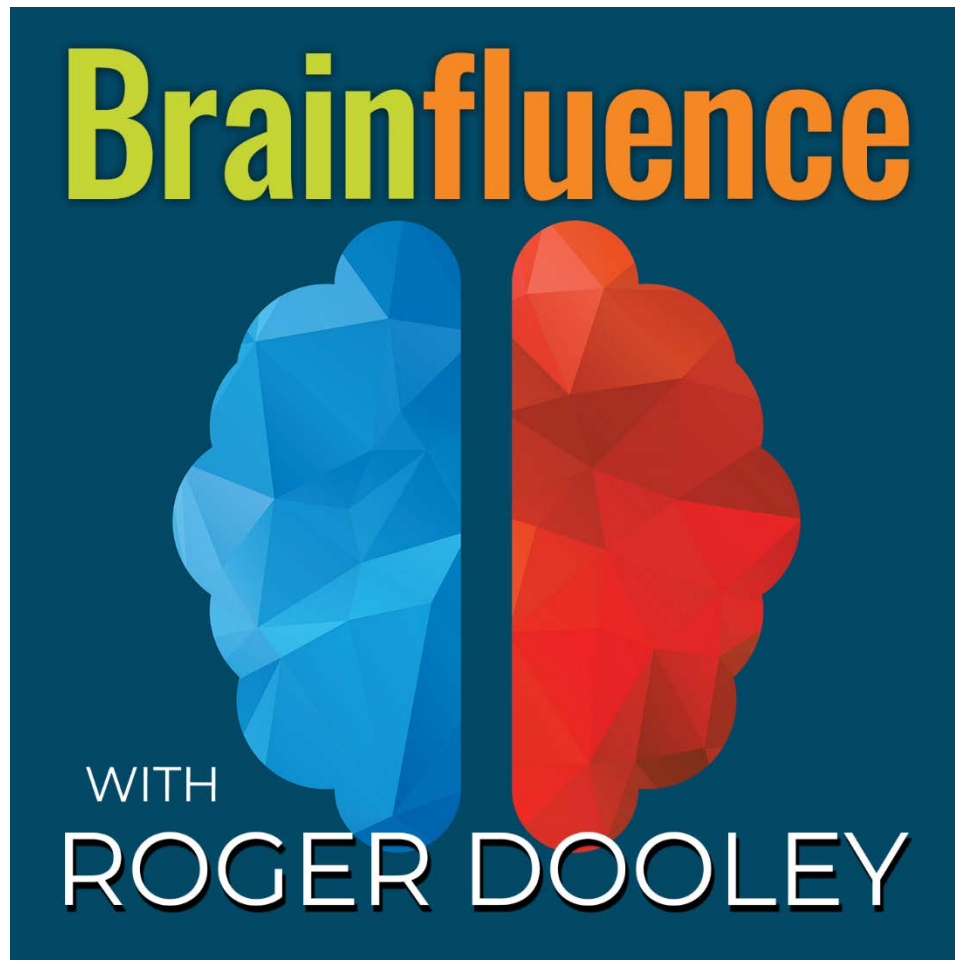


# Tom Peters' Compact Guide to Excellence

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**Full Episode Transcript**

**Brainfluence with Roger Dooley**

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**SPEAKERS: Roger Dooley, Tom Peters**

**[00:00] Intro:** Welcome to Brainfluence, where author and international keynote speaker Roger Dooley shares powerful but practical ideas from world-class experts, and sometimes a few of his own. To learn more about Roger's books, *Brainfluence* and *Friction*, and to find links to his latest articles and videos, the best place to start is [www.rogerdooley.com](http://www.rogerdooley.com). Roger's keynotes will keep your audience entertained and engaged. At the same time, he will change the way they think about customer and employee experience. To check availability for an in-person or virtual keynote or workshop, visit [www.rogerdooley.com](http://www.rogerdooley.com).

**[00:35] Roger Dooley:** Welcome to Brainfluence, I'm Roger Dooley. Today's guest is special for multiple reasons. He's here for a rare third visit, but that's not one of the reasons. He's an author and business thinker who has done more to define the business book genre than any other author. He's himself the subject of two biographies. He is, of course, Tom Peters, now an author of 19 books, including his latest *Tom Peters Compact Guide to Excellence*, he calls the book the essence of his work, and it has a different format from Tom's previous books, I'll let him explain in a moment. And I've heard he celebrated an important birthday yesterday. Welcome to the show, Tom, and happy belated birthday.

**[01:10] Tom Peters:** Thank you very much for both scores. And thank you for keeping the birthday a deep dark secret –the number. It is higher than I can count.

**[01:19] Roger Dooley:** It is up to you. I never reveal our guests' secrets, so it's up to you, Tom. But I will say it was a significant one. I won't say anymore. Tom, you seem like a man on a mission and you've been following the same theme with your writings for a while now. Do you get all frustrated that there are still so many

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people who ignore these important ideas? The proof is out there. You've got lots of data to support what you're saying, but not everybody is listening.

**[01:47] Tom Peters:** Well, yes and no, I guess is the right answer. My comment has always been, listen, I've written 20 books now with this new one. And I'm as greedy as the next person. And I would love you to buy all of them. And I will accept the royalties. But the reality is, I've said the same damn thing 20 times in a row, which is frighteningly close to the truth. Yeah, sure it's frustrating, because the message is very straightforward, particularly in terms of people first, and so on.

But the flip side of it is, as you know, as well, as I do is called the real world. I said to somebody, if Tony Robbins walks into a room with a thousand people, he expects to convert a thousand people by an hour later. If I give a speech to a thousand people and three people walk out and say, "Holy shit, I'm really going to do something different," to me, I've had a hell of a day. So, you pick them off by the onesies and twosies. And obviously, the stuff is straightforward.

But you're the neuroscientist. Now the reality is, people may listen to parts of it, but at some level, they don't get the most important part, then we can talk about this. And I know all the problems with EQ, so I won't push that too hard. But hiring for something like EQ, to me makes sense. And if not, no go. And God alone knows promoting, you've got to promote people, you should promote people who get off on people. An old saying goes, never promote the best salesperson to sales manager. It's people whose pleasure in life is working with other people.

And there was this whole book I read one time on promotions that said, the most important decisions you make in your business life, and either nobody knows how to do them, or don't spend enough time on it or what have you. So, I'm frustrated as hell and anybody who listens to us today and does one tiny thing slightly differently tomorrow will make my day.

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**[04:06] Roger Dooley:** That's a good attitude, Tom. You based this rather simple short volume on your previous book, which had extreme humanism in the title. Can you briefly explain extreme humanism?

**[04:17] Tom Peters:** Again, as I said, my bottom line top line is, it's all about people and developing people. And my extreme humanism is to push the point in my mind, that those verities about people and training people and developing people are just as valid if not more valid in the age of AI than they were when Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. And so that's really the point. And the other point, which is frustration is... and I want to say this right because I can say it in a cheesy way. You don't have to do a hell of a lot to get a group of human beings who want to cooperate with each other.

There was an experiment that was done, and it was totally legit. And teacher stands in the doorway of her or his classroom when the kids are entering. And all she or he does is say good morning, might say, "Mary, I know you had a cold last week, how are you doing?" But not much of that. Just good morning. Glad you're here. And it— and I really hope people will believe me—measurable differences, and disciplinary problems, apparently go down by 20% and measures of intellectual engagement go up by 20% for standing in the frigging doorway.

And so, Ms. or Mr. Boss, who is watching us, do you effectively stand in the doorway in the morning, virtual doorway, rear doorway, I don't care which, but just engage people and make it clear that it's really cool that we're together and doing something of some significance for the rest of the day. And again, I suspect, you know better than I, between the two of us, we could try out 25 examples of that sort of thing that had enough bloody neuroscience social psych insight behind it to sink a ship.

**[06:29] Roger Dooley:** Tom, one of the interesting things about your new book is it is very different than your previous books and format. It's got this little square shape, and it's not dense. Lots of pages are simply just short quotes, sometimes

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just a few words. At the same time, this is really sort of distilled knowledge. And I'm thinking that kind of like distilled spirits, you don't want to drink the whole bottle down in one sitting. How would you recommend that people consume this?

**[06:58] Tom Peters:** Well, first of all, let me say that through a friend, luck got to me. And on the spine of the book are two names mine and Nancy Greene, who was the designer. And I've been a design fanatic for 25 years, but I didn't really know what I was talking about, until this book came along. I said to Nancy, you want to be the lead author, because it is simple, straightforward sentences. And it is the look, feel, taste, touch smell of a thing that really projects it. And so that's just huge for me.

I know what I'd like and I think we may have said it in the preface. I would love X or Y, or Z to go through a few pages and really get hooked by any particular item. I just happened to open it. This is not for our conversation. And I opened it to a page that has a quote from the Oscar-winning movie director, Robert Altman. And the quote is, "the role of the director is to create a space where actors and actresses can become more than they have ever been before, more than they have ever dreamed of being."

And I just love that. And I think it is as true for the head of a 30-person housekeeping department, or a biotech research group. And this does maybe have something to do with my age. The measure of a leader is how did the people who worked for her or him grow. And particularly how did they grow after they left him? I was giving a speech, maybe it's five years ago in Mumbai, and in the real world, as opposed to the virtual world where you're sitting with a four-star Indian Army General, who I think ran the whole darned army.

And we got talking about something like this. And he said, "Well, I'm trying to decide whether Roger or Tom ought to get the promotion to General." He said, "I only have really one test and that test is I go back and find the people who

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worked for them over the years, and try to discover the degree that the two years that they spent with Tom led to the biggest vault in their skill or improvement.” He said, “That’s the measure.” The measure is how you affect others, not whether sales went up by seven and a half percent, and the margins went up by 1/8 of a percent or whatever else.

And I really do think it’s obvious to all people. And one thing I want to say to that I do want us to get on a little bit, I think it’s all people. And I think again, regardless of the business, the most significant driver is the quality of the first-line manager. There’s enough research to sink a ship that says productivity, profitability, quality, innovativeness, any damn thing you can name is extraordinarily dependent on that first-line manager. And I’ve gone so far, I think I’d say it in this book that, we’re running—I ain’t talking about giant companies—we’re running a 200-person company and it has, I don’t know, 30 frontline managers. Those 30 frontline managers taken together our asset, number one of the corporation. And there is a one-liner like that, that says the sergeants run the Army. And by the way, the Army figured that out long ago. So, it’s a fact.

**[10:50] Roger Dooley:** Do you see companies really emphasizing that though, as opposed to just saying, well, the first line manager position is, well, maybe sort of a test bed, throw somebody in there, see how they do and maybe pretty soon be able to promote them if they do well. As opposed to emphasizing the value of that position in and of itself?

**[11:05] Tom Peters:** Absolutely, positively. Obviously, I haven’t done the original research and can’t peg it to a percentage. But I think, alas, that your description, just then that is the norm. And my argument, obviously from the prior thing is that the selection of the frontline manager is a strategic business decision. It is not a promotion decision. It is literally the determination of the effectiveness of the strategy that you tend to be trying to implement in the marketplace, or if it’s a public sector organization, and the place where human beings use your services or what have you. But no.

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And I think it's a deadly, and we can go to this in a while too, the same thing is true of hiring. I had forgotten the name of the book, but somebody wrote an entire book on hiring and said, it's just insane the degree to which leaders are not trained in hiring people. And I would not dispute that. But we'll stick with where we are. And I just want to make a list of 175 or 175,000 exclamation marks under what you just said. Well, put him in this job and see how he does because maybe he's headed for top management. No, he's going to be in that job maybe for six months, maybe for 18 months, and the people he works with determine the future of my company.

**[12:36] Roger Dooley:** Well, I guess so you also make the argument that if you have an exceptional crop of first-line managers, when you do need to promote, you'll have some excellent choices. And you'll be basically building the organization from the bottom up.

**[12:46] Tom Peters:** Yeah, absolutely. You should with any luck at all, you should have a basket of people who you'd have been developing since the first day they walked through your real or virtual door. So, we should have a plethora of candidates. I couldn't agree more wholeheartedly.

**[13:07] Roger Dooley:** Tom, how do you get the CEO and top management to buy into these ideas because I'm sure that you can be very convincing to a lot of people who don't necessarily have the power to affect organizational change. I run into that in my own work, where people say, "Oh, these ideas are great, but man, I can't fight the corporate bureaucracy. I can't get this stuff done, because top management isn't committed to it." And you make the point again, about Milton Friedman's effect, and the other sole purpose of a corporation is to create shareholder value. Unfortunately, CEOs are often still compensated that way, with an eight-figure payout depending on performance.

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[13:49] **Tom Peters:** Let me tell you where I am now that I'm 100 years old. The management guru business... Jesus, I hate that word. The Economist invented it in a year and this year, a thousand years ago, and I wish it never happened. The guru class of which you are a part, me, I'm blaming me, we focus on the damned Fortune 500 or the FTSE 100, if it's the UK. And the reality is that 7% of Americans work for the Fortune 500, which doing the advanced math suggests that 93% don't. And for people like me, if you went through all of my books, until very recently, you would find fleeting mention, but I wouldn't focus on the SMEs, the small and medium-sized enterprises.

And per your point it is unfair. One-person, two-person, and three-person enterprises employ millions of people and that's fantastic. But my mental focus is on a company with 50 people 75 people, 100 people 125 people, maybe 175 or what have you, a manageable number. And my strong suspicion and I have no measure of this is if I had a room full of 50 people running businesses with on average 125 employees, and I made this pitch and screamed and yelled and shouted, I thought I'd get somewhere with a handful of them.

If I had a roomful of Fortune 500 companies, "Tom go back to bed, go get a good night's rest." And I'm sure we know some dude there are turnarounds and so on and so forth. The other part that makes me laugh is... and this is a million years ago, I worked at McKinsey before it was disgraced and a couple of friends of mine at McKinsey studied the thousand largest companies either in the world or in America, 40 years' worth of results, and not one of one thousand outpaced the marketplace when you use that 40-year measure.

And so my bias, and I'm asked sometimes when I'm in a room that has middle managers, they said, "Look, you're working in a giant company, it's going downhill, there's not a damn thing you can do about it, but experiment and have fun on the way down." This is kind of the same with Paul Oberon. I love the meeting. And it's a serious book. And he's a serious economist and researcher and all that. And he said, "I am frequently asked by people, 'how do I create a small

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business for myself?” And he said, “My answer is obvious. Just start a big one and wait.” It’s a smart answer but it’s statistically true at some level.

So, the real answer to your question is, with you or me or our message, if we were talking to a group of people from 75-person companies, I think we get a hell of a lot further than we would with the 75,000-person organizations.

**[17:04] Roger Dooley:** That makes total sense. I did a workshop in New York City a few weeks ago, and I had a commenter that was talking about friction, unnecessary effort, and how to reduce it in your employee experience. And the comment from the leader of that was “Yes, in our company, reducing friction is a high friction experience,” just because he was in that situation that he did not have the power to really change the corporation’s way of doing things. It is tough.

**[17:34] Tom Peters:** I will say, this goes all the way back to in search of excellence. One of the companies was an auto parts company called The Dana Corporation. And the CEO is a guy named Ren McPherson, who, oddly enough, went on to become the Dean of the Stanford Business School. But he said, “As I was moving up the ranks in this big company, what I really wanted every couple of years, was to inherit some shitty little piece of it with 25 people or 30 people. And I would turn that 30-person outfit into a gem, fit for the tiara of the Queen.” And he said, “I like to think that I hid from top management for 20 years until they finally said, ‘Holy shit, look what happens, these things get better’. And I was then welcomed into the top ranks.” But yeah, that’s a cute story, but there’s an awful lot of truth in that.

**[18:26] Roger Dooley:** Yeah, that’s one thing that even perhaps not top C-level leadership can do is focus on something that they can control and produce results. And then probably also try and get assignments that let them do that. If they’re in an assignment, that they pretty much done what they can with it to look for something else, even if it’s not the next step up the ladder, maybe it’ll give them a chance to do something cool and fun.

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**[18:51] Tom Peters:** They should please assign me to a country that's at least four thousand miles away. I can have my own house to play with. And I think metaphorically, if not, in reality, it's not a bad idea. That's what I want.

**[19:05] Roger Dooley:** Well, sometimes the little divisions are the ones that get overlooked. They're too small to worry about, so they don't get all that top management attention. So, Tom, you've mentioned big companies a few times, are there any big companies that seem to be getting it right these days?

**[19:18] Tom Peters:** I'm going to give you an honest answer. I have not been studying them close enough to say these four companies are doing it right. I saw something just a couple of days ago that said that Apple relative to Facebook and so on, is now the most valuable of that lot. And Apple and I go back to about 1985 and between Mr. Jobs and Tim Cook, I think they've done a pretty decent job. But I would give my left arm to be able to give you a list of seven companies that meet your standards. But my problem is not that I don't think they exist, there is literally an absence of data.

If read my recent books, what you will find is some wonderful little stories about those medium size enterprises that have just flipped the world upside down in their little market space. I mean, the one I always love, which I've written about in the last two books, and maybe even before that, is a company in Central Connecticut called Basement Systems, Inc. And their life is to take Roger's, moldy old basement and get it clean and sweet and turn it into a playroom, turn it into an extra bedroom. And it's allowed them to grow to be a \$100 million Company,

Larry Janeski runs it. He wrote a book called *Dry Basement Science*, which sold brilliantly. So, I love those. It's about as many miles away from Silicon Valley as possible to be. And it's doing something and it has done something cool and is doing good for the world. Those are the people who just don't make me smile, they make me grin.

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**[21:13] Roger Dooley:** Yeah, I think maybe the larger you get, the tougher it is. I know, one of my favorite stories is Carl Sewell. Sewell is one of the biggest car dealers in the country with branches in multiple cities and every brand you can think of is represented. But his focus was on customer service. And he really carried that philosophy through. He wrote a book about customer service, much like your basement guy, perhaps. And he was able to replicate that way of operating across multiple units as they grew and grew. I don't know how they're doing today, I think they're doing fine. I don't know, if they are still that good.

**[21:46] Tom Peters:** I'm a little behind. The story is clearly accurate. And the other thing, it's always fun to me, like the teacher standing in the doorway, are you can come up with a hundred little things they've done. One I remember is the most important thing about your car dealer is how good they are at repairing cars and fixing cars. And one of the things that Carl would do is he would insist when you were buying the car that you make a tour of the space where the mechanics were, and meet a few of the mechanics, because he said I know it's the perfect car, General Motors is God, but it's not going to work every minute of every day. And I want you to know, the kind of group we've got here who will support you.

And stuff like that goes under a category that's damn near called, a true genius. To have that kind of integration for both sides. I mean, on the one hand, that makes Roger the buyer feel good, but more than Roger, the buyer, Tom, the mechanic says, "This is really cool. My boss thinks I'm the most important person around and he wants me to meet his customers." And as we now know – and I don't think it was always true – somewhere in the neighborhood of probably 150% of the profits of an automobile dealership come from the service department, not what goes on the sales floor.

**[23:14] Roger Dooley:** True. That may change with electrics. But that story is great. I didn't know that particular story. But it reminds me of something else that's both in your current book and in my *Brainfluence* book, and it's a story

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about radiologists. One study found that they were more thorough and accurate in reading X-rays when there was a little picture of the patient attached. It's almost the same thing as the mechanic meeting the customer, suddenly, it was just an engine and then there's a customer on the other side of that...

**[23:44] Tom Peters:** And make sure that people who are listening to us, it led to 80% better diagnosis. Because what does radiologists do? The radiologist is sitting 10 miles away or in Mumbai, India and we've got the next test results coming up. What does he see? He sees charts, graphs, numbers, that's all and he makes his judgments from that. And this research piece, which was published by the American Radiological Society wasn't published by a PR firm, made it in time, you spent more time, and they did empathy tests.

And the radiologist in Mumbai or Philadelphia on those empathy tests, which I think are pretty reliable or can be pretty reliable, said that you empathize with the patient. And I saw your frigging picture for four and a half seconds. But suddenly, I was looking at data associated with a real living human being. And I will be the first to admit I get off on stories like that.

**[24:59] Roger Dooley:** Right. And we've just seen two examples of humanizing the customer, so to speak, or the patient. I think there is probably amongst our audience members, who could think of some way of doing that. If there's that disconnect between somebody who is providing a service or just part of the overall company delivering their product or service, when they see the customer as a human being on the other end, chances are, they're going to be a little more engaged, a little more conscientious. And I think it is a win for everybody because.

**[25:30] Tom Peters:** Yeah, which is pretty obvious from our couple of examples, the investment costs is zero. I mean, maybe it costs an eighth of a penny to take a picture of somebody, but not today with an iPhone, doesn't even cost an eighth of a penny. But it's stuff that doesn't have a \$2 million price tag associated there with it.

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**[25:48] Roger Dooley:** Tom, looking at the book and trying to figure out, I initially started by asking you how it should be consumed. What I think that people should do... first of all, they should obviously get the book. But also, to me this would be an ideal thing, if you have a regular leadership meeting or staff meeting, to just select a few pages that are on a certain theme and share those, because obviously, you could read those three pages in 60 seconds or so. And then spend a few minutes discussing how they might apply to the unit, the business, or whatever size group this is. To me, that will be so valuable, because, it's one thing to read these things and say, "Yeah, that really makes sense. People are important." But when you could bring a team together and focus on just one little thing, well, how could we apply this idea? To me, that would be the real win in this.

**[26:40] Tom Peters:** Yeah, I guarantee you that down to the punctuation marks, what you just described is my ideal in terms of the use, because I have no question that you're exactly right. I could read every word in this book. If I said, I don't have time to do the rest of the interview, Roger, I've got to have 10 minutes to read the book and in 10 minutes I'll be back. Well, it's not quite that. But it is... I don't want to say one-liners, it is a very condensed thought.

And the other thing I love about it, which I've always said in my presentations as well, there ain't much Tom Peters in this. It is the Anita Roddick who founded the body shop who's responsible for the epigraph and people like that. It's all what I will call real on the line, in the marketplace, human beings. It's not some bloody academic guru, who says it. I mean, I would like to think that the things that I say have appropriate background and so on. But the point is, I want Richard Branson to carry the message, because we know what he's done. And who gives two craps, what Tom Peters has done, and it is sure as hell I haven't run a company with 7000 or 700 employees. Seventy, maybe, but not 700, or 7000.

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[27:56] **Roger Dooley:** Right. And that's what makes the book fun, too. It's one thing for an expert, - and I would consider you an expert Tom – to share wisdom gained through experience and research, and so on. But as you say, hearing from Richard Branson, and some of these other great people makes it more impactful. And you do have a few of your own ideas interspersed throughout. But I did do an analysis, but not all that many of them. But overall, the compilation is great.

[28:22] **Tom Peters:** I will admit to your charts, that there is a handful of Tom in there.

[28:28] **Roger Dooley:** Right. That's a good thing. It would be wrong if there wasn't. Tom, how can people find you and your ideas?

[28:34] **Tom Peters:** [www.tompeters.com](http://www.tompeters.com), which has every damn thing that I've done for the last 20 years, every PowerPoint slide, presentation, etc. It will have a link very boldly at the top of the first page associated with this interview that you and I are having. We have a similar, more or less similar website called [www.excellencenow.com](http://www.excellencenow.com). I'm not sure with Mr. Musk in charge, but you can also find a lot of me on Twitter, at least at this moment. You know, I've got... I hate to use numbers like this, because it sounds like I'm trying to pretend I'm a hot shot. I got 175,000 followers, and I do an awful lot of tweeting.

Well, it's hard to leave Mr. Musk alone. But what I like about Twitter is the conversations, the conversation with you, or the conversation with a woman by the name of Sharon Watkins, who was the whistleblower for the Enron fiasco. And she responded to some tweet of mine and we've been talking ever since. It's very normal people and it's conversation. And I will admit, my wife, says we have to get a divorce if I stay on Twitter after Musk took over. And I haven't quite figured out how serious she is. And I'm certainly distressed. But I'm not going to run out the door at this point because to be very selfish, it does what I want it to do, for me in a conversational way.

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**[30:27] Roger Dooley:** Right. Well, we'll keep our fingers crossed, that Twitter doesn't go completely in the wrong direction. You might have to cough up eight bucks though, to keep that blue star. That's not that big of a deal. Tom, thanks so much. It's been a lot of fun and good luck with the new book.

**[30:45] Tom Peters:** Well, thank you so much. And it was just such a lovely conversation, and I have enjoyed every minute of it, and thank you for your serious preparation. And we'll do it again sometime.

**[30:58] Roger Dooley:** Definitely.

**[31:00] Outro:** Thank you for tuning in to Brainfluence. To find more episodes like this one, and to access all of Roger's books, articles, videos, and resources, the best starting point is [www.rogerdooley.com](http://www.rogerdooley.com). To check availability for a game-changing keynote or a workshop, in-person or virtual, visit [www.rogerdooley.com](http://www.rogerdooley.com).