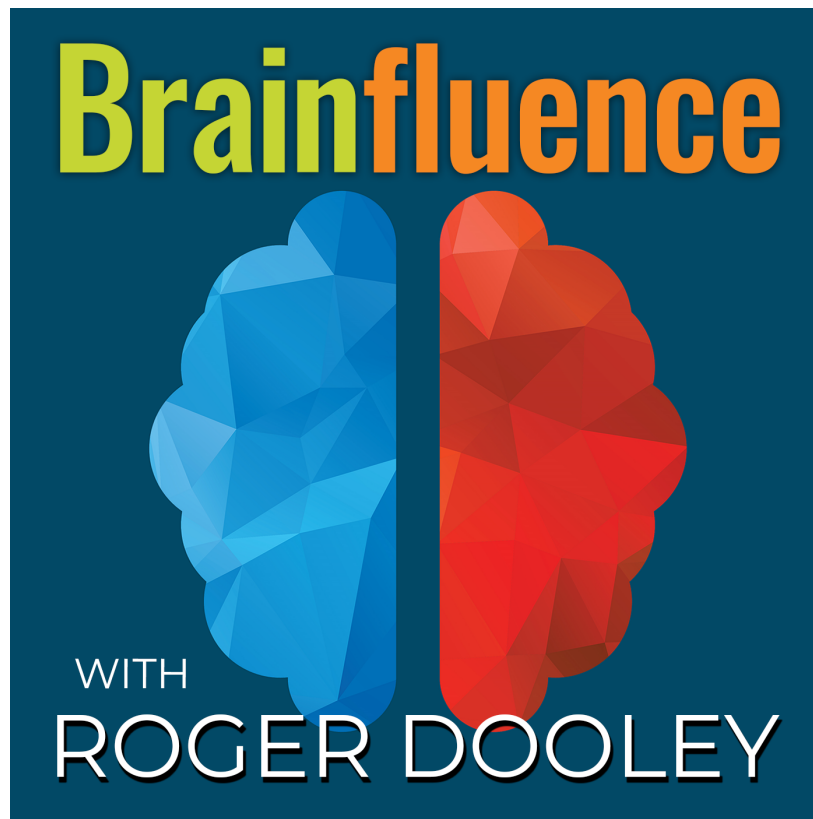


## Smartwatch Neuromarketing with Paul Zak

<https://www.rogerdooley.com/paul-zak-immersion>



Full Episode Transcript

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# Roger Dooley

The Brainfluence Podcast with 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 Clamer 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. I'm excited to have Paul Zak back on the show today. Paul is the founding director of the Center for Neuro Economic Studies and Professor of Economics, Psychology, and Management at Claremont Graduate University, as well as founder of Immersion Neuroscience.

He's been a pioneer in the study of oxytocin hormone with deep connection to trust. His last book, *Trust Factor*, is one of my favorites. It's a business book based on science, and Paul's the rare academic who understands how business works. In fact, when people ask me the dreaded, "So what book have you recommended most often?" *Trust Factor* is typically my go-to answer. Paul, great to have you back on the show.

Paul Zak: Thanks so much, Roger. Great to be back with you.

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Roger Dooley: So I've been thinking a lot about trust lately, and I'm curious. Since Trust Factor came out, do you have any new insights about trust either in business or in general?

Paul Zak: Yeah, I think we've been looking at some of the precursors of trust. So how do we design an environment situation so that trust can be sufficiently high? And we found that psychological safety is really the precursor to trust.

So if I have low psychological safety, my anxiety's high, I'm just trying to hold on for the next two seconds, and I can't actually connect to other people, I'm not a very good colleague, but being able to measure that in real-time physiologically has been, for a lot of companies, a real game changer. So I can know right away, do I have the preconditions to actually build trust?

Roger Dooley: And right now we're at a sort of trust inflection point in the country. As we're taping this, we have just seen, basically, the CDC throw out mask requirements or guidelines for people who are fully vaccinated. And businesses around the country, particularly at retailers, Costco, Sam's, Walmart, all of the big retailers and other types of businesses, are saying, "Okay, we still will want our unvaccinated customers to wear masks, but it will be an honor system." It would be based on trust.

And I think that they really have no choice other than doing that because they can't check every single person who comes in the door and turn their employees into mask police. But I think that I'm also hearing rumblings from the shoppers who are saying, "Well, gee, how can I trust that my fellow shopper really is vaccinated if they're

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not wearing a mask? Or are they just not liking masks and saying that, 'Well, nobody's going to check?'" So any thoughts on that, Paul?

Paul Zak: Yeah, I think trust is the social lubricant around us. So we have to have some degree of trust and we just can't go through life, but also worry about employees, right? So now if I have a lot of unmasked customers, do I feel comfortable giving great customer service? Am I able to work in a team with my unmasked colleagues?

And so I think, again, that's where measurement comes in. So I'm always going to put my science hat on and go, I think asking people is important, but also establishing those conditions. So it could be more frequent breaks, more chance to wash your hands, maintaining social distance. I had a handshake, I told you I traveled last week, someone shook my hand. It was so weird. I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, do I have to wash this now? What's the story?" So I think we're all trying to figure this out.

And I do believe tolerance is the important watch word here, right? So whenever you're really sensitive that everyone's anxiety level is going to be all over the map, and it's tough. It was fun to be on an airplane and fun to be there, but lift your mask for a drink, that's not going to survive. So I think we all have to acclimate to the mask-free lifestyle eventually.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. I had a similar handshake experience, Paul, just a week or so ago. I met up with a few local colleagues here in Austin and ran into somebody that I hadn't seen in a year and instinctively stuck out my hand. We shook hands. And then I think both of us immediately wondered,

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oh, gee, were we supposed to do that or not? So I think there's probably a lot of that going on around the country.

So Paul, I want to learn more about Immersion Neuro. I know, according to Crunchbase back in December, you raised a million dollars. So, congratulations on that. And the basic principle seems to be that you are doing, in essence, what are something like neuro-marketing studies, if you will, using smartwatches. And this is something that I told your colleague, your CEO, for probably five years or so, I've had a slide in many of my decks that shows a picture of a smartwatch, typically the Apple version, and with something like the future of neuro-marketing. Now so far, that hasn't panned out. So when I saw your company, I said, oh, well, okay, maybe I was actually right.

Can you explain a little bit more about Immersion Neuroscience, what they do, what the technology is and so on?

Paul Zak:

Right, so we have democratized neuroscience. So this grew out at work in my academic lab in which we identified the signals in the brain that together would tell us how much your brain values that experience. When the experience is valuable, you'll remember it. You'll act on it. You'll share it. Those are all things that marketers care about.

And so again, we had these \$100,000 machines and roomful of PhDs. And as companies started asking us to help them, we realized the problem is, I'm a weirdo. You don't want to talk to me, right? And I'm too expensive and I'm too slow. So, we began to automate all the signal

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processing. And then once we did that, we realized like, why do we need \$100,000 machines? We've been testing wearables for quite a while.

And 10, 12 years ago, the data quality was quite poor. But in essence, we have democratized neuroscience by creating a SaaS platform that lets anybody measure what the brain loves in real time, any place people are. So absolutely remote. It can be synchronous, can be asynchronous. You can send them a video, send them audio, and actually measure second-by-second how much their brain cares about this.

So a lot of our clients are in the entertainment space, movies, TVs, TV networks, in the training and education space. So one of the great things about COVID has been this explosion of ed-tech abilities to really capture the best teachers in the world and see if they're really connecting to students. So we have ed-tech companies who are using our technology, and certainly advertising marketing world, instead of just sort of throwing spaghetti on the wall and hoping something sticks online, now we could actually test.

So we see Immersion as workflow software. We have partners that have panels of people with smartwatches with the app already on it. So anyway, that's what we really care about is creating extraordinary experiences for customers from advertising, to marketing, to in-store. And ultimately, Immersion is designed to be a prediction engine, not a feeling engine.

So I don't believe in feelings. So think of my poor wife who has to live with me for all these years. Feelings are

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too fleeting. So what we did when we built Immersion was identified the signals in the brain that told us that people would take an action, or a highly accurately predictive that people will take an action after a message or an experience, and then worked backwards to reverse engineer what these signals were.

Roger Dooley: When you say in real time, Paul, what sort of a time granularly do you have? I'm thinking that your original oxytocin studies were typically a sample before and a sample after when you were doing blood draws, like a sample before some intervention or action or experience, and then after. Obviously, if you're getting continuous data from a wristband of some kind of smartwatch, you don't necessarily have that limitation. But how fine-grained is that time understanding if people are watching, whether it's a commercial or a TV show or a trailer for a movie or something else?

Paul Zak: Yes, so we get one-second frequency data. So we're getting electrical signals. We actually can get it at a higher than one-second frequency, but I don't think anybody really needs that. So we should say that a lot of the early research is funded by DARPA, different agencies in the US government that, as you can imagine, are interested in predicting what people will do after a communication or an experience.

And so US tax payers were kind to give us millions of dollars to really understand not only the signals coming out of the brain, particularly the signals from the cranial nerves, but we can evolve them in ways that are not natural. So, we really optimize the combination of signals so that we are able to predict consistently with 80% plus

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accuracy things like sales bumps from advertising, TV ratings for reality TV shows, movie ticket sales, information recall.

So actually, that's one of the nice things. So it was about a 0.6 correlation between immersion and information recall. So the more immersive you can make this communication or experience or ad, the more people are going to stick this in memory. So one way to think about immersion, which I didn't define, by the way. Immersion is a neurologic state in which you're attentive and you're emotionally resonant with experience. You're sharing the emotions of that communication, let's say, so the attention is dopaminergic. I've got to focus somewhere. But most of the variation second-by-second in immersion comes from this emotional component.

How much do I actually care about this experience? And as you know, Roger, the brain's a very energy-hungry organ. And so to get me to care about this is metabolically costly. And so I've got to actually create a narrative. I've got to create some tension. I've got to have a reason to keep watching. Otherwise, I'll just switch off.

So just as an aside, we are finishing up some research in my academic lab showing that we can predict how long people watch a piece of video as a function of their immersion. So the more immersed they are, the more likely they are to watch it, even though we let them click out anytime they want to. So, it's really sucking people in.

So think about Immersion as like the opening of every James Bond movie that we've ever seen. James Bond running across the rooftop, and there's some damsel in

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distress and he's going to save, and bullets are bouncing at his feet. Well, if you watch that, your heart rate goes up, your palms sweat. You start to share the emotions as if you have transported yourself into that movie. So that's what Immersion is capturing is that emotional transportation into an amazing ad or experience or video or movie.

Roger Dooley: So it's a sort of an engagement metric, you could say as well, I suppose, that people are actually engaging with the content in emotion or other way. And I think that probably there's a good lesson there from James Bond movies. I think every one since the first couple, have used that same approach of having an eye-popping action sequence to start the movie and then went into the titles. Compared to, I think in the early years, the traditional approach was to start the movie with the titles, who's in it, what's the name of it, who directed it?

And they broke that mold by both having very unusual animated title sequences, but also starting right with the action before they got to the slower pace title piece. And I think that many marketers and content creators can learn from that.

Paul Zak: Yeah, I totally agree. So we find you've got 15 seconds to get people to care about the experience. If you don't get them in the first 15 seconds, they're generally going to tune out neurologically. And the other thing that we're seeing clients use... Again, this is full self-service. This is a game-changer because you don't need to see me. It's like a PhD in a chip. It's all in the cloud. And real time was hard. It took me a couple of years to write really efficient algorithms to be able to do this in real time.

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But you can watch that data come in, whether it's a synchronous event like we're all like right now, or sending us stuff asynchronously as the data comes in and begins to accumulate, you can actually watch it. And it's super weirdly compelling to look at people's brains respond to some content you created or an experience you created.

But also it allows you to look at the distribution of those individuals. So who are the super-fans for your experience? And we see clients often find these little golden nuggets where we thought our target demographic was X, but we find that we have a subset of people in a totally different demographic or psychographic who are in some area that we really didn't know about. So we always recommend that clients go broad. Even if you think you know your demographic, you may find this little nugget here of people who dig it.

And if they're super-fans, let them help you. They want to help you. They are turned on by this thing. Encourage them to share on social media and have them invite a friend to your website. Whatever that is, you can reward them. You can give them a badge, give them a sticker, whether in-person or online, send them... What does this thing cost? It cost, I don't know, 50 cents. Send them a sticker. They're super-fans. Or give them an attaboy on social media. So there's so many ways to keep people engaged when you know how much they care about your experience.

Roger Dooley: That makes a huge amount of sense. And I think, too, if you can engage those super-fans, even if whatever content you're creating isn't off to a tremendously brisk

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start, then sometimes those are the people that can keep it alive long enough for it to catch on.

Because I'm sure you talk about seeing if a TV show will do well in the first 90 seconds. And I can see how that would be the case, because a lot of people are going to tune out after that. But certainly there are some TV series, particularly a scripted series, that really start with a slow burn. People take a few episodes to get into it, to know the characters, and then they become fans and draw more people in. So, that's great.

So if somebody wants to measure the potential impact of whatever it is they're creating, do they form their own panels of their own customers or their own users, or is this sort of part of a SaaS model where you've got panels of people who are ready to look at your stuff?

Paul Zak:

Great question, all those. So again, this is workflow software. So just like you would test anything you're doing, a lot of clients in the creative spaces will just grab some people from the accounting department, and go, "Look, we have some roughs, so we're going to show this to you. We're going to use your wearable, or we brought a couple of wearables." And so we find you can get nice directional signals by measuring as few as seven or eight people. Have a bunch of roughs, let's just show them to some folks. So it gets out of that, "Well, Roger likes this and Paul likes that."

And to me liking is the wrong question, right? I don't really care if you like this. And we've compared liking to immersion and I'll tell you about that in a second. What I care about, does it stick in your brain so much that you

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remember it and act on it? That's what we really care about to get a return on investment. So we find a zero correlation between liking, self-reported liking, and immersion.

And this is true for Superbowl ads. It's true for TV shows, on and on and on. So I think the liking question is asking people to reveal their unconscious emotional states. And we just can't do that with any fidelity. And by having this data second by second, you can get to edit this. So I think liking is the wrong question. Now we do find that highly immersive experiences are enjoyable, but we're going backwards. We're saying is this tattooing your brain so that it's stuck in there?

So again, think of the most amazing experience of your life, the birth of a child or grandchild. You just had a grandchild, 9-11, right? Those are tagged with emotion. So that's what Immersion is picking up is that emotional tagging that says and this is valuable, so it's saved in the brain in a very particular way. And that's why it's so useful for advertising, for marketing, for movies.

Roger Dooley: You started off talking about psychological safety. And one of the claims on the Immersion Neuro website is that you can actually measure psychological safety or the state that people are in. Explain that a little bit more.

Paul Zak: Yes, so again, that's the precursor to having a great experience, a trust precursor to being immersed. So there's a moderate, negative correlation between psychological safety and immersion. So again, if I don't have enough bandwidth in my brains, I'm not psychologically safe, I'm just not going to have a great

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experience, or I'm not going to be able to absorb the information in your ad.

And so I think we dealt with the first physiologic measure of this, that we can pull data from these cranial nerves and look at arousal levels, essentially. And so if you're over aroused, you just don't have enough space in your brain. By the way, if you're under aroused, again, that sort of hot open of the James Bond, if you're under aroused, also immersion is going to be low. So we want you in this middle space, so part of the Immersion secret sauce captures arousal levels. And I do want you to have some reason to plug in, but again, most of that variation in Immersion is due to this emotional component.

So one of our clients, I won't say exactly what he said, but he said, "Oh, this is give a S measure." I said, "Yeah, well, that's basically what we're capturing is how much does your brain care about this thing?" Caring is hard. I mean, metabolically it's hard, right? So I think on content creators, on event organizers, trainers, all those are asking the human brain to put a lot of energy into something that you want them to do that they may not have capacity to do because they're not psychologically safe or they're tired, or the content is just not that good.

I know, Roger, we've talked about this a long time, but the whole arc of my career has been creating tools so that people live happier lives. And no one wants a bad educational experience, a bad training. They don't want to watch bad ads, bad movies. Oh, it's terrible. You watch the movie trailer and you go, "Really? They spent \$50 million on this dog. I can watch the trailer and tell you this thing's no good."

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So it shocks me that in this age of human evolution, that we don't know a good story from a bad story. But I think the reason for that is we're using this biased measurement technology called our own brain and body. And so once we actually can do this objectively, well, now get rid of the stuff that's not good fast and speed up production of those things that really create amazing experiences for clients and customers.

Roger Dooley: You mentioned cranial nerves. Now explain more or less, how does a consumer device on your wrist measure activity, your cranial nerves?

Paul Zak: Right. So because we had these millions of dollars from the US government, we measured central and peripheral nervous system activity simultaneously. So then we used pharmaceutical, so we actually can activate these pathways, and we can do a mapping from the areas in the brain that are associated with the intentional response and this oxytocin- driven emotional response, and then find that mapping from the cranial nerves into the head.

So we do high density EEG or FMRI, you're getting locations, but you're not getting networks. This stuff is networked. And since the brain controls the heart, largely controls the heart, we can feed in heart rate and then infer via mathematics what is actually going on in the brain. So that, Roger, I'm telling you as if I knew what the hell I was doing five or 10 years ago, and it was a lot of experimentation. We just tried this over and over and over. And almost all this is published. So everyone should be skeptical.

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I'm a skeptic by personality and by training as a scientist. You can put me in Google Scholar, download papers, read them for yourself. So almost all the details of this are published. The way we actually created these algorithms and the stuff on the website, that's not published. But everything else, you can look at it and judge for yourself.

Roger Dooley: You mentioned how quickly you can form conclusions about TV shows and such on the website. There's one that 90 seconds were about as predictive as a much longer segment. Are there cases where a more lengthy process makes sense, where maybe you do have to observe immersion, if you'll call it that, for 30 minutes or 60 minutes or something like that?

Paul Zak: Yeah, it's a great question. It depends on the client use. So I think in the movie industry, we certainly have clients that measure the entire movie. And then, for example, for roughs, so you're beginning the editing process, they'll do things like table reads, so we've actually seen interesting data on doing a table read for a script, which is super cool, and you can actually see where immersion goes up and down.

So again, it's really workflow software, and so sometimes you want to measure the whole event. But these kind of short questions where I was with a client like, "Hey, do we need to watch the whole movie or the whole TV show? Could we just do a minute, minute and a half?" I'm like, "That's a damn good question." So the beautiful thing about democratizing neurosciences, there are zillions of interesting questions that I can't think of that clients will engage with us on. And because it's self-service, they can

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measure as much as they want. It's a standard subscription software, so you subscribe, go to town.

And some of the most interesting experiences I've seen also have been in classrooms. So pre-COVID, we have a bunch of clients in the educational space, and to see teachers looking at this data in real time and helping their class pivot towards more immersive experiences or knowing when they need a break by finding those kids, I call them super-fans, find those kids who love this class and can be discussion leaders. I mean, there's so many ways we can improve the experiences that we all have in the world.

But I think that what's been missing is easy measurement. And so that's what we're trying to do is easy onboarding. People go to the website, they can try it for free. So maybe I'm full of crap. Maybe, it's possible. Probably not, so try it and see if it works for you. If it creates value, awesome, sign up, subscribe, get more features. So I'm passionate as you know about just creating better experiences for everybody in the world.

Roger Dooley: One of your case studies is TED talks. And I guess they're a good tool because you can see how popular they are and they're easily available for use of samples. And I don't know if you looked at how much of a TED talk you had to watch before you could predict that it would be a highly-viewed viral one, or maybe not so much.

Paul Zak: Yeah, we didn't do that for that. That's another good question that we could do because we have all that data. But we found a 10% increase in immersion for a TED Talk resulted in 170,000 more online views. So the size effects

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are really large for immersion. If you can get people to really get into your talk, it's going to pay off. So again, apply that to CEO presentations or conference presentations. Really, if you want to have an impact, you can guess. I would say hope's not strategy, but measurement is.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, Paul, you and I both do some public speaking and training. And I had a vision of some guy in a dark booth at the back of the room having maybe a dozen members of the audience wearing smartwatches, are talking into my ear saying, "Okay, Roger, you better change it up. You're losing them." Or maybe just telling the MC, "Okay, get that doofus off the stage. The audience isn't paying any attention at all." That's obviously an exaggerated example, but would something like that be possible?

Paul Zak: Yeah, I think, two ways. One, I think our clients in the events organization space use Immersion to train people to be better keynotes. So rehearsal, when I spoke at TED, I had about 10 months to prepare, but it was doing this. It was by Zoom, and then I did some rehearsal in person. And it was people giving me opinions, but why not have objective data? Did I really capture them? Was my big reveal in TED exciting enough? So that's the first.

I think the second is one of our longest term clients, Accenture, has been using our platform to optimize the training. They spend a billion dollars annually to train their employees, future-proof their employees. That's an amazing investment. They never had a great measurement of technology. So Accenture has found is what I'm calling the 20-20-20 rule. That's my term, not

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theirs, which is no matter how good a speaker you are or I am, Roger, people can not stay immersed for more than about 20 minutes. And so they break up their training into 20 minutes of presentation, 20 minutes of participatory learning, so having those learners do something, and then 20 minutes of debrief.

And they've also found that breaks are really important. So one of the learning architects at Accenture had a great phrase. Let me see if I can get it right. "Maslow's hierarchy always wins." So if your butt hurts, if you have to pee, if again, your psychological safety is lower, your bandwidth to learn is reduced. And so they're putting in actually longer breaks. After an hour, they do a half an hour break. And that seems weird, right? Because you say we're adults.

They found, for example, the working lunch, terrible. That people need a break actually. And so not only were working lunches very low immersion, but it carried over to the session after lunch. So people just need a cognitive break. And so shorter, more intensive, more repetition, I think, is what we're seeing as important. And so again, I think you apply the same thing to advertising. Great stuff. Let me see it a bunch of times. Stick that in my brain, and then I'm likely to remember it. And when I go into the store or search online and I see that logo, "Oh yeah, those guys. That was a great ad."

Roger Dooley: Could this technique be used to evaluate physical products?

Paul Zak: Yeah, we have a client, a big electronics maker, that is actually doing that in their testing facility in Europe. So

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they had to have people come in, they have a beautiful lab, and they have people to use those products. And so we have cameras all around the room, and actually, the Immersion platform will automatically overlay the Immersion data with what they're using. And there are other ways to do that.

You can show them aspects of the product. It could be a video if you want to do it asynchronously, even live events. I took my team to Disneyland just before COVID just for fun. And we all wore smartwatches, and we looked at standing in line. Disneyland is so famous for having these wonderful experiences as you're waiting to get on to that attraction. And what we found is that not only was Disneyland in the 98 percentile for immersion, but sometimes the path through there was actually more immersive than the ride itself.

So Disney has done really a great job at capturing people's emotional states so that they're fully engaged in the whole process of getting on the attraction and in riding it.

Roger Dooley: Do you think there's a possibility or value in combining the smartwatch or wristband readouts with other techniques like either eye tracking, perhaps, or facial coding?

Paul Zak: Yeah. Facial coding pretty much has been blown out of the water academically. It just doesn't predict outcomes at all. So I think no one's really doing that much anymore. We have a couple of clients that have done with eye tracking. So again, I think the eye tracking gets you visual attention, but it doesn't tell you about the valence, the emotional state. So I may look at something because I'm

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just confused or unhappy or because I really love it. And so Immersion allows you to differentiate those two. So certainly for online experiences, knowing where the eye is going is pretty important.

Roger Dooley: So what is the next step? Something that you can't do now, but hope to be able to do in the either not too distant or maybe a little bit farther out future?

Paul Zak: Yeah, I think it's really curating your entire life for greater happiness. We have a number of clients that are building emotional wellness platforms that are using data from our wearable to capture what do you love in life. And so, in particular, looking at more vulnerable populations. So imagine if you're doing this all day and it could be at work. What do you love doing at work? Where are you going to put more discretionary effort in? It's just human nature. And what frustrates me at work? It's hard for me to articulate that, particularly to my boss. But if we agree to share data and they go, "Man, I love accounting. I didn't know. It's just great. And then meeting with clients, not so much. So either train me on that or give me more of that."

But more generally, what the big arc of my career and, hopefully, the company is, is just helping you figure out what really drives your happiness so you can live a more fulfilled life. And then if you can, avoid those things that are neurologically frustrating, where you're doing them, but you just don't care about it. And so I think having that quantified self-knowledge about your emotional states really is the next frontier.

So we want Immersion to be the new steps. So steps was really cool for the 20th century. How much are you

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moving? But knowing what you really care about, that to me is the future.

Roger Dooley: Well, I think making people happier is an awesome goal and probably a pretty good place to wrap up, Paul. How can people find you and your ideas online?

Paul Zak: Easy to find me. It's getimmersion, with an I, getimmersion.com. You can go on there and get a free trial. Use it yourself, and if it's great for you, awesome. Subscribe. And if not, then hopefully, it was amusing for a couple of weeks.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, we will link there and to any other resources we spoke about on the show notes page [@rogerdooley.com/podcast](https://www.rogerdooley.com/podcast), where we will have video, audio, and formatted text versions of this conversation. Paul, thanks for being on the show.

Paul Zak: 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](https://www.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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