pretty easy to circumvent security protocol, because all he has to do is tell me to put spaces in them, it's like to your comment about policy.

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And he was lovely about it. He was apologetic and seemed like a bright guy, and just like, but this crazy rules in place.

Howard Tiersky: So I sympathize with your situation. And I do agree that it's an epidemic. And with respect to... It's funny, because I feel like this goes back again to a theme that I hear you talk about all the time, which is people do things for subconscious and emotional reasons. So yes, it's only rational to want to know the problems so you can solve them, but it is wholly logical that you emotionally would rather not hear bad news, who wants bad news? Don't you want good news? I imagine if you hire someone to look at your website, you might think, well, the best thing I would love them to come back and say, we have looked at your digital experience, and it is the best we've ever seen. It is so beautifully done, you have done such a fantastic job on it, that we can suggest absolutely nothing to improve this experience.

Howard Tiersky: And all I would suggest and I think whenever I give a presentation, when I'm sharing with a client the results of analysis that we've done of the challenges and problems on their digital properties, I always start by saying, if I were to tell you that, that would be the worst possible news I could give you because you're already doing business at whatever level you're doing it, and do you want to do business at the same level? Or do you want to grow? Because if you want to grow, we're going to have to improve. And if you've already reached the maximum potential goodness of what you're doing for your customers, you're SOL.

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Howard Tiersky: There's nowhere to go, you're as big as you can get. But if I can tell you and show you that there are maybe dozens of ways that you can improve the customers experience, things that even though you already have people buying from you today that are frustrating and confusing them that if you fixed you get even more people buying from them, would that be good news or bad news? And I try to get them to go, "That would be good news." And just try to get their...

Howard Tiersky: So let's be enthusiastic about every single possible thing that we can fix. And the other thing I always try to acknowledge when I'm talking about and sharing these types of problems is look, I know because I do this for a living there are always reasons. Just because there's problems, it doesn't mean someone was stupid, or incompetent. It's not a judgment like that. First of all, very often we launch new things, and we try to create a minimum viable product, and we get great, cool new stuff out quickly. And it's only logical that then there's a cleanup process afterwards to say, "Hey, we got it out quickly, but in perfectly, and now we have the opportunity to polish it."

Howard Tiersky: And furthermore, there's a natural tendency for, I mean, within... There's always a reason why, or very often there's a reason. Like for example, let's say when you try to look up your account and tell you what your upgrade options are, it takes 15 seconds for that page to come up. Well, that's too long. But it's not because somebody sat there and said, "I think we should add extra time here, we should make this take 15 seconds." People were doing the best they could with what they had. And now we have

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the opportunity to come back and point out areas for further improvement to get even more business results.

Howard Tiersky: So try to put it in that context. So the CEO, we're not leading the CEO down the path of saying, "Let me show you why all the people who've worked on your digital properties are idiots and they should all be fired." That's the point. But only that anything could be made better. And we figured out ways to make it better and understanding the customer more is only going to help us go up and up and up.

Roger Dooley: I think that is a great takeaway to wrap up with, Howard. How can people find you and your ideas online?

Howard Tiersky: Well, if they want to learn more about the book, they can go... First of all the book is available wherever books are sold. You can find it of course on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, et cetera, et cetera. You can also go to the website for the book, which is winningdigitalcustomers.com and if you go there, you can download the first chapter of the book for free. So you're welcome to do that. You can also find me. I'm on LinkedIn, other social media channels like Facebook and Twitter. I do two live casts a week, I have a podcast as well called Winning Digital Podcast. So if you google me, or you Google Winning Digital Customers, probably a lot of that stuff's going to come back. And we'd love to you have anyone in your audience that wants to learn more about it. Find me on any of those places.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, we will link to all of those places in the book on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast, where we'll have audio, video and text versions of this

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conversation. Howard, thanks so much for being on the show.

Howard Tiersky: Oh my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

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

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

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

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