How You Can Become an Expert Reverse Engineer of Success with Ron Friedman
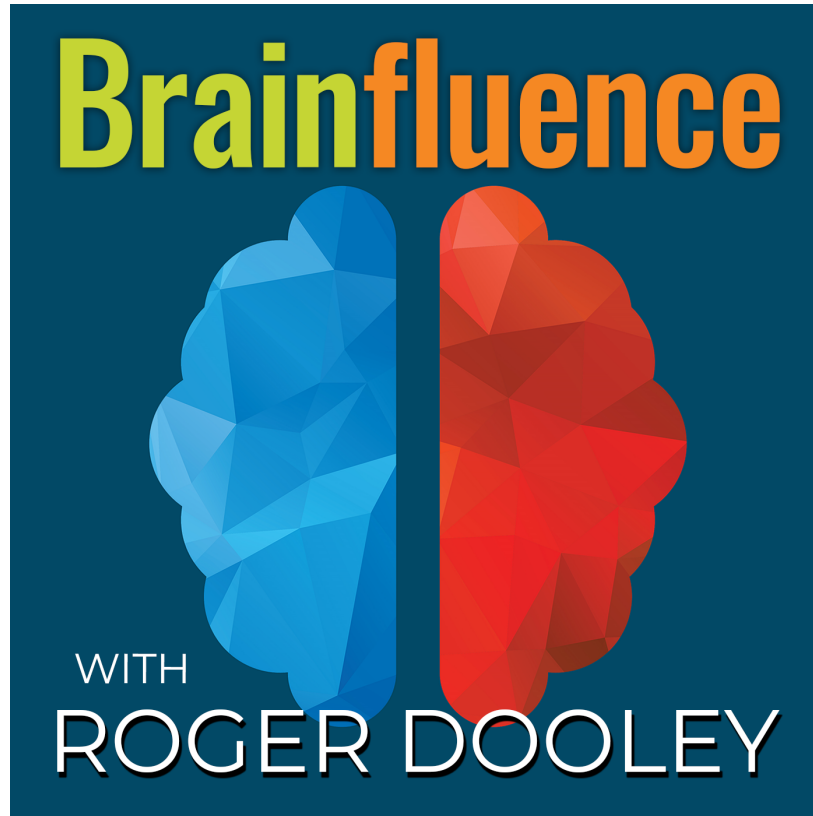
Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

How You Can Become an Expert Reverse Engineer of Success with Ron Friedman

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, or just visit the book seller of your choice.

Now, here's Roger.

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

today is award-winning psychologist, Ron Friedman. Formerly on the faculty of the University of Rochester. Ron has consulted for political leaders nonprofits in many of the world's most recognized brands. Today, Ron is the founder of ignite80, a learning, and development company that translates research in neuroscience, human physiology, and behavioral, economics into practical strategies. His new book is "Decoding Greatness: How the Best in the World Reverse Engineer Success." Welcome to the show, Ron.

Ron Friedman: Thanks so much for having me.

Roger Dooley: Yeah. Ron, people love "Reverse Engineering Success Stories. I mean, how did Hemingway, right? What was his daily routine? How did Steve Jobs have such great consumer insights? There have been many, many books written about how Jeff Bezos has created a huge

success that is Amazon. And then there are sort of compendiums are compendia if you prefer of success stories, like what Tim Ferris' "Tools of Titans" comes to mind where he has all these world-class performers and he decodes what their secrets of success were then tries to tease out maybe what common elements they had. Although one of the big key findings, I think of his works is that they have a few common elements. But really, there is not much universal in the way of a key to success. And you have got other folks, Albert-László Barabási's "The Formula" or Ryan Holiday's "Perennial Seller" and all of these are ways to try and help you be successful and teach you lessons from other people. But your book, Ron, is a little bit of a departure instead of simply offering some success stories and saying, "Okay, well, this is what we can learn from that." You actually try to teach people how to reverse engineer success and asked to provocative question there is, and the question is along the lines of, "I can reverse engineer be reverse-engineered." So while let's just start by answering that question that you pose yourself.

Ron Friedman: The answer is yes. And in fact, one of the things that I found while doing the research for "Decoding Greatness" is that one of the key strategies the top performers use is they don't passively enjoy experiences or objects. They are consistently asking, "How is this created? What can I learn from this? And how can I apply this the project that I'm working on? And that's the message of the book is if you're not learning from the best in your field, you're not up leveling your skill to the extent that you can be. And so, the big idea for the book is that we've long been told two major stories about how success happens.

The first story is that greatness comes from talent. This is the idea that we all have certain inner strengths and that the key to finding your greatness is finding the right feel that allows your strengths to shine. The second story is that great-- greatness comes from practice. This is the Malcolm Gladwell Theory, the idea of 10,000 hours. If you just practice long enough and you

have the right practice regimen, and you have enough discipline, eventually, you will become great. But there's a third story and it's one is that it is particularly dominant in creative fields and it's not talent, and it's not practice, and it's reverse engineering, which simply means finding outstanding examples in your field and then working backwards to figure out, how can I recreate this?

And, you know, there's a long history of reverse engineering and it's, it's everywhere from Stephen King, "Learning How to Write" to Claude Monet, "Learning How to Paint" to Malcolm Gladwell himself. This is how he became a writer is that he reverse-engineered William F Buckley. And so the founder, I mean, the, the originator of the "10,000-hour rule" himself reverse-engineered. Now, clearly, practice and talent have a role. I'm not suggesting that talent and practice should be ignored. But what I'm hoping that the message that people take away from this book, is that if you have given up on your dreams, because you don't think that you have enough talent or that you don't have the discipline for doing 10,000 hours of practice, there's a better way. And that way is reverse engineering.

Roger Dooley: Right. I think the 10,000-hour rule is, I wouldn't say, it's been debunked but I think it's been recognized that that's hardly universally applicable. And there are plenty of people who have succeeded without those 10,000 hours.

Ron Friedman: Yeah, that 10,000-hour is a great marketing gimmick, but there's nothing particularly special about 10,000 hours. And in fact, even the studies that Gladwell cited there was no-- nothing significant about 10,000 hours. It happened to be the 10,000 hours was the average of the particular group that was studied in that experiment but the the person whose work was cited for the 10,000-hour rule. Anders Ericsson himself says, "Nothing special about 10,000 hours. More important is the quality of your practice, not the amount."

Roger Dooley: Yeah he's been a guest on the show as well and you know, you brought up Malcolm Gladwell and as a business book writer myself, I found that section interesting because you point out that you can't succeed, perhaps by directly copying Malcolm Gladwell because many people have tried but nobody sells as many books as he does today. Uh part of that might be the brand effect where Stephen King, J.K. Rowling of all written books on her pseudonyms and they did not do as well as those published under their own names. But there's I think a key point there and I did try by the way, to learn from Malcolm Gladwell. My first book "Brainfluence" was not at all Gladwell's hundred short chapters of little science lesson on the practical takeaway. But my second book "Friction", I wanted to be a little bit different style. So I did look at his work, I didn't really try and copy it, but I did notice how he incorporated plenty of stories along with his research and then some other stuff that I tried to adopt and I think it probably made it a better book. But you point out that simply copying Malcolm Gladwell is not a good idea. You talk about mimicry and sort of formulaic copying. Why is that not a good idea?

Ron Friedman: Two major reasons. One is because Gladwell has particular strengths and we're using Gladwell as a placeholder for really anyone who you want a model after. So Gladwell has particular strengths that are difficult to emulate unless you have his particular abilities and personality type. You have your own personality of your own experiences. And you also have certain strengths that you can draw on that Gladwell can't. And there's something to be said for that. The other component, not just execution, but the other component here is that audience expectations shift with every every time there's a new Gladwell book, more people are exposed to the Gladwellian's style and become bored with someone else trying to replicate it.

And so, the better approach is to use reverse engineering as a learning tool

to figure out what is Gladwell doing. What can I learn from this? How do I apply this? And then evolve it in a slight way that is relevant to you. So I'll give you an example of how I do this, which is I, you know, there's I study Gladwell just like every other nonfiction writer. If they're not telling you they're not they're wro- they're lying right? Like because why wouldn't you study the guy who's sold more books than anyone else? If you're a marketer, you're studying Apple. Why would you not be right? So what for me, personally, I do not have the patience to travel along with a story or to interview people to the extent that Gladwell does. And in fact, when I'm reading his books, I will pass through those stories to get to his point. So, I embrace that about myself, and I trust my compass and I think that if I'm bored with his story, I'd imagine other people are bored with the story, too. And so, what you'll notice in my books is that there's a lot of stories in a very short, condensed period of time. I think it bodes well for me, and for better for worse, resonates with this, ADD culture, and that we now find ourselves living in.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, one of the quotes in that chapter comes not from a noted expert but rather the fictional Don Draper from the TV show Mad Men. And I really love that where in evaluating a new TV show, he says, well, it's derivative but with a twist, that's what people want. And that's kind of what you're recommending at least for certain kinds of things were simply copying what's been done before won't work. In fact, that reminded me of Raymond Loewy, the famous designer who had a principal a maya, M-A-Y-A, which was most advanced yet acceptable. He said that to make something surprising, make it familiar and to make something familiar, make it surprising. And that's kind of that same sort of philosophy. I think that you can't simply do what's been done before. If something is familiar, then you've got to add the- the different twist to it if you want it to be successful at least at a high level. I guess there are always derivative works that end up doing, okay. But if you're really trying to succeed in your own right then you've got to do what's been done but add your own stamp

as you saying.

Ron Friedman: Yes. And in- in fact, one of the challenges I think that a lot of creative professionals have is that they are striving for complete originality and what they don't realize is that striving for a complete, originality is actually an exercise in futility because even if you do exercise,e- e- even if you do exercise perfectly and you come up with something completely original, chances are it will be rejected. And there's research out of University of uh... I think it's uh University of California - San Diego. Jennifer Mueller who has done research showing that when people are presented with work that is highly original, they tend to reject it and they tend to prefer work that is only slightly original. And so all of that pressure that we put on ourselves to be completely original, it's completely counterproductive. It prevents us from doing great work because we set a bar that's possible to meet. And then even if we do execute that work, we're going to be rejected. And it's because as a species, we tend to be distrustful of the new. We like things that are somewhat familiar and as you say a little bit surprising. And so, I think that that is very freeing as a as an insight because now you realize all that pressur you're putting your on yourself is counterproductive, but more than that, it gives you license to look for the best pieces of different executions and then look for new ways of combining them and that really is what creativity is about. It's about finding things that already exist and finding a new way of combining them.

Roger Dooley: Right. I think that's definitely true for commercial things. If you are a true artist and want to create something that's absolutely novel and creative, go ahead and do it. But may not be accepted immediately or perhaps even in your lifetime and Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring", caused a riot when it was first performed. But now it's a great classic work of art. But, you know, I think that in the commercial world it's pretty rare that something that is totally novel ends up being successful. I mean, even even the iPhone. I mean, it seemed like it was a huge breakthrough but it wasn't that

groundbreaking. It combined familiar elements in a somewhat new way.

Ron Friedman: Exactly. Right. And then take the Apple watch which continues to grow and sells, and I love my Apple watch. I got one last year and I've been using it consistently. But the Apple watch was presented 20 years ago. Seiko is the first company with a smartwatch. How many people do you know who have a Seiko smartwatch? Microsoft came next with the Microsoft SPOT watch. And all of the elements are... At least most of the elements that exist in the Apple smartwatch were there. Initially, there's news, there's sports, there's traffic and it failed miserably and it's because audiences weren't ready for it. And so, I just think it's liberating to think, "Hey, you know what? I don't need to be a complete original." And beyond that, I think that when we talk about reverse engineering, I just want to be clear. It's not it's about identifying somebody else's formula and making it your own.

It's also about just the educational elements of uncovering why is this working? And I think that there's so many of the experiences that we consider guilty pleasures that maybe we should reconsider as ammunition for great ideas because it's in understanding why those guilty pleasures are as addicting as they are, that we can identify components that we can incorporate into our own work. So, just to give you an example, if you enjoy Dan Brown novels. Dan Brown is one of the first to have very short chapters, and I don't know about you, but when I first read "The DaVinci Code", it kept me up. I kept reading it because it was hard to put it down because the just one more chapter is another 30 seconds, why not? And before you know it the book is over. That's something that we can incorporate into into business workbooks which it seems like you tried with bit with Brainfluence. Is that right?

Roger Dooley: More or less. Yes. And that's what I... What I was striving for there was not so much the narrative pace but Dan Brown was going for,

but rather the ability to skip around and absorb little chunks of information in bite-sized way instead of having to slog through 30 pages of dense text and references and such.

Ron Friedman: Yeah. And so there's an example where you can take something more completely different genre and incorporated into your own. And I'll give you another example of a story in the book that you may have come across which is "How Barack Obama Became a Successful Elected Official." And it's by be... It's by learning from a different field. And so when he, when Barack Obama first entered politics, he got trounced, he lost his first race by a margin of more than two to one and for a while he thought about leaving politics and the problem was that he was a terrible speaker if you can believe it. It's because he was a law school professor. And as a law school professor, he was used to lecturing students. Voters didn't appreciate being lectured to, and they let him know at the polls. And so he was about to give up on politics until he noticed what it was that pastors were doing when preaching in churches.

And he came back a few years later and he was transformed. He was now telling stories using repetition, quoting the Bible, modulating his tone, and he, and it was through that process of taking something that was working in a completely disparate field, incorporating it into his own, and then coming up with his own style. And what I love about that story is that it illustrates that Barack Obama, didn't go and find his talent. He didn't go to practice for 10,000 hours. He reverse engineer what was working in a different field and incorporated into his own.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, I think that kind of brings us to your vision ability gap in the chapter where he might have said, "Okay. The people that I'm competing with are much more skilled orders than I am. How do I do that? That I'm not... You know, I'm a professor and I don't necessarily have those skills." So a talk a little bit about that vision ability gap in how people

who are relatively normal people can close that.

Ron Friedman: Yeah. So the first half of my book is all about how people in different industries reverse engineer. And then I teach you how you can reverse engineer and evolve your formula. The second half of the book is about shrinking something I call the "Vision-Ability Gap," which is actually who came up with that terminology the famous NPR host. And the Vision-Ability Gap refers to the fact that even when you know what your road map looks like, even when you know what formula is that you're trying to evolve and execute, you're still not necessarily going to get it right immediately out of the gate. And it's because it takes a while to develop your skills. And so the second half of the Coding Greatness is about skill acquisition and using psychological insights to improve your execution more quickly.

And one of the first tips is something I call the "Scoreboard Principle." And the Scoreboard Principle refers to the fact that anything that you measure, you are likely to improve upon. And so, simply put measurement begets improvement. So, if you want to lose weight, measure your calorie intake every day. If you want to drink more water, measure how much water you're drinking every day. If you want to increase your focus time at work, measure how many minutes you get of uninterrupted uh work. And so simply by measuring, what it is that you're trying to execute against. You will improve and it's because measurement makes us more mindful of the decisions that we make. It illuminates anything that doesn't contribute to our bottom line. So if anything... anything is getting in your way, you're going to recognize that because it's not moving your score. It increases your motivation because when you see your numbers rise, you get a, a sense of thrill of a of achievement and if your numbers are are languishing, you feel a little bit ashamed.

And those emotional jolts are what motivate you to get better and there's a whole host of reasons evolutionarily why we're so obsessed with numbers.

There's also that which can also lead to some danger. It's why we obsess over our Twitter accounts, in our LinkedIn followers, which doesn't help us in any way, but because numbers are involved, we can't help but pay them attention. And it's because in the past, paying attention to numbers actually kept us alive. So, if you weren't sensitive to what suggested a larger food source versus a smaller food source. You weren't paying attention to where your energy was best invested, same for evaluating competing tribes. If you didn't know who to ally with versus who to fight you weren't alive today, right? So the fact that we're all sensitive to numbers represents a real opportunity because anything that you want to get better at, you need to measure. And there's something to be said for simply taking the time to identify. What is it that I really am trying to execute against? What am I optimizing for? I think so many of us in everyday life. We have aspirational whiplash. We... One moment we're optimizing for long-term wealth. Another moment we go on Instagram, our friend, bought a nice car. Now we want to optimize for status. Then a friend invites us to a fancy restaurant. Now, we're optimizing for fun. And it's because we're shifting from goal to goal to goal. That's where the misery comes in. So the first step to getting better and having life satisfaction is figuring out what you're optimizing for.

Roger Dooley: Right. Well, I supposed choosing the correct metrics is really key because you talked about losing weight. If your metric is weighing yourself every morning, chances are you're not going to lose weight. You're going to just get be depressed every morning when you see that you're not changing, all are even going in the wrong direction. But if you measure various behaviors, that will lead to your goal, that's where you can make a difference. In other words, if perhaps say, we want to be successful authors, you know, we could try and measure how many social media followers we have because we know that we are supposed to have a lot of reach and big following a lot of interaction with their readers, but we would probably be better off measuring the minutes we spend writing each day or the how many words we write or perhaps even some kind of

research metrics if we're doing a research-based book. But something that is actually directly related to the eventual product there, the eventual result we're trying for.

Ron Friedman: Exactly, right. So it's a mix. I would recommend a mix of behaviors and outcomes. So there I adore you pointed out is if you're measuring outcomes and you don't, you're not noticing what the behavior are they're contributing. That's going to be problematic for you because it's going to feel a little bit out of your control and probably a little bit depressing. So you have to identify what are the behaviors I need to execute and what are the outcomes because you don't wanna... You don't wanna just shrink it down to one of the other 'cause chances are you will review, of course. And I have a story in "Decoding Greatness" about Wells Fargo and their challenges. And for those who don't remember, they... Uh Wells Fargo is in the news not too long ago for for a pretty pretty serious scandal where their employees were opening up accounts for people who either were were clients but didn't approve the accounts or for people who had nothing to do with the financial institution.

It was because Wells Fargo was incentivizing and punishing those who didn't meet a certain sales goal within their company and their goal was to open as many accounts for individuals as possible. And that demonstrates the danger of optimizing for a single metric. What Wells Fargo would have done well to do is have a balance of metrics, which is what we all need to warn us when we keep veering off course because metrics are so strong that when we give ourselves a metric, we're going to be successful at that metric, but unless we identify what the adverse effect of reaching those metrics might be we're going to get in trouble.

So like for example, if you're a salesperson, if you're optimizing for leads, you're gonna get a lot of crappy leads unless you have a set. Another metrics identifies quality leads or sales conversions that sort of thing. So

you really have to think deeply about what does a success mean and then work backwards and really reverse engineer your own success.

Roger Dooley: One of the more interesting images particularly for our audience who has an interest in brain scanners is a putting Tony Romo in a brain scan for Tony Romo, being an American football quarterback of some renown, not tremendous renowned but also a sportscaster. Explain what potential reverse engineers can learn from Tony Romo.

Ron Friedman: Well, Tony Romo was fascinating because he was a, a pretty average football player and then he retired and became a broadcaster. And he achieved remarkable renowned as a broadcaster for his ability to predict plays before they actually happen. If you watch him on CBS, you'll notice that often times, he will tell you what the offense is going to do or what the defense is going to do before they do it. And he is remarkably accurate. He... His percentage is really, really high. In fact, it's better than his completion rate as of quarterback, which for is amazing. And so turns out that anticipation is a hallmark of expertise and professional quarterbacks in the NFL are trained to read plays.

This is part of what their training is. And so it is not at all surprising that he can anticipate plays because experts are able to anticipate events before they take place and the reason for that is because in par... is in part is because of the way that their brain has adapted to the demands of their tasks that they frequently encounter. And so, in the case of Tony Romo, for example, one of the things I point out is that in all likelihood, if we were to put them in a brain scan, we would find less activation in his brain than the average fan as they're watching a football game. And it's because expertise comes with knowing, which plays have a high probability of transpiring, and those that have a low probability of transpiring.

And someone like Tony Romo is considering fewer options than the

average football fan because he's seen so many games. And so it's really interesting to understand why it is that Romo was just an average quarterback, but a phenomenal broadcaster and it was that expertise that played that role.

Roger Dooley: Yeah, I know if I'm looking at a football game from a high-level view, I'm not a football expert by any means. And basically, you know, I see a bunch of people running around in different directions and usually can sort of get the gist of which way the play is going by the direction of the players. And but undoubtedly a skilled quarterback or perhaps a coach, who's just sitting up in the box high in the stadium would be able to visualize exactly what's happening at all. Play out like a ballet, they've seen before, and the only question is, is this particular ballet going to work or not?

There was a study of while ago about Chess Grandmasters, where they were at... Well, actually, the some subjects were chess Grandmasters and others were regular people and they were shown a chess board configuration and then after watching it, studying it for a very short period of time, they were asked to reproduce the layout of the pieces on the board. And the interesting thing was that the regular people who are not skilled chess players weren't particularly good at it, but the Grandmasters were very good at producing real chess game situations where they could relate what they saw on the board, to some kind of a framework in their experience. But if, if the pieces were placed in a way that really didn't make sense, then they were no better than the regular people remembering those. So I think it's kind of the same phenomenon.

Ron Friedman: Yeah, it's exactly right. And in the, in that case it with the Grandmasters it's because they they they're absorbing not just the placements of the pieces but the relationship between the pieces and so they just have a different way of interpreting it. And so the question

becomes how do Romo get so good? And the same for the Grandmasters. How do they get so good? And the answer is by practicing in three dimensions. So, that's probably leading you to your next question. But that's, that's, that is the answer in the book, which is that, it's not simply practicing the way we think of practicing, which is practicing in the present. There's two other dimensions to practice, which is practicing in the past and practicing in the future. And by practicing in the past, I mean, reflective practice. We've all heard of deliberate practice, which is practicing on something that is just slightly beyond your current ability and focusing on the feedback to improve practice.

Reflective practice or practicing in the past is looking at past experience with an eye towards new learnings. And so, there's research out of the Harvard Business School that shows that simply at the end of the day, taking a few minutes to think about "what did I learn here today?" will improve your performance by over 20%. And so to that end, I recommend in the book to pick up one of these five-year diaries, five-year journals, and you can find these on Amazon. They are wonderful, they have got 365 pages one for each day of the year, and there are five slots within each page. And so how this works is you get three lines to write what you learned today. And then you do this for a year after a year, you come back and you see you write down what you did that day, but also what you did on that day last year. And so, it's a process that invariably strengthens your memory because you're constantly learning what you did the previous years.

But also, you're automating the self-reflection to think about, "What did I learn today?" And applying that to all sorts of insights. The other component is practicing in the future and that simply refers to imagery. Thinking about events before they happen, anticipating, thinking about, you know, for example, if you have to write a paper tomorrow, thinking about the process of sitting down your computer, visualizing it, thinking about all

the decisions you'll need to make in advance. And what, the reason that imagery works is not because, you know, of some kind of woo-woo visualizing success nonsense, it's because your front-loading decisions. So you are thinking about what your...the steps you're going to need to take before you get there and that enables you to be more present and not have to make decisions constantly and you're better able to execute as a result.

Roger Dooley: Mm-hmmm. Just to dig into that visualizing successive bit a little bit. Does that mean that these experts who tell you to visualize how successful you are? You know, collecting the big check, standing on the stage with 5000 people on their feet applauding you, that is not necessarily helpful. Maybe that's a motivator but it's not going to help you learn. But really what you're saying is you should be visualizing what got you there. What? Why those people are standing and applauding for you.

Ron Friedman: Yeah, yeah. So look, I'm... I'm a researcher. So I need some evidence if I'm gonna make a recommendation. And in the case of visualizing success, there's just no evidence that it's helpful but with there is evidence for is that it actually is counterproductive and I'll tell you more about that. So there's a study out of UCLA where they had introductory psychology students, come into the lab, and they divide them into three groups. One group was asked to visualize doing really well on their psychology test. The second group was asked to visualize themselves studying for the psychology test and the third test, third group was just asked to measure how much time they spent studying. And what they found was that the group that visualized studying did significantly better than all the other groups.

The group that visualized success did the worst out of any group and the question is, why? And it's because visualizing success...seeing yourself at the finish line with your arms raised and not having to run a marathon, that's immediately gratifying. And once you're immediately gratified, you

don't have the motivation to actually do the training necessary to be successful. And so, you know, I, I don't want to discount all visualizing of success, but based on that study, it's hard to recommend it.

Roger Dooley: You know, I like the idea of visualizing studying. That sounds a lot easier than actually studying. They knew the fourth, fourth group there, one that actually did no visualization, and just studied to see how that group performed.

Ron Friedman: I don't disagree with that. And I would say though that I think it's interesting because if anything that group should have done better. You know, the group that was just measuring how much they studied. Because as we talked about the scoreboard principle, measuring should elevate performance. So if anything that just tells you even more about how powerful visualizing the process was.

Roger Dooley: One of your chapters is talking to experts and perhaps unsurprising finding, it may also surprise some, is that experts often are not very good teachers. So explain that and how? If you want to learn from an expert, if you're lucky enough to talk to them, how...how you should try and go about that?

Rong: Yeah, so there's a lot of research showing that experts tend to be terrible instructors and research looking at professors, who have... You know, if you look at the professors at Yale and Harvard and all these great schools, they're there because of their research resume. It's very rare that a professor who is a good instructor will receive tenure from one of these research institutions because of their teaching abilities. So they are basing their hiring decision on research output. And there is a ma... There was a massive study done of tens of thousands of professors looking at their research output and their teaching abilities. And the correlation was zero. There is zero correlation between your teaching...your research ability and

your teaching ability.

And that in a way is not really surprising at all. Because if you think about it, we're all experts at tying our shoes. And if I were to ask you to write a book about how to tie your shoes, that would be a tall order, right? At that would be very difficult for you to execute because there's so much that goes into teaching someone else how to tie their shoes that has nothing to do with knowing how to do it yourself. There's also research showing that there is something called "The Curse of Knowledge" which is basically what it comes down to is "If I know something, it's impossible for me to imagine having a state of mind of not knowing that same information." So that makes it harder for me to explain to you because I can't imagine the mindset that you're in. I just take my knowledge for granted.

Final piece of evidence that I'll share is that when you ask experts to explain their thought process when doing when performing a complex task, on average, they will neglect to share 70% of the decision-making process that went into it. It's because they're just it's not conscious, they're not thinking about it. They just automatically do it and it's based on their experience. So talking to experts is problematic to say the least. And so in Decoding Greatness, I talked about some questions that you can ask that can be helpful to you. You know, there are thr...different categories of questions and and examples of questions that you can ask about. Just give you... One category now which is discoveries. And so asking the expert to think about to compare when they first started to where they are right now. And to ask something along the lines of, "What did you think was going to be important at the beginning that turned out not to be very important?" And so that process of forcing them to compare their initial expectations until their...I guess their actual experience leads to them sharing insights that can actually be useful to you.

Roger Dooley: Well you know, hypothetically, imagine that you are a

podcast host, and every week you get to talk to an expert on... This is perhaps hmmm 370 some odd episodes too late but now that we're now that we're chatting, Ron, what would you suggest? Or how would you suggest I structure a conversation to elicit the most useful knowledge either for me or for my audience when I talked to some of these experts like yourself?

Ron Friedman: Oh man, that's a great question. But here's what I would say, Roger. I would ask you and you probably do this as well with me as a marketing expert is I would say to you, "Who's your targ...? I would ask you to work from that with the end in mind, which is reverse engineering. Right? So start with the engine in mind, who's your target audience? What is it that you're hoping to get them to do? And let's talk about what else are they interested in? And then, once we know who your target listener is, then we work backwards to identify what their interests are. And then we know which guests to..to invite. And then that's a whole other conversation about what you should ask those guests.

But I think that, in many cases in life, we are so transfixed with the question of, "Can I do this? Can I become a lawyer? Can I start that business?" And we never bothered to ask, "Should I do this?" And I think those are two very different questions and sometimes spending a little bit more time thinking about the outcome will save us both a lot of energy and a lot of disappointment in life because sometimes we're
successful at the things that we hope to achieve without... And then and then we realize, "Wait a second. That I really want that goal? I'm not sure." So I'm all for reverse engineering your best self and then working backward.

Roger Dooley: Ron, one thought that comes to mind, perhaps. You know, if you ask an expert, perhaps, a successful CEO or CMO how they accomplished, what they did, they undoubtedly have some reasons why

that worked. You know? What we focused on this, we focused on that. We took these three steps but I think that often those may be to some degree rationalizations. In other words, "We had the success now, how do I explain it?" So I kind of like building on your idea asking questions like, you know, what did you start doing that didn't work? What were your assumptions approved not to be valid? And sort of find out how they managed to get into the position they were in. So we'll try that in some future episodes run. This probably a pretty good place to break. Uh, how can our audience members find you?

Ron Friedman: Well, to learn more about Decoding Greatness, the best place to go is to decodinggreatnessbook.com, and I say that because you can get a book but also get a free course on how to reverse engineer and apply that skill to your life and it's free. All you need to do is get the book and then you could find me online at ronfriedmanphd.com and also on ignite80.com, which is the name of my company, I-G-N-I-T-E-8-0.com. And it's called ignite80 because over 80% of employees are not fully engaged. And so the mis...mission of ignite80 is to teach leaders science-based principles on making their employees help healthier, happier more productive.

Roger Dooley: Great. Well, we will link to all of those places on the show notes page at rogerdooley.com/podcast. We will have audio-video and text versions of this conversation as well. Ron thanks for being on the show.

Ron Friedman: My pleasure, Roger. Thank you.

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.

How You Can Become an Expert Reverse Engineer of Success with Ron Friedman
https://www.rogerdooley.com/ron-friedman-decoding

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.