

# SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR



HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF [membermouse™](#)

## 11 Eternal Marketing Truths That Can Help You Grow A Strong Business with Brian Kurtz

*"Marketing is not evil. I made a case to them for a good 20 minutes of why marketing is not evil. It's a samurai, not ninja. It's a welcome mat and not a tripwire. I mean, I hate the term tripwire. It's like, how can you use a term that blows up people as the technique that's going to get you new customers or get you new leads? I did a video on why blowing up your customers might not be the best idea... because they're not going to be your customers anymore!"*

### **INTRO:**

That's Brian Kurtz. My very special guest on today's episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Now... before I introduce you to him, I just want to take a moment to say how excited I am to share this conversation with you.

The reason I'm so excited is because Brian is an absolute legend in the marketing world and he shares so much valuable advice and wisdom with you here.

Brian's marketing career spans four decades and his work has helped sell over a billion dollars worth of books, information products, and recurring subscriptions.

In this episode, we dive deep into:

The key distinction between invention and innovation in marketing  
The business-changing revelation Brian had about recurring revenue  
How you can use timeless marketing principles to sell more of your own products  
And much, much more...

If you're not already familiar with Brian, then I'm so grateful for the opportunity to introduce you to him here. And if you are familiar with him, then you already know this is an episode you won't want to miss.

As always, I'm your host Eric Turnnessen and this is Episode 170 of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

**Eric:** Hey, Brian, welcome to the show.

**Brian:** Hey, Eric, how are you?

**Eric:** Doing great. Thank you so much for coming on. I'm so excited to talk to you. Now, for our listeners who are not familiar with you, you have a storied marketing career that spans about five decades, and you got your start in marketing at Boardroom, which was a wildly successful direct marketing company and publishing company. After you retired from Boardroom in 2015, you decided to become a bridge between the old school of direct marketing and the new school. Since then, you've made it your mission to share everything you've learned in your career and help coach the next generation of marketers. In support of that, you've spoken at countless seminars, hosted your own conferences, published two books and created your own private membership community, the Titans Xcelerator. Brian, welcome to the show. Is there anything from your history that I've left out?

**Brian:** Yeah, there is. Whether it's relevant or not, I don't know. But yeah, I mean, I think that it definitely is two different careers, but one of the things that's interesting is that the two careers, one career was selling \$39 subscriptions and books to the tune of a billion dollars plus, but \$39 at a time, to a B2B coaching business, educational business that is selling memberships at 2000 to 25,000 at a time. In a lot of ways, they're the same business. I don't want to say they're exactly the same, clearly, they're not, but it's interesting that... and that's why being the bridge of... it's not just old school, it's the bridge of the eternal truths of direct marketing and how they apply to everything that's state-of-the-art today. It's not an easy bridge to cross because having grown up in the world of direct mail and TV, radio package, inserts, print, and moving to digital, it was... most of the people I grew up with in the direct mail horse and buggy days gave up.

I mean, they either gave up because it was too intimidating, this internet thing, or they gave up because they were old and they wanted to just retire. For me, it was like the amazing opportunity because the internet and email and everything around it is the ultimate direct response medium with much more immediate results and much more... I mean, you can still measure everything. I mean, a lot of online marketers don't measure things as well as they could or should, which is a chapter of my book, why paying postage made me a better marketer, because having that discipline is really important to go with it. But I got to tell you, the more things change, the more they stay the same. I love that because I can learn and then teach, learn and then teach. That's my whole life. I'm a student and a teacher every single day. It's just been a glorious career and I'm glad I'm still here.

**Eric:** That's amazing. Most people are really good at recognizing those major changes, like a shift between direct marketing and then the digital. But of course, these changes are happening all the time if you're paying close enough attention. Sure, when internet first started, it was a certain way of doing things, but now how often are things changing and how often are you having to reinvent and look at different strategies?

**Brian:** Yeah. It's so much more innovation and invention. I mean, people invent stuff Jeff Walker invents Product Launch Formula, Ryan Levesque invents Quiz Funnels, and Russell Brunson invents ClickFunnels and Stu McLaren invents TRIBE and membership models. But you know what? I can trace every single thing to something that came before. That's not to take a

stroll down memory lane. I mean, I'm nostalgic because I'm getting older. So why not? But it's not to be nostalgic. It's to basically know where babies came from, know the roots of everything, and that enables you to build on it even more.

I'll tell you, I'm in Jeff Walker's mastermind. I don't really do a lot of PLF launches, but I need to know that because I'm teaching to another generation and I want to be able to bring that to them with my spin on it, because my spin is still my spin from the 1980s and the '90s. I don't think there's as much invention as we'd like to think, but there is a ton of innovation and the innovation is happening every day, every way, and you've got to have your ear to the ground. If you're not, you're going to get left behind.

Even with me, because I run two mastermind groups, I'm in six other mastermind groups that I pay for or... some of them I don't pay for, but most of them I do. That's an ear to the ground. You can't be everywhere. Again, I get terrible FOMO. I'm always fearful of missing out on everything that's going on. If you have FOMO and you're hungry to learn, you could drive yourself crazy, but you know what? I try not to drive myself crazy and be in the right places to learn and pick up the stuff that I need to pick up. Again, it's been an amazing ride and it is all about the relationships. It really is. It really is about the thing I used to call myself was the director of sales prevention. Joe Polish coined me that. It's not because I don't sell. You and I were discussing before you turned the recording on that we all sell. I have a slide in one of my PowerPoints, the quote is, I'm not a salesman, and then it's attributed to the last salesman that came into my office. Everybody's a salesman, but it's how you sell and how you design the platforms that you sell under.

Here's a consistent thing. You always have to be consistent and congruent with who you are and how you sell, because you can be very aggressive and have an aggressive sales approach, you can be passive, have a passive sales approach. But even a passive sales approach can make you a ton of money. It's different strokes for different folks, but it's all under the... it's on the foundational block of direct response marketing.

**Eric:** Yeah. I mean, it's something you were talking about in terms of your approach to how you learn, and then do you consistently stay in touch with the masterminds? It made me think of George Lucas and how he has been a part of the film industry and also been innovative, and a lot of what he does in terms of his writing, he ties back to these fundamental universal truths that he gets from the Man of a Thousand Faces or The Hero's Journey, which of course how many things, both movies, entertainment, marketing, all of this stuff is based on those fundamentals that come out of it? You're talking about this one seed from which all these trees come from. I think that sounds to me like an important element of like, yes, you have a FOMO, but you stay grounded with the fact that you keep trying to connect all these new things you're learning into the fundamentals, the ever-existing universal truth.

**Brian:** Yeah. I think if I have a superpower, it's really about, I'm a really good dot connector. In Overdeliver when I wrote about the experience I had about taking trade books from bookstores and creating a direct mail version of that book, that had been done before, but I combined that

with a research technique that I had learned from someone else. I combined that with the idea of premiums and bonuses that I learned in direct mail. It was a variety of things. And I learned about how to write copy from... not me, but I knew the copywriters who could write copy from books in terms of bullet points and fascinations. All of that became... that's the gestalt of an idea, but it's not one idea. It was a combination of things to the tune of a \$40 million book operation of not our own books, which before that, Boardroom was known as a greatest hits book publisher. Our books were the greatest hits of our newsletters.

Great model. All you got to do is rehash the content into a book and you have a new product and a new mailing and a new promotion. But when you take a third-party book and you can bring that into the realm of what you've already done by using all the things that you've learned, that was my secret sauce, if I have them. Again, it's not that I invented any one of those elements. It's like in my book, I talk about RFM and list segmentation. I didn't invent that, but I have an approach to it that enables a new generation to consume it from me that they've not consumed it before, and then I become their messenger.

That's the most satisfying thing I always find during my career, is that if I can be the messenger to you for a concept, a premise, a golden nugget, something that you didn't get until I explained it to you, that's as good as inventing it because now I've shared it with someone who's going to go share it some more, and it's a basic principle that needs to be shared further. That's what jazzes me the most these days.

**Eric:** I mean, it's interesting because in listening to you talk about this, my mind asks the question, "Well, what is the difference between invention and repackaging, or innovation and repackaging?"

**Brian:** Yeah, it's not a lot. I was just watching the series Genius, I don't know if you've seen it, but it's a National Geographic series and it's at three seasons and each season is one Genius. The first season was Einstein. The second season was Picasso. The third season, I just watched, it was Aretha Franklin. It's science, art and music. Now, those people invented some stuff. I mean, Einstein definitely invented-

**Eric:** Einstein still repackaged that. He didn't invent that.

**Brian:** He absolutely did. Here's the ultimate thing. That's perfect. What about Edison? Edison is considered the inventor, or DaVinci. Well, DaVinci's an original source, almost. When you start going back further and you get away from 1990s and 2000 gurus, you actually get to some stuff that was really invented. I remember, there was a quote that I've used a lot. It's; if you're the smartest person in the room, you're in the wrong room, and I wanted to put on a t-shirt for my mastermind members. I went to the Google and I started going down a rabbit hole, who said it? Usually everything is Winston Churchill, but who said that quote. There was this one thought leader from the 1990s who says he invented it. There were a lot of people-

**Eric:** It sounds like a Napoleon Hill thing, or-

**Brian:** It actually went further back. Confucius. Once I got to Confucius, I was satisfied. I don't have to go back further than that. But that's the kind of thing. It's not just for nostalgia. It's like that's where the invention is. However, the idea of adapting not being the smartest person in the room, I've taken it to a step further about when you're the dumbest person in the room, and what that does for you. If you can get a ticket into a room where you're the dumbest person, but you're not the dumbest in terms of absorbing. You're the dumbest in terms of the knowledge that's in the room, that's a golden ticket. That's Willy Wonka stuff. I did a whole blog post just about being the dumbest person in the room.

I didn't invent that. I didn't invent the other one, but I took it to another level, which I could put my stamp on it to some degree. But I've said it so many times in so many ways. It's actually better not to invent anything. To innovate off someone else's invention, give the inventor or the innovator before you all the credit, give it to him, give it to him, give it to him. Because when you're standing on the shoulders of giants, you're taller than them in a lot of ways, because the idea of... and that's why when you hear about... whenever I hear about someone taking claim to something or plagiarizing something, that just like... the hair on my arms stands up on end and I get a panic attack. "How could they do that? How could they do that?" They could do so much better by not taking credit and showing their innovative way of looking at it than taking credit for something that wasn't theirs. That's just a... I didn't invent that either. I didn't invent that concept either. Someone else figured that out.

A lot of the response I got to the blog post about the idea of invention is overrated, and I've written about it many, many times, I had one that not everybody can be Edison. I had a bunch of blog posts that... I got responses every time that the person responding to me from my online family would say something like, "Brian, I feel so relieved because here I thought that I had to invent something to be a meaningful person, or I had to be in the spotlight to do something great. And you just gave me permission to not have to do that." That, to me, that was the joy of doing that because I gave them a gift that was out of my mind. I just very appreciative when people come back to me with stuff like that.

**Eric:** For sure. Speaking of the geniuses in all this, I'm sure at some point in those programs, they talk about the Eureka moments, where some of the most amazing breakthroughs that have happened through history have not come as a result of... like that person was saying too, they were putting so much pressure on themselves. They had to-

**Brian:** It was serendipitous, almost.

**Eric:** Right. They had to come to something that was amazing. But ultimately, in some ways there was preparation, and then it was timing or something. How has that shown up in your life when you consider the things that you've invented or innovated, what ways have they come to you?

**Brian:** Yeah, it's a slow and steady journey. It's a slow and steady climb. I'll tell you, the key concepts are all in my book, part of it's overdelivery, that you have to go into every relationship 100/0, with no expectation of a return. Reciprocity is not doing a launch and getting the same amount of names from the launch. That's not what it's about. In fact, reciprocity, is according to Robert Cialdini, it Influenced, I have a little card in my wallet that I carry around with me, and it's the pocket version of Robert Cialdini, The principles of Ethical Influence. Number one is reciprocation. You then me, then you, then me. Be the first to give. Service, information, concessions. Be the first.

That's a rule of thumb for me. That's always to be the first to give. Always be the first to contribute. Always be the first to overdeliver. Always be the first to give 100/0 and see what happens, without any expectations. That's one of the things that was part of the slow climb. If you do that for a year, it's not going to change your life. If you do it for 40 years, like I've done it, it did change my life, completely. I've had Eureka moments on little ideas, I think, but they were all part of a... it's sort of like... I talk about this in Overdeliver also, about the compound interest of relationship capital. I hate the word networking. That's how I start chapter 10 of Overdeliver. I hate the word networking. Instead, I look at it as contributing to connect. You contribute and then you connect. It's such a different way to look at it in terms of...

Because I can get a network. I mean, I have 5,000 Facebook friends who are not my friends, but that's not a network. I didn't contribute to them to connect to them. But the people that are really, truly important, the top 100, the top 1000, whoever you have in your life, it's all done through contribution and connection, and everything that leads to any kind of innovation or invention, in my life anyway, was based on those bedrock principles of setting it up. You said it before, you said, "You're preparing for genius, you're preparing for the invention of the innovation." You're not planning for it. I don't know. You're setting yourself up, and then the right... it looks like the right place at the right time, but I don't think it's that random in a lot of cases.

**Eric:** Yeah, I agree with you. In marketing, it seems like there's this challenge with terminology, like you were talking about networking. You switched the perspective on networking to make it your own, because ultimately, it's just a word. In marketing, so many of the things that have turned me off about the different approaches and the different ways people talk about it is they use particular words, but they put a certain perspective on it that's about the opposite of what you said. They're trying to get before they give, or they're trying to cheat or these other things. The thing is, you can have an outcome and an accomplishment with both approaches. But I don't have a long enough career to basically have to say definitively, but my sense is, if you take the approach of getting before you give, that's a short-term gain, long-term loss situation. Have you, in your experience, seen that? Because all the guys-

**Brian:** Yes.

**Eric:** ... who are great marketers and it's black box stuff and they make millions of dollars and everybody wants to copy them because it's a get rich quick thing, people are attracted, but then what?

**Brian:** I'll give you just a semantic explanation of what you're talking about. I've done two different video blog posts. One was about ninja versus samurai. You always hear about ninja tactics, and that's one that's big. I looked up ninja, and ninjas were mercenaries, these rapists, they did everything in hiding. It's the exact opposite of the way I teach marketing. And yet, as you say, it can be effective because if there's a trick involved, there's a whatever. Samurai, they'll kill you, but with honor. I made the differentiate... I don't like samurai marketing, but I like it better than ninja marketing. I used it to take it a step further into the explanation of blackouts versus white hats. Marketing can be used for evil. Teaching people that marketing is not evil. I got to that at a least common denominator, when I went to Hungary and spoke to Hungarian entrepreneurs in Budapest.

Now, Hungarian entrepreneurs sounds like the ultimate oxymoron. Hungary was communist until 1989. And yet the guy I was going to his event, he was an amazing... he coaches entrepreneurs in Hungary and there were 300 of them in the room. But even they were so suspicious. I'm the ugly American, and they're sitting on their hands and going, "How's he going to teach me how to rob from my customers, and should I listen to them?" The title of my speech in Hungary, I went least common denominator; Why marketing isn't everything. It's the only thing. My first topic was, marketing is not evil. I made a case to them for a good 20 minutes of why marketing is not evil. I used... it's a samurai, not ninja. It's a welcome mat and not a tripwire. I mean, I hate the term tripwire. It's like, how can you use a term that blows up people as the technique that's going to get you new customers or get you new leads.

I think I did a video. It's why blowing up your customers might not be the best idea, because they're not going to be your customers anymore. I took it to an extreme to make the point. When you use terms like that, people say to me, "Oh, Brian, you're making too big a deal. It's just the term ninja, tripwire or whatever," but it's not. Because if you start using the term, it gets into your brain, it gets into the way you market, it gets into your copy, it gets into your offers, it gets into how you don't give returns when people need a return or they need customer service when you don't want to give them customer service. I mean, I have a chapter and Overdeliver, customer service and fulfillment are marketing functions. You want customers for the long haul, you've got to service them, not just sell them.

This whole idea that... and you said it perfectly, that you can do very, very well and make millions of dollars as a black hat marketer, even as a white hat marketer using black hat tactics, you can make a ton of money. You can make a ton of money being totally focused on cold traffic with gimmicks and all that. But I maintain I'd much rather, and I'm glad I'm talking to a membership expert and a guy who lives by continuous service and renewal, and it's not the first order. It's the second order. And it's the renewal of the business. If you want that kind of a business, and that's the only business I want. If people come into my mastermind and all they want is the next new thing and the next new order, they're probably not a good fit for my



mastermind. I'm not going to be bringing in speakers that are under that. Again, I'm not making those people wrong. I could be the Dan Kennedy and say, "They suck and I'm right." I'm not going to do that.

But it's a way to market. It's a way to do it. It's just not the way I choose to do it. It's not that the way... Look, I don't have a really long history. I only have 40 years, so I don't... I'm joking, but 40 years has taught me that there are some things that are probably not worth doing, and you hinted at them. I've been in it for 40 years. I've not gone out of business. I've never gone bankrupt. I don't have the story of rags to riches. I mean, I just worked my way up. I think part of that is because, yeah, I got lucky, I was right place, right time, all of that. But I've constantly been in this mindset that says, "It's the compound interest of relationship capital. It's the... I meet someone, they introduce me to someone, I go back to the first person and thank them. I go back to the first person and say, 'What do you think I could do with the second person?'" I don't just keep on accumulating people because I'm contributing to each one going forward and going backward.

I got to tell you, it takes a lot more time to do that. The downside is that I end up responding to a lot more emails than the average person, I end up being in conversations that I probably shouldn't be in with a lot more people, but shit, what else do I have to do?

**Eric:** I'm not sure if you're familiar with the Date philosophy. It's an ancient philosophy from India. Since you're not aware of it, I'll let you know that a lot of the things that you're speaking to are tenets of this philosophy, like continuous service, the importance of words use, they call them mantras, but the sound energy, the things that the words are indicating and how that is actually very important, which words you use.

**Brian:** Yeah, gets into your bones, right?

**Eric:** Exactly. It forms your reality. Taking action without expecting the reward.

**Brian:** It sounds like I should join this whatever religion.

**Eric:** No, you already are, basically. Anything actually has truth to it, it's not about... just like The Hero's Journey, it's a universal thing. Somebody writes it down in different ways and describes it in different ways, but ultimately if something is universally true, it doesn't matter what you label it. But I'm just saying I think what you're seeing and the reason why these things flow so well in your life is it's actually universally true that these are things that help in life. They've been documented in different areas. I would argue that different tactics can work in the short term, but ultimately if your vision is to have a career or a lifestyle, something that you're doing with your life, something where you're putting out, taking action in the world, like we all have to do something, ultimately there is...

**Eric:** A lot of people have a short-sighted view of only thinking about the financial rewards, but ultimately they don't think about the other impacts, and maybe detrimental impacts, that may

come from certain decisions that are made in terms of how approaching... you're talking about you spend a lot of time writing emails, but the thing is, because of the choices you made, I imagine that in a lot of cases, more often than not, those emails are fulfilling to you, as opposed to, you having to beat people off with a stick and have all these arguments and defend some faulty policy or something.

**Brian:** Yeah, I mean, saying no is really hard for me. I remember reading Essentialism, really good book by Rob McKeown, and he talks about that everything in essentialism, you either has to be a hell yes or a no. I actually... it was set a desirable, to say, it's either a hell yes or a no. Then I realized it doesn't work for me because that means it's got to be a 10 or a zero. And I got a lot of sevens and eights in my life that I like.

**Eric:** Sure. Well, seven and eight, I would say it's still yes.

**Brian:** Okay. Maybe a six then.

**Eric:** You're still not really it testing the theory. It's like, if it was a three, would you say no?

**Brian:** There are threes that I say yes to, so the answer is no. But I say no to more threes than I do sixes. I have documented everything in my life by a one to 10. But I really believe that sometimes when I realize that I'm doing a three and it's giving me some fulfillment, I get off it really quick because I say, "I'm going to keep doing this because it's not as important as something I could be doing right now that could be a 10, but it's still important. It's still fulfilling. It's still doing something for me that makes sense."

Again, part of it, you said it also, that not being motivated completely by money makes a huge difference. When I was talking about being ninja and tripwires and all of that, marketers... and now we bring it back to marketing, marketers in their twenties, they are hungry for money. That's okay because they need to survive, they need to eat. There's a survival mechanism in there. Being 40 years removed from that part of my life and not having to worry about money, but worrying about what... and I hate to use the word impact because it's overused, but just to be able to... things that have real meaning in everything you do. It's not like the book that says you do what you love and the money will follow, but there's some truth in there. The thing is that if you're really committed at a deep level to everything you want to do, you'll make money, believe me.

**Eric:** Yeah. I haven't read that book, but I would imagine that one of the things, the proofs behind it is when you do something that you love to do, there's an access to a particular energy, which may come out as enthusiasm, which ultimately that's... if we're talking about relationship-based businesses and that's a foundation, people are responding a lot to that.

**Brian:** Yes. Yes.

**Eric:** Who you are, what is your enthusiasm?

**Brian:** Yeah, exactly. Enthusiasm plays a big role in everything. I think passion goes along with enthusiasm. I have these seven characteristics that were present in every great copywriter I ever met. Because I wanted to identify... I've been fortunate to work with... every great copywriter who's been alive in my lifetime, I've worked with, or I know. I've tried to come up with, what are the characteristics that make up these amazing copywriters? Because copywriting's not a commodity. The writing talent is one piece, but that's not the most important piece. I identified these seven characteristics. They were things like hunger, insatiable curiosity, going for feedback loops, even when you know you're the smartest in the room, passion, understanding direct marketing, specific direct marketing principles, because just being a writer is not enough, humility and then pride in your work, was number seven.

But it was so interesting. Then coupled with that, I learned these from Dan Sullivan, who's from Strategic Coach, who is the top coach for entrepreneurs. He talks about the five ways you get paid. And the fifth is money, in his mind. You have to appreciate, you have to enhance, you have to refer. You do all these other things, that does lead to money. I had a Facebook ad where I put that blog post up, the five ways you get paid, and this guy writes to me and he goes, "I had to just pay my \$1,400 mortgage. I can't get that from appreciation." First of all, I told my tech guy to get him off the feed because I didn't want him throwing out stuff like that. But I did answer them first. I said, "Well, you're not appreciating enough. You're not appreciating enough, because I think if you appreciated enough, you probably could pay your mortgage."

**Eric:** Yeah, I agree with that. Ultimately, I think that comes back to the missing practice of... Entrepreneurship in a certain way, is about delayed gratification, which is another way of saying don't expect the rewards immediately after you've done something. It's not like placing an order at a fast food restaurant.

**Brian:** Entrepreneurs are us, right?

**Eric:** It's like, "Hey, I'll take \$10,000 plus a Ferrari. Can I have that right now? Thanks."

**Brian:** Dan Sullivan puts that in the context of the Gap, which is really interesting, where he says that most entrepreneurs are just looking to the horizon all the time. There's not only not any immediate, they can't get to it because if you can walk to the horizon, you never get there. They're looking at something that's unachievable. What Dan does in Strategic Coach and why he keeps people in for 20 and 30 years, because he says slow learners with money, he says, but you have to go quarter and quarter.

**Eric:** It's great marketing.

**Brian:** It's a great marketing scheme. Basically, you look at your life in terms of quarter by quarter, but not just so much that you basically come up with five projects that you want to get done in the next quarter, and when that quarter is done, you basically turn around and look back and see what you achieved of those five or four projects. If you achieved any of them, you

celebrate them right there. Then you turn back around and walk toward the horizon, but you're only walking toward the next quarter. It's a very logical way to look at the entrepreneurial existence. I'd say Dan invented it. But it's from a lot of experience, coaching entrepreneurs for 40 years. I trust concepts like that. I pay him \$25,000 a year to be in his group just to keep me on track every quarter, and you have to pay to apply. That's the other thing that no entrepreneurs understand. There's no free lunch. You got to pay to play.

You can't have accountability groups that are free. You get five people together and they get together and the hot seat each other, and they take care of each other in terms of feedback loops and all that, but being in that kind of an environment is the way to the next level and the next step.

**Eric:** The walking towards the horizon thing and celebrating victories, I mean, to me, the way that I've thought about that in my journey is that there is importance of a vision, but the fuel that's going to get you from here to there is passion and enthusiasm for what you're doing, because if you're ultimately, you're saying, "Oh, I'll enjoy what I'm doing when I get the reward," you're never going to have enough energy that it takes to traverse from here to there, which is always going to have obstacles.

**Brian:** Exactly. Dan has a phrase, he says, "What'll get you out of Egypt, won't get you to the promised land." But yeah, no, you nailed it, Eric. That's exactly right.

**Eric:** When we spoke last week, there was a story that you shared with me about an aha moment you had while you were at Boardroom regarding recurring revenue. This was in relation to Marty Edelston. I was wondering if you would mind sharing this at this time.

**Brian:** The story that I couldn't... and it's very relevant to what you do at MemberMouse. But I was sitting... it's in Overdeliver and it was big aha moment. I'm sitting in Marty's office one day and we're looking at the financials for the company and we're looking at our direct mail, our subscription, new subscriptions, renewals, we're looking at cross sell, our book operation with overhead and everything on the financials. At that point we, we weren't sophisticated enough to have a really good dashboard, it's was in the late '80s, early '90s, we didn't have a great dashboard for the company. We weren't pulling it out of our, you know what, but we were just scrappy. I'm looking at these financials and Marty goes over to the line where he says, "Where's all the money. Where's the money coming in?"

He went right to where Bottom Line Personal, which was our top newsletter, at one point, we got up to a million subscribers, paid subscribers. It's settled in at 500,000 in its hay day. That's a big number for a newsletter because that's not a magazine with advertising. That's a newsletter that has to live on circulation revenue and list rental and cross sell. That's it. We're looking at it, and it's only \$39 newsletter. We're looking at it and we look at the renewal revenue, and it's the biggest number on the whole sheet. Marty turned to me and he said, "Brian, you know what business we're in? We're in the business of Bottom Line Personal renewals." But the aha moment was that we realized how much time we spent on the Bottom Line Personal cold mail,

meaning, cold traffic or outside the list to get new subscribers, how much time we spend on those new subscribers with the billing series, getting them to pay finally.

And yet the key was that if we focus then on the renewal first, look at the renewals, see what their behavior was, see what mailing pieces the majority of the renewals came in on, and we started actually changing some controls on the front-end packages to relate to the renewals because the renewals were much higher on certain promotions than others. Everything was connected to the renewals. Now, if you're just starting a business, you don't have any renewals, but if you have any kind of business that's been around for a few years, you've got to look at the income that gets repeated, why it gets repeated, because it's how you sell, is how they respond. I have a whole section in *Overdeliver* about that. That it's so important that you have to understand that lists are people. Lists are people too, believe it or not. They're not just names on a piece of paper.

They behave a certain way. That's why you have to understand a book like *Breakthrough Advertising* by Gene Schwartz. What's the state of awareness that they have with your product and what you're doing and how you're messaging them? All of that, all of that Uber deep analysis that we got into was based on that aha moment, that our business was about Bottom Line Personal renewals, because those are the people... Because what we found is that with the right package that went out to get new subscribers, that got the highest payoff, that got the highest renewal rate, so the high renewal rate might've been like... so maybe we got a low front end response, like 2%, we got a 48% renewal rate. Then the second renewal was 60%, and then 80%. Now, it's a smaller number as you go to further, but that's where all the money was. All the money was piling up because we were doing it right at the beginning to get to something.

I did a blog post on this too, where I was reading so much about these gurus in the copywriting space giving you all the deep secrets of marketing and selling to cold traffic, that's the big thing. If you can go to cold traffic, and so I think the blog post was, don't play in cold traffic, they're basically saying, "Here are the techniques, the tactics, maybe some ninja, maybe a tripwire or two, to get into a new customer that knows nothing about you, to get them to subscribe or to buy your product."

Now, that's sexy. That's sexy marketing, right? When you do that, you'd feel like you're on the top of the world, whereas I learned over time that that's not what got me off. What got me off was that, were they good enough to renew? Were they good enough to stay with me for two or three years? If you're going after them with those kinds of tactics, you'll get them, but they won't stick. I always say, you have to go out to cold traffic with the second order in mind. In this case, in Bottom Line Personal's case, it was the renewal.

I tell a case history in *Overdeliver* where I talk about how you sell is how they respond, where I had two packages to sell subscriptions to Bottom Line Personal. One was a survey package. It was a simple envelope with a one pager inside, and you basically answer this two-question survey. We say, "We'd like your help." And you answer this two questions survey, and by answering the survey, you get a free three subscription to Bottom Line Personal. The other

package was a book-a-log. A book-a-log was a 64-page promotion with all kinds of tidbits. We give away some steak in addition to the sizzle, it was not a gimmick, it was not a technique. It was basically content with selling, content with selling.

After we did the mailing, the survey package got a very high front-end response. I'll say six or 7% response. The payoff was, I don't know, 18%. Whereas the book-a-log would get a 2% response rate, front end, and the back end, the payoff was 49%. What does that tell you? Well, you might've gotten more new subscribers from the survey package than you did from the book-a-log. We maybe would call the control the survey package, but then go a year later when the renewals came or eight months later when the renewals went out, people who came in from the book-a-log, the original promotion came from the book-a-log, and we tracked this over two years, the people who came in off the book-a-log would go from the 49% pay up to like 65% renewal. Whereas the people who came in on the survey package, who paid up at say 20%, 18-20%, they renewed at 17%, maybe 23%, if you're lucky, 28%.

We were building a list that was built on sand with the survey package, but the book-a-log was building a list for a lifetime. Then we sell our books, our encyclopedic books, which are the greatest tips from our newsletters. Who do you think those sold better to? The people who originally came in on a book-a-log, the Bottom Line Personal, the people who came in on the survey package? All roads lead to the renewals and where they came from and how they came through the customer journey. Learning that, that was more than an aha moment. That was a moment of revelation in a subscription business that could stand the test of time.

**Eric:** Right. One of the things in there was the giving away something for free upfront, you're being very transparent about what you do, and so people get it. If they're interested in that, then they're interested in what else you do.

**Brian:** That one also was important because in both packages, the survey package and the book-a-log package, we gave away three free issues, and then we billed them. In the survey package, they didn't know anything about the newsletter really. They started getting these three free issues and that's why they paid up so low. In the book-a-log, we gave them 64 pages of the newsletter in a promotion, basically. That's why they paid up so well because they knew exactly what they were going to be getting with the three free issues. Then they paid up at a much higher rate because what they were getting was similar to what they were being sold on. Other techniques, to answer your question, were how we did our premiums and bonuses. On something like the survey... and I'm using the survey and the book-a-log as illustration, we did a lot of interesting tests like that in our career.

But in the survey package, we would have the same premiums. It would be a couple of booklets on some specific health or finance topics. In the book-a-log, we not only had the same premiums and bonuses or editorial premiums and bonuses, but we would have pages on them in the book-a-log, what's in them with page numbers. You can see that you've got them so down, they have gone so deep into your product while you're selling them that the sale is the easy part, in a way. Free issues was not only transparent, it was consistent with basically, try it

before you buy it, and also, I'm going to tell you a lot about it before you try it, as opposed to not telling you about it. The whole thing became very, very consistent, very congruent with our brand, how we sold.

Premiums... I talk about this when I talk about offers in Overdeliver, but premiums... and the thing about premiums that were interesting in terms of bonuses. I remember we had a bottom line yearbook, which was every year, we put out a book, which was the greatest hits from Bottom Line. The original control for the Bottom Line yearbook, control package, had four special reports of premiums. One on heart disease, one on estate planning, whatever, one on taxes. It was four areas that are in the Bottom Line yearbook. It was for premiums. The copywriter gets up one day and he says, "Hey, Brian, I'm going to try 10 premiums." I said, "Sure. Why not? 10 is more than four. It should work." Gangbusters, 50% lift by 10. Not only was it because it was more, so you're over-delivering, but yet instead of four to 10, you had six more entry points.

If you had an entry point on heart disease or you had an entry point on diabetes on a special report, you had an entry point on the state planning, so you had all these other entry points. Then this copywriter, not stupid, believe me, said to me, "I'm going to do 50 premiums." Then he actually ended up going to 100 premiums. What was the premium at that point? A premium was a two-page article that was part of one book. This is another technique. It was still transparent, in my opinion, because everything that's in the promotion is going to be delivered, but we didn't have to deliver it in 100 different premiums because it's expensive to have 100 different books. What we did was, every premium was two or three pages, which was an article, every article was part of a book. In fact, it was a perfect bound book, and the book was the premium with all the 100 premiums inside.

However, in the promotion, we fanned out the 100 premiums as opposed to just showing the book, so every premium had a title, and those were the entry points. We were transparent about the design of selling the premiums. That was big. That was huge for us in terms of... but it's so simple. It was like, "Go from four to 100, show the 100, show what's in it, and you get many more people interested in your product."

**Eric:** Now, I know some people might be listening to this and be like, "Okay, he's talking about this stuff that no longer applies," but this goes back to earlier part of our conversation, which is, I think it's actually good to learn from this experience as opposed to direct things about today's market because your mind actually has to do a little bit of work, which ultimately is a good thing to get the exercise. Okay, how does this translate? What are the things in here that makes sense? I know immediately one of the things that popped out for me in the recurring revenue space in that whole story is, you started with understanding what your lifetime customer value was by looking at the numbers, because there is a cost associated with sending out the books, which ultimately ended up being your bigger business. But if you didn't know what your value of those customers were, you might've been on a purely financial cost basis, you would... "Oh, it's too expensive for us to send out all that stuff."

**Brian:** That's critical, and I didn't get to that. But that was part of the aha moment. Well, we already were there to some degree, but when we realized that we knew what the renewal rate was, we knew what the cross-promotion value of a name was, we knew what the list rental value of a name was, we were trying to lose as much as possible on the first order to get to the second order. We call that our bogey. We had a direct mail consultant who was like God to us. His name was Dick Benson. In fact, he wrote the most amazing book on direct mail, *Secrets of Successful Direct Mail*. Everything in the book is applicable to today's marketplace, even though it's only about direct mail. I have a full PDF of that book on my [Overdeliverbook.com](http://Overdeliverbook.com) site as a giveaway, a free PDF of this book. That alone is worth more than my book. It's worth everything that's on that site.

But anyway, so Dick had this thing called the bogey, and your bogey is how much you can afford to lose on the first order to make it back in year two. Now, once we started accumulating cash in renewals, all that cash, that stockpile of cash enabled us to go to a two-year bogey. We actually went out to a three-year bogey at one point. We were not making money on a subscription that came in today until over two years later. And yet it was profitable for us because we had all the back money that was already three years in making money. But again, you have to be careful with that because you can't have the same bogey for all of your products. You can't have a bogey for your books that are being sold to the newsletter subscribers.

We just went to our flagship product, *Bottom Line Personal*. One of the values of the proposition for us was to extend the bogey out as far as possible to make all boats rise in the company with all the other newsletters and our books. It was a formula for success, obviously. And it was all based on the fact that, as you said, and you spurred this on by saying the term lifetime value, that it was all about calculating at least a lifetime value. For us, it was more about the bogey, but that's part of lifetime value. Once we calculated the bogey on the lead product, it was direct marketing Nirvana for us.

**Eric:** Now, in your Xcelerator membership mastermind program, is there anything that you're doing with this that might be useful in addition to all that information for people running membership sites?

**Brian:** Yeah. I mean, we just did something, it's top of mind, there's a lot of things we do, but I realize that everything is connected in my business because my business is congruent, it's all direct marketing education. I sell breakthrough advertising. I sell swipe files from the great copywriters. I sell masterminds for multi-channel direct response marketers. That's what I do. I coach. I coach direct marketers. I realized that the *Breakthrough Advertising*, which is Gene Schwartz's masterpiece, it's \$125 book, and that's cheap because if you go on eBay or Amazon, there are copies there for \$500. It's a book that's a collector's item. It's a fantastic book, but it's very dense and it's really hard to get through without some training. I realized that my Titans Xcelerator mastermind is a group of direct marketers who I meet with on with live calls two or three times a month and I give them... I bring in guest speakers, I do hot seats with them.



It's a family operation on Zoom, it was launched pre-COVID, I was like Nostradamus when it comes to COVID. I called it. It was like, I got 250 potential people coming on the phone on Zoom two or three times a month. I realized I connected the dots to Breakthrough Advertising that the people who buy Breakthrough Advertising and don't use it, it's a crime. \$125 can either be an expense or an opportunity. I don't want it to be an expense. I want it to be their opportunity. We came up with this idea to do a quick start bootcamp, Breakthrough Advertising, quick start bootcamp, and we emailed the last... We did it on recency and frequency and monetary because we mailed the last three months first, and then we go three to six and then six to nine. We mailed the last three months buyers, offered them this bootcamp. It's a two-week bootcamp. Basically, we sprint through the book with exercises and all this stuff so they can get use out of the book, but it was in the image of Titan's Xcelerator. It was a Zoom call. There were some hot seats at the end. There was some ask me anything.

In the Xcelerator group, I do Coffee with Kurtz. I go on a half hour early and we just riff on anything anybody wants. I get 30 people on the call, we're just riffing. It's like an intimate group of 30 people. I was basically doing a... going back to my direct mail days, I was doing a direct mail piece for Titans Xcelerator using the bootcamp as a theater into it. Because once they get through the bootcamp, obviously, even though I'm the director of sales prevention, I did sell them on Titans Xcelerator. And most of the people took me up on it because basically it was... Titans Xcelerator is Breakthrough Advertising bootcamp on steroids. The format was the same, it was consistent. And that's just like you sell Bottom Line Personal, you sell the premiums that are like Bottom Line Personal. Then they buy it, they subscribe. Then I sell them the book of inside information and the Bottom Line Yearbook, which are the greatest hits from Bottom Line and similar information. What's wrong with that?

I apply everything that I've done indirect mail my entire career to everything that I do online today, everything. I mean, you talk about the 100 premiums, doing that digitally is so much easier. I still had to produce a premium book of 100 premiums that I had to mail to them. They were paying me for a subscription, so it was worth it, but you can do all that digitally now. Although the people that combine digital with online and offline, the people that combine the fact that I'm going to give you the 100 premiums digitally, and once you buy the product or subscribe, I'm going to send you the print version too. Most digital marketers would say, "Well, that's a waste of money."

**Eric:** Does that apply across all demographics, or is it age specific?

**Brian:** It's better for older audiences, for sure. But I would say that to think that younger audiences don't like physical products is a big mistake that marketers make. I talk about this in Overdeliver where I talk about O to O to O (online to offline to online to offline). The toggling between both.

**Eric:** Right. Which is also a relationship building.

**Brian:** Yeah, exactly. It's like there's still something about holding a book as opposed to looking a PDF or even printing a PDF with a paperclip on it. There was a guy years ago who was the CMO, the chief marketing officer at barnesandnoble.com, and it was all about digital books and eBooks and all of that, and audio books. He did a presentation that I'll never forget, and I even titled a blog post dedicated to him. The title of the blog post was, books are still a perfect product. And he meant hard cover books or soft cover books. It's still a perfect product. It's not applicable to every situation. It's not usable in every situation. It's a perfect product though, because the perfect product to support anything digital.

I've seen digital courses and digital products converted to physical product and offer the physical product in addition to the digital, and the take rate on that for certain types of products, especially to health products for older audiences, the take rate is huge and it's an additional revenue stream to sell the physical product, in addition to the digital. All I'm saying is that it's short-sighted to think that because digital is cheap to deliver, it's cheap to create, that that's the only way to do it and the only way to deliver it. And then I'm also not saying that everything should be physical. But to consider it, I think you can consider it every single time and you certainly can test it. And if it doesn't pay for itself, then don't do it because everything's testable. In direct marketing, that's what direct marketing is, it's measurable advertising. You're not going to get an ROI on it, don't it?

However, the idea of creating physical products from digital product... It's like I did an interview with Joe Polish once, and it was something like everyone's going, "Who's going to do something just on direct mail" the discussion was much better than that. We got into a discussion about physical product and direct mail on the back end of a digital marketing business. We got into the discussion of... if you have a digital marketing business like you're selling courses and you're doing all sorts of stuff and you've sold them all by credit card, you have a postal list. You have a postal list, and postal lists are opt-out, not opt-in. That's the beauty of postal lists. I mean, in direct mail, you can mail somebody until they opt out. In email, they have to opt in before you can mail them. Why people are not using their postal lists for good, as opposed to not using them at all, which means they're using them for evil, it's crazy. It's just crazy to not even consider it.

There are marketers who have considered it and they're doing great with it. I know a digital marketer who sells tennis instruction online and he created a physical product, a playbook that is a playbook for tennis doubles that he ships in the mail, and that the play on it is that the tennis player can have that book in his or her tennis bag when they go to the courts and it has a QR code and they can put the QR code, they can point their phone at it. They can look at it and look at some positioning and use it on the court. That's O to O to O.

**Eric:** Then it's ripe with the opportunity for cross promoting to whoever they're playing with.

**Brian:** Exactly. Exactly. Right. Especially if they beat them by using techniques in the book, right?

**Eric:** Yeah, exactly. I could do another hour of podcast here with you, but they're not that long. We will reluctantly close it down here. I will ask you just a final question, kind of overarching question. Do you have any parting words of advice or wisdom for our audience of online entrepreneurs, something... and actually, I'm going to kind of steer this a little bit. I'm not going to make it as broad. Something that I'm interested in, which you have a unique vantage point answer is, we're always interested in techniques and strategies and the short game of how do I get from here to there to there? But something of your unique experience is, you have this career. There are things that I haven't run into yet or had to run into because it's like planning for retirement. That type of thing. Is there anything from the fact that you have had this long career that you can impart on maybe a younger audience like myself? Only been in business for 15 years, maybe some things there, some words of wisdom.

**Brian:** God, I mean, I think that I could go a lot of different directions with this question. It's still pretty broad for me because 40 years is a long time. The good thing, it's not one-year experience of 40 years. It really is 40 years of cumulative experience, which means that I got so much crap in my brain that I can't even get it out of there all the time, but it's a good problem to have. I would say that it probably ties into a couple of pithy things that I've said. One is, everything's not a revenue event, but everything's a relationship event. And because I couldn't do that as much in direct mail, because everything did have to sell because you're paying postage and printing, the idea that we're not paying postage and printing in today's marketplace gives you an amazing opportunity to just start... build with relationship first.

A lot of people teach this, I'm not the only one, but I have the vantage point of paying postage. And that's why chapter three of my book is titled how paying postage made me a better marketer, because of the discipline that it took before you hit send, because hitting send meant I got to put a million pieces of direct mail packages in the mail. That was hitting send. I had to be perfect or close to perfect. With email, people think they don't have to be perfect because it's just email

**Eric:** You get that oops email five minutes later with the correction.

**Brian:** Good selling technique...

**Eric:** Oh good.

**Brian:** But yeah, you do get... I'm kidding. But yeah, absolutely. You get the oops email and... But it's not just the oops email. It's also the thing where you send out the email and you get no response and you say, "Well, I guess that didn't work, but it's no big deal because it's just an email." However, could it have worked against you? With nobody responding, means that was there a negativity that was put out there in your email that turned off people to your offer or to you? And therefore, the next email that comes in from you might be ignored. Everything is not a revenue event, everything is a relationship event.

The other thing is that I think that the whole point of the melding of offline and online, which is something that is very near and dear to me, not because I'm selling direct mail and offline marketing to everybody, but because having both arrows in your quiver, all these arrows in your quiver just makes you so much more limber and not dependent on any one thing. The idea that the least crowded inbox is the one at the end of your driveway, I use that a lot, because understand that this incredible network called postal mail that can support everything you're doing online.

**Eric:** How do you do lifestyle stuff? Day in and day out for 40 years, doing a job, I mean, you... I know I'm 40, I started when I was 25. I don't have as much energy now to... it's more of like, I have to be more specific about the yes and the nos. When I was younger, 80-hour weeks, whatever. I could do that. But now it's like, "No, I need to be more focused and I need to make choices about what I'm going to do and what I'm not going to do. Stuff like that."

**Brian:** Yeah. I mean, I guess it came down to when I left Boardroom and went out on my own with this business, Titans marketing, I think the thing that I said is, I said, "I'm going to be retired now." Well, retirement has a different meaning to me. Retirement to me is... it's something that Dan Sullivan had taught me also, but I needed to retire from things I don't like to do, retire from things I don't do well, that's important. I could do it, but I'm not going to do it as well as someone else will. Then I want to retire from people I don't want to hang around with anymore. Those three things became almost like a mantra for me.

I would say that on those three criteria, based on that definition of retirement, I'm about 80% retired, which means that I still do some things I don't like to do, fewer and fewer every day, I still do some things that don't do well, but many fewer of those, because if I don't do them well, I just get frustrated. I mean, I always say, I'm not a handy guy in the house, so I have a toolbox, and I opened it up and there's one thing in the toolbox. It's a checkbook. That's the way I think about my business. Dan Sullivan says that if you have a problem, but you can write a check to make it go away, you don't have a problem. That doesn't mean you just write checks willy nilly for every little thing. But I'll tell you, I am always in the back of my mind saying, "How much can I pay reasonably to get this off my plate and done better than I could do it?" I ask that question every day.

**Eric:** That's a more mature problem. It's not something you do in the beginning.

**Brian:** You can't because you got to eat. You got to eat.

**Eric:** And you have to learn. You have to go understand and learn and to experiment and come to an understanding of what you are good at and what you're not good at, and not just be resistant to putting yourself out there and testing yourself and pushing yourself and these things.

**Brian:** That's a really good point because I didn't think of it that way. I was thinking more that you're in your twenties and you can't pay the rent, so you have to be more desperate. That's part of it. But your point is more well taken because it's that you just don't know, you haven't worked long enough to know who you are, what you're good at, what you're not good at, what you like and don't like, and what people you don't like and don't like. I love people. I love human beings. I'll tell you, after 40 years, I can tell you that I have totally written off less than I can count on two hands, people that I've said, "You're out of my life. I can't deal with you anymore," in business. I think that's a function of being in 100/0 all the time, being in an overdelivery mindset. It gets me caught up with people that I probably should not be hanging out with, that I've given the benefit of the doubt too much.

And sometimes that could be a real burden, but I think the burden of keep on having to figure out who I've written off already is worse. The idea that I can safely say that I've written off less than 10 people in 40 years, and believe me, to get written off in my world, you'd have to do something pretty screwed up. It's not even 10, it's probably like five. If I told you the five people I've written off in my life, you'd say, "Why didn't you murder them," basically, but I'm not into that. That's the upshot of being in that mindset.

But again, just like too much overdelivery has a downside, too much acceptance of everybody has its downside. But I'll take that versus not enough tolerance for people and underdelivering to everybody.

**Eric:** Well, if you look at the kind of wisdom traditions, including samurai and any sort of martial art, in the more advanced stages, it's always about the balance between two opposites. If you're on one spectrum all the way versus the other, whether you consider this one bad and that one good, whether you're full good or full bad, it's still ultimately, is imbalance which leads to imbalance.

**Brian:** Right. I guess I'd rather be more imbalanced on over delivery and tolerance than under delivery and no tolerance, I guess.

**Eric:** That makes a lot of sense. The proof of the result of that is in the pudding of what your career has been. People can make their own determination in terms of what they-

**Brian:** Yeah. Maybe they wouldn't want my career in a million years, they'd say, "I don't want to do what he does. I'll do the opposite." And that's fine.

**Eric:** Hey, actually, one more quick thing, because I'm really intrigued about this. The umpire situation. Tell me about this.

**Brian:** Yeah. In the United States literally goes up to 12 years old, those are 60-foot bases as opposed to 90 foot bases. The skill is two thirds of the size. At 12 years old, you're in the little league, on the small field. You turn 13, you go on to the big field. I was a pretty good capture in little league until I was 12. I could catch the ball. I can throw it to second base, throw out

runners. I was a happy catcher. And I was fat, so I could block balls. I was slow, but it wasn't a long baseline, so I could get down to first base. It was a perfect sport for me. Little league baseball was a perfect sport for me up until 12 years old.

I turned 13, I went on to the big field. I said, "I can catch the ball still. I'm still a good catcher. I can't reach second base with my throws. I hit a ball that was a home run in little league, and I can't even get to first base to get a single, baseball is not for me." But I love the game. I love baseball. That's when I said, "I want to stay in the game, so I'm going to become an umpire." I became an umpire at age 14 or 15. I ended up being the umpire in chief of my little league growing up when I was 17 years old because I just was obsessed with it. I didn't even realize why I was obsessed with it until years later. But I was obsessed... part of it was the power, I guess.

Now I teach the kids that I train that it can't be about the power. But it was about the power. It was about that I was 17 years old and I'm telling 50-year-old coaches where they can go if they argue with me. It was part of that. But it was also being like an ombudsman. It was like creating order out of chaos, which was really appealing to me, for some reason. Then I go to college, I get home from college, I start on umpiring softball when I'm living on my own in Brooklyn. I get married. But all this time I'm umpiring in between. Then I get to the point where... I get good. I mean, I'm doing varsity, high school umpiring. That's what I do now. I do tournament little league. I've been to three Eastern regionals for little league. I've been to a world series. I'm a serious umpire.

In fact, I thought about when I graduated college that I would go to umpire school and become a professional umpire. I realized that would not be a great life, and I wouldn't have the life I have if I did that. I had to incorporate it umpiring into my life as a direct marketer. But the interesting thing, years later, and this is only maybe 10 years ago, I'm sitting at a conference, somebody asked me about the umpiring thing because somebody knew about it, I'm always with friends. A friend asked me, he goes, "Why would you ever want to umpire? Why would anybody want to do that?" I thought about it and I realized... this is after being in the business world for 25 years or so, maybe even 30 years, and I said, "I guess it's twofold. One is that umpiring for me is like yoga for somebody else or meditation or something. It's an area in your life where you have to get complete focus. You have to block everything else out."

The difference was that if I don't block it out and I'm calling 300 pitches, balls and strikes, and I miss one, people are going to yell at me. You don't want to get yelled at for bad meditation or a bad trial pose.

**Eric:** Unless you're in a Buddhist monastery and the guy's got a bamboo stick.

**Brian:** Exactly. Exactly. And that appeals to me because it's like I have to be so focused. I used to go out from work, I leave the three o'clock in the afternoon to go to a high school game. I had to block out the whole day and then get behind the play and call 200 to 300, pitches balls and

strikes, and get them all right, or as right as possible. That appealed to me, the focus, the re-focus, and everybody has that in their life. That was part of it.

The second piece was so much more. It was an aha moment. When I realized that it's not only making order out of chaos, but it's actually doing something at a very high level that is necessary for the game to be played, and yet if you're noticed, or if you're the center of attention, you're a loser. Then I equated it to customer service and fulfillment, and then I wrote a blog post about it. I equated the telephone operator or the customer service person to an umpire, that the best thing you get if you umpire a good game is nice game up, good job back there. The fulfillment manager or the customer service rep on the phone, the only time we hear about them is when they screw something up.

Then I went into a whole chapter in Overdeliver about it. In fact, I start with the umpiring story, and then I go into the fact that rewarding customer service and fulfillment people, even with commissions for saving orders or for saving customers, whatever you need to do to compensate them, to acknowledge them, to make them feel as important as the sales person. I got into a whole thing about that. It's actually elevated the whole umpiring thing from when I started, when I was 15 years old to today, the journey has taken me into a whole realm of umpiring is so critical as customer service and fulfillment is. It's given me a lot to write about, it's given me a lot to think about, it's given me a lot to share with companies that don't take customer service and fulfillment as in anyhow part of the business, which is the biggest mistake you can make.

It ties into what you do. It's not just getting members and keeping members. You keep members through service and fulfilling them with great material and great content in addition to having a good service. You have to continue to do it. And when they're unhappy, you have to make them happy.

**Eric:** Right. My hobby, I've been composing music since I was 14, and I've been mostly interested in film composing. And it's the same thing. You do a good job as a composer of film music if you support the scene, but you're not noticed. If somebody's watching the scene and they're like, "Oh, that's a great tune it," depending on the scene, but you've failed as a composer because you're calling attention to yourself. I understand that distinction.

**Brian:** Yeah, no one comes to a movie to find out who wrote the score and no one-

**Eric:** I do.

**Brian:** Yeah, you do. And no one goes to a baseball game to see the umpire, I do.

**Eric:** But you do.

**Brian:** I watch their positioning. You go to a baseball game with me, I'm watching the umpires.

**Eric:** That's awesome. Well, Brian, it's been really great talking to you. I really appreciate you taking the time, and we went a little over, so I appreciate you hanging in there with me.

**Brian:** Thank you for tolerating me.

**Eric:** No, no, it's been great. Thank you so much, Brian. Appreciate it.

**Brian:** Oh, thanks, Eric.

## **OUTRO:**

Thank you so much for listening to my entire conversation with Brian.

I hope you enjoyed learning from him as much as I did.

And in case you found yourself scrambling to write down all his bits of wisdom and advice, I have some good news for you.

We took all of Brian's most standout advice and quote-worthy moments and compiled them into a cool downloadable graphic for you.

To get it, all you need to do is go to [SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/170](https://SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/170).

There you'll also find the show notes and a full transcript of our conversation.

Many thanks to Brian for coming on the show today and sharing so freely from his decades of wisdom and experience.

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Thanks for being here and we'll see you next time.