



*Michael Senoff's*

**HardToFind Seminars.com**

**Expert Interviews On Mind Body & Spirit**

# *University*

**INTERVIEW SERIES**

**How To Use The Power Of Your  
Own Curiosity To Teach Your Brain  
To Be Successful**

**An Interview With Todd Kashdan**



*Michael Senoff's*

**HardToFind Seminars.com**

**Expert Interviews On Mind Body & Spirit**

Dear Student,

I'm Michael Senoff, founder and CEO of [HardToFindSeminars.com](http://HardToFindSeminars.com).

For the last five years, I've interviewed the world's best business and marketing minds.

And along the way, I've created a successful home-based publishing business all from my two-car garage.

When my first child was born, he was very sick, and it was then that I knew I had to have a business that I could operate from home.

Now, my challenge is to build the world's largest resource for online, downloadable audio business interviews.

I knew that I needed a site that contained strategies, solutions, and inside information to help you operate more efficiently

I've learned a lot in the last five years, and today I'm going to show you the skills that you need to survive.

It is my mission, to assist those that are very busy with their careers

And to really make my site different from every other audio content site on the web, I have decided to give you access to this information in a downloadable format.

Now, let's get going.

Michael Senoff

*Michael Senoff*

Founder & CEO: [www.hardtfindseminars.com](http://www.hardtfindseminars.com)

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## How To Use The Power Of Your Own Curiosity To Teach Your Brain To Be Successful

Anxiety is normal. If someone or something makes us intimidated, we get clammy hands and racing hearts. It's completely natural, and not a bad response. But success can only come when you stop making the decision to avoid situations where you feel uncomfortable, and decide to open up to them instead.

And that's where curiosity comes in. According to Todd Kashdan, psychology professor and author of *Curious? Discover the Missing Ingredient To A Fulfilling Life*, you can use curiosity as a way to counter anxiety so you can become the person you were meant to be. And in this audio, you'll hear how to do that.

### You'll Also Hear...

- Exactly why people today are at a higher risk for anxiety and depression – and how to prevent it in yourself
- The secret to becoming a happier and more fulfilled person just by being mindfully aware of the people and situations around you
- Why you really need to schedule “psychological checkups” for yourself in order to be successful, and the one easy way to do that
- Sneaky psychological tactics that will help you use curiosity to discover your passion, foundation, and profile in life
- Why it's so important to be disciplined about where your attention goes – especially in this age when we can never really “turn off” technology – and ways to do that

When people like Steve Jobs or Steven Spielberg talk about the road they took to success, they usually don't mention classrooms or textbooks. They talk about the curiosity, discovery and experiences in life.

We're allowed to challenge our brains and our beliefs along the way because success starts from within. And in this audio, you'll hear the proven strategies that work to help you use your own curiosity as a stepping-stone to that success.

Hi, this is Chris Costello, and I've teamed up with Michael Senoff to bring you the world's best health related interviews. So, if you know anyone struggling with their weight, with cancer, diabetes, ADHD, autism, heart disease, or other health issues, send them over to Michael Senoff's [HardToFindSeminars.com](http://www.HardToFindSeminars.com).

Chris: So Todd, great to have you with us this morning.

Todd: Thanks for having me.

Chris: What is going on in our society?

Todd: There's no one answer but we're definitely seeing a trend. It's called a cohort trend which is we're seeing an increase in the number of people who have body problems and depression, from each generation to the next. So it gives us an idea to think about, what's changed over the course of time? There's a few things that are pretty obvious.

One is we have these hard wired old brains that were designed for us to live in the Sahara Desert and the few people we have to associate with in our caves, to stick with the group because we can't attack a woolly mammoth or a saber tooth tiger by ourselves. And now it's such a high density of people in such small spaces that we're having to read so many cues of so many people. And our brains are so attuned to being accepted and belonging to a group and not being rejected, that we've got far too much stimuli that's coming at us. And so it's very easy to imagine that our brains are sort of whirling around too quickly. And it's easy to get anxious and start worrying about the future and really ruminating about all the things that we do and might have done wrong.

For the first 10 or 15 years that email became popular, there was this idea that this would make people less socially skilled, they'll be less adept at having intimate relationships and we would see increased divorce rates and parentless children. The more recent research is showing that it actually has the exact opposite effect. A lot of these mediums are actually enhancing people's social skills and improving their intimacy, as opposed to getting in the way of improving social skills.

The one problem that does make people more anxious, and this is pretty clear, is because we're always wired in with our iPhones and our cell phones, we're never really off task. And so the real lack of balance between the boundaries between work and play and family and all these different areas of our life that we care about, everything bleeds into each other and there's too much information for us to hold on to.

What's important is that we believe that there are people that are going to care about us if we have something positive that happens in our lives. So you publish a book, you have the baby, you get a pay raise, you have an amazing piece of chocolate truffle you've never tried before, the fact that someone's actually going to listen and care about that story and that someone will be there for you during those difficult spells when you're not funny, you're not entertaining and you really don't feel comfortable in your own skin.

The important thing is not how many people you have or the proximity, it's the belief that you have those people there that would support you and would listen to your stories. Twitter might be one of the most in terms of creating a feeling of belonging, and that's because the sheer number of people that ignore anything important you have to say is unlike any other medium that we've seen in technology. I was hitting sort of one dimension, which is the kind of feeling like you're connected to other people.

But if you want to satisfy your desire for novelty, to really gossip and be a peeping tom and get into people's worlds, your greatest resource that you have at your disposal is your time and energy. The problem is that most people don't spend it that wisely because they don't realize that it's so limited in terms of whatever we attend to becomes our personality, becomes the meaning in our lives. Most of us don't think of it as a currency that we use.

And so when you collect thousands of people that you follow on Twitter and thousands of people that you email. As opposed to focusing what you just described, I'm interested in what Larry King is doing right now. It's very laser focused attention. That's a really wise use of your currency that you really have.

Chris: I really see a lot of people now spending a lot of time on the computer and not really connecting in their communities. I'm just wondering; is that partly why we're feeling this isolation, these anxieties that a lot of people are struggling with?

Todd: I'm not sure I would blame it on curiosity for people's anime and loneliness, but you bring up a really good point which is you have to be as disciplined with your attention as you would in terms of dieting or trying to add muscle to your body. It's just something you have to practice on on a regular basis.

The idea of being open and curious, taking off our blinders and our expectations and our worries and looking at things that really are in the



present, this is an effort-ful endeavor. But the more we practice the more we become used to using this mindset. We start to realize how much beauty and intrigue is around us. What you bring up is a good point though, which is most moments of being curious add nothing to our well being.

For me, I used to be a massive [INAUDIBLE 0:04:53]. I'd love to find little nuggets of information about him. It would not add an iota to my well being. It was a nice, positive splurge, just like having a chocolate bar on my commute home from work. And if I find a UPS package sitting by my doorstep when I get home, of course I'm curious what's in there until I get closer and realize it's the Amazon books that I purchased last week.

And so it disappears immediately and adds nothing to my well being. So it's really about discovering what are your passions, your interests, your values and that's where you invest your attention in, that's where you're going to get the reservoir of pleasure and meaning that's going to have that stickiness to it.

Chris: Now, in your book *Curious* you've written basically that being curious is a book about living a life that matters. Now why is being curious an essential ingredient in a fulfilling life?

Todd: One thing is we have to explore and discover things and learn about ourselves. I was just mentioning sort of what we're passionate about, what our values are. If you were to ask someone just yes or no, do you know what you value? People will most often say yes. But if you ask for details you find that people really don't have an inkling of what's the foundation if everything was taken away from them and they had to rebuild from start. Think of the survivor games.

What would be the foundation that you make your decisions on what you devote yourself to? Is your community important to you? Is your family important to you? Is achievement important to you? Is leaving a lasting significant contribution to the world after to you - is that important to you? Discovering the truths of the universe and trying to get your hand on some of the mysteries there? These are a lot of different values. We can't invest in all of them equally. We all have our different profile. So discovering these things, discovering what our strengths are, how to use them, how can I figure out ways to apply them into my everyday life?

Just to give a personal example, one of my personal strengths happens to be authenticity. I'm very playful. I use profanity all the time. I use sex and drug analogies all the time in the classroom. I realized

that I'm not going to try and be whatever a so-called professor is supposed to sound like. My objective and my value is to teach the children that I work with how to be flexible, creative, innovative thinkers. That usually means disagreeing with what I have to say and challenging me on a regular basis.

There's a lot of tension that comes there. But I realize that that's me. I like that playfulness. I like these violent arguments we have in the classroom and I have no problems when these hot button issues are raised. But if the dean or the president of George Mason University was to sit in my classroom and hear me cursing in my classroom, I'd probably lose tenure. But you know what? I have a feeling that those kinds learned a lot more because there are no really clear boundaries of what you should do, but what's the best way of helping you learn? I try to teach them from the get-go, just because I'm a so-called expert doesn't mean I know anything.

You should be questioning punk rock ethos. Question authority, question your parents, question everything. One of the things about this book - I spent ten years studying this topic. I wanted to make sure every suggestion was backed by scientific research as opposed to my own personal opinions or another book by a motivational guru, motivational speaker or some spiritual leader.

What I find is I'm not against profession monks. Actually I'm a big fan of them. But I'm always amazed when the Dalai Lama is on Larry King or some other show and someone calls in to ask them for relationship advice on their love life. I think to myself, "These are people that are celibate, that decided to master consciousness. So they don't have to worry about sex and picking up people in bars and figuring out all the conflicts and fighting, and should we cuddle afterwards or not." From their point of view and their limited observation, why would you trust them over your neighbor?

Part of it is trial and error. It's one way of learning. This is an important process of discovering what are the things that I care about. What I mentioned in that blog is when you bring two groups that have different values - well, look at Obama. Obama's a great example right now. I'm a libertarian so I can speak of politics comfortably and no one has to yell at me. When he shook Chavez's hand or he's talking to the President of Iran, 50% of the U.S. goes irate and gets really upset and says, "How could you do that without them telling you in advance that they're going to agree to five to seven principles in stone ahead of time?"



What their research shows is his best approach, if the goal is to get the best negotiation for both parties, the best possible outcome, what he's doing is instead of judging them ahead of time - this is hard to do with some of these people. He's being open and receptive. All he's doing is collecting information. He's not judging. He's collecting information, doing some research ahead of time. There's probably some 15 year old intern doing the research about what their values are, what their beliefs are, and then asking them about, "Why is it that you hold this belief? Why is it that you feel this way?"

From there, when you ask the clarifying question without any judgment about that, just to get information, what happens is that the other party views you as more warm, more open and they're more willing to negotiate with you. This research has been done with people who are pro-abortion, anti-abortion, staunch conservatives and staunch liberals. They've done this at the laboratory and they've done this out in the streets. They find that just asking one single question without judgment - when you ask questions it doesn't mean that I'm automatically going to agree with what you say. All I'm doing is collecting information.

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Chris: So in your book *Curious*, you also talk about the anxious mind and the curious spirit. What is that?

Todd: What it comes down to is we're hard wired to be curious and we're hard wired to be anxious. Our brains don't really care if we have a meaningful, happy existence. All they care about is that we survive and that we sleep with as many people as possible to pass on our genes. What we do with a lot of our lives is we're modifying our neurons and the synaptic connections in our brain so it can work with us towards things that we care about that don't have to do with survival and passing on our genes.

So anxiety is completely normal. This is just a completely normal reaction to threats, challenging situations and we're being put in scenarios that are just manageable, just outside of the skills that we have and the knowledge that we have. So the conflict that we face on a regular basis is I walk out of my workplace right now and see my twin two year olds. They're both playing with a bunch of insects. Right now they're in this massive phase of dropping them in their shirts because they like the tapering sensation. I'm always worried about where those insects have been and what bacteria is on them. So I sort of have this mixed reaction.

Part of me is a little bit anxious and maybe they shouldn't be shoving them in every orifice that they have. Part of me is a little bit intrigued by their intrigue. They're just getting the texture and the feel and they're learning to discriminate the difference between a caterpillar and a ladybug and a cicada. So this is the conflict we face is do I go out and take out all these insects and get them off them as soon as possible or do I allow them to enjoy this experiencing process where they're actually learning a great deal very quickly?

This happens all the time. When we meet people, if someone intimidates us do we avoid or do we act on our intrigue and try to learn a little bit about them? How we decide to act on those decisions, do we approach or do we avoid, determines whether we have an opportunity to grow or learn, or whether we withdraw into our shells. So anxiety and curiosity are the see-saw that really determines most of our existence.

Chris: But how do they transform that to curiosity?

Todd: Well, there's a lot of techniques. Nothing works better than exposure, in terms of graduated exposure, in terms of dealing with anxiety. This is an ancient Chinese calling of going to the heart of fire. There and only there you'll find safety. We have to sort of expose ourselves to experiences because they're in territory that we care about. So the anomaly is the person that loves giving public presentations to 500 people. Most of us have a little bit of public speaking anxiety. The reason that we potentially do it is because our job depends on it or this can really be a nice way for me to launch some ideas that I care about.

This is my creative product here that I'm sort of advertising for. So we discover what our passions are and with our without this anxiety. The anxiety comes because we care so much about what we're doing. And so just by actually acting on what we care about, over time our brain starts to change. The neuro wiring starts to change. We start to realize that it's not so bad when our heart starts to race. It's not so bad when our hands get a little bit clammy.

We think people notice and focus all their attention on our anxiety. We think that other people see what we're saying to ourselves in our head. So we're saying to ourselves, "Oh my God, there's sweat beating on my forehead and my legs are shaking. My hands are sticking onto my side. I'm holding onto my glass so tightly." We think that other people see what we're telling to ourselves. The fact is that they may see a little bit, but not close to what it is when we're talking to ourselves.

Chris: I see.

Todd: So by exposing people to these scenarios and trying to develop an openness to the naturalness of being anxious. When I was living in New York City, when I worked with people who had social anxiety difficulties because I'm also a clinical psychologist. One of the things that I would do is we would go on the subway and I would say, "What I want you to do is every time before the next stop comes I want you to yell what the next stop is going to be." This would be a busy subway. If you're from New York City and if any listeners are, they know what I'm talking about. It's a pretty embarrassing thing to do.

I'd ask them what they think was going to happen and they say, "People are going to throw things at me. I'm going to be mugged. They're going to hate me." I'd just sit way into the background and I'd do it first to show them that they could do this. So what happened? At the first two or three stops everyone looks at them. What are they doing? What's happening here? Are they going to ask for money? By the fourth stop what happens is people start asking them what the next stop is. All of a sudden it becomes a source of information.

Just like you said, people become not only compassionate. They actually appreciate information. It's just a lesson of this spotlight effect. We think the spotlight is always on us but what we forget is our brain is talking to ourselves. The thoughts that we have of, "I have nothing to say, I'm not that funny, things are hopeless," we forget that my brain is having that thought and that doesn't mean that thought is a true representation of what my life actually is. We're allowed to challenge our brain just as if we're allowed to challenge anybody that we talk to.

I will be perfectly honest telling you that I am not that knowledgeable about dietary issues. I do know that a lot of dietary treatments for psychological difficulties end up showing no effectiveness when you go into the actual research. There's actually just not that much research that's published in peer review journals that actually have the quality control to show that some of these methods work. The question I always ask is what's the evidence? If it's just that you've seen a couple of clients where you've seen effectiveness, that's not enough for me because I've seen every single possible combination of things happen with one person in my life.

One thing to be very wary of, at least this is a mantra for me and I think for everyone, is be wary of small numbers. That's that everybody has a story of something worked for somebody. And the other thing is there's the placebo effect. ADHD is either this epidemic or it's a social nightmare of the idea that so many children are being diagnosed. It's a

little bit of both. And so people are trying all sorts of treatments - leafy diets, focusing on Omega-3 acids.

These nutrition based treatments have no effectiveness whatsoever. But there's a placebo effect. Parents want their children to be better with such vigor, and their motivations are clear that they will start to see things. There are tiny changes that no child with any mental disorder doesn't have moments where they're actually in good spirits, have positive things, are effective, productive and creative.

And so when any treatment goes into orbit people start to focus on those moments. This is kind of what the placebo effect is all about. Randomized controlled trials where we have half of the children or adults that are on these leafy diets or supplements and then half of them have placebos, which are pills that are inactive. You might as well be sucking on some candy. The doctors don't know who's in which condition and the clients don't know who's in which condition.

So you have these nice, randomized clinical trials and you find that the active treatment taking the nutritional supplements with the leafy vegetables has no more effect than the sugar pill.

Chris: You also talk about the strength of curiosity. What do you mean, Todd, by the strength of curiosity?

Todd: Strength can be defined as a capacity that leads to the fulfillment that we care about in life. When we look at well being as more than just happiness - I look at it as series of dimensions. There's happiness, there's wisdom, there's emotional maturity, there's feeling confident, there's achievement, there's feeling autonomous as I'm the author of my own life and I'm not controlled by other people. Being spiritual, feeling at home in the universe. That's my definition of spirituality. A sense of love and compassion for other people, compassion for yourself.

When you look at all these different dimensions and you find out which strengths are the most consistently and strongly related to all of them, none of them - generosity, forgiveness, being a good moral person, being a religious person, emotional intelligence, courage, hope - none of them are strongly related to those dimensions of well being and curiosity and gratitude. We think one of the reasons why you see these effects is because not that curiosity is the only ingredient to a fulfilling life, but it energizes other things.

So, for example, take gratitude. This is a profound impact on well being. People feeling good about themselves and strengthening

relationships being mindfully aware that other people are providing benefits that are helping me with my own life. But to get there you have to actually be openly exploring, first of all what benefits have I received in my life. And what ones aren't due to me and my own actions. That's a whole process of being curious and exploring right there. It's part of the process of being grateful, is exploring of who are my benefactors, who's been there for me.

This is one of the exercises that I give to my students every year. I've been teaching for ten years this class on the dream class, The Science of Well Being. I have them go out and find someone in their lives that they've never properly thanked in their early childhood and adolescence and then write a letter and then read to them.

For many of them, it's been this really profound experience of here's someone who wouldn't have been in life where they are now if it wasn't for this person. And they never thanked them because usually, as every parent knows, their children don't really appreciate them until they get married. All of a sudden they recognize everything they sacrificed for them.

But wouldn't it be wonderful if they had these little moments where, almost like you have a bar mitzvah in the Jewish faith, where you have to show your gratitude to your parents. They have this proclamation, this ceremonial thing. The idea that we can implement these things in our daily lives; we can have psychological annual checkups just like we have physical checkups.

There are ways of enhancing our well being. Part of this process is really being profoundly aware of what's going on in your world - past, present, future. And then really probing. This is how you get all the juices and benefits from them.

*For more interviews on health, mind, body and spirit go to Michael Senoff's [HardToFindSeminars.com](http://www.HardToFindSeminars.com).*

Chris: How do people slow down enough to do that? We just go at such a fast pace.

Todd: Well, the beauty of a lot of these things that I talk about is that they're really simple. We make time for doctor's appointments. When we have a dental appointment we make it. When we have a work meeting we make it. When I have to pick up my kids from daycare I'm there. When I have to go to the bathroom, I make sure that I go to the bathroom.

Schedule in, just like anything else, time to focus on our psychological well being. We don't do this. We don't put this into our schedule. In my Gmail calendar I have specific times, deliberate practices of being mindful built into there to remind me. I've got it on my iPhone as well. I'd love for someone to make an iPhone application about that word. We just have to actually have regular, deliberate practice of training ourselves to be attentive.

You know, the thing is that feeling curious is not what leads to a happy, meaningful life. It's when you act on it. It's the act of I'm going to explore, I'm going to discover, I'm going to grow. I know that I'm not done evolving. There's some really interesting work which is that when people believe intelligence is a fixed thing, so we've got this genetic baggage. I'm 18 years old, I'm 30 years old, I'm done. I've got this analytic intelligence and either I can go to Brown University or a community college or I don't have what it takes to really educate myself.

If you believe that it ends up being a self-fulfilling prophecy. And if you believe the truth that our personality and our intelligence is a moving target and still evolving, when we seek out new things and new challenges, new nerve cells are growing in our brain. New connections are being made as our brain is trying to understand and make patterns. Our intelligence is always changing. If you believe that, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So it's really important to know that brain science is now showing that our personality can still change into our 60s, 70s and 80s. Why this is important is because we're going to be living a lot longer than our parents or grandparents. But who cares if we're living longer if we're sitting there stuck as the curmudgeon neighbor who stole your kickball when it went over their fence, and was racist and sexist and stuck in their ways. And you have some 25 year old home health aide who has to clean you on a daily basis.

I don't want to just live longer. I want to live a healthy, satisfying life during my older years. I had this moment last spring where I saw this couple. They were at a pond and they were reading the paper next to each other. I was telling it to my class and I changed my impression. I thought it was so beautiful that they could be content, enjoying this experience without having to say anything. Together. Who knows what they were talking about afterwards once they both got a different perspective after reading the paper? I don't know because I didn't get the ending to the story. All of a sudden I became a lot more appreciative.



First I was really judgmental and saying, "I don't want to be that way." Then I changed my mind and said, "You know what? I think I do want to be that way as I get older." Imagine our school system, that's how we've taught our system and we were trained to learn information. Instead of taking history classes where you're supposed to memorize facts and have these standardized achievement tests which has been this No Child Left Behind thing. The biggest nightmare of it - I don't want to get into the issues too much - is the standardized testing.

We don't want children to learn facts. They'll always have books on their bookshelves. We want them to be flexible, innovative thinkers. So instead of teaching kids about the Manhattan Project and that Robert Oppenheimer was involved in creating the atomic bomb, the better question is from whose perspective would it be a good thing, the Manhattan Project. And from whose perspective would it be a bad thing? Have them get into groups and to think about this. There is no answer. It's just to remember that things change depending on the perspective and the content that you're looking at it.

Think about music. All music sounds the same until it's not the same. All of a sudden a band comes out, like Nirvana, and creates this grungy sound with this distortion in the background. Everybody sounds like Nirvana. This happens over and over again. When the Beatles came out and when The Who came out, to be reminded that with context and perspective, things always change.

I'm very appreciative when people like Steven Spielberg and Bill Gates and Steve Jobs; they talked about how they got to where they were. They provide lessons of that it wasn't in the classroom. It was in the garage. It was playing stickball. It was digging huge holes in their backyard to see how many species of insects and animals live in there and who's going to go into that hole at nighttime versus the daytime, of what they're going to find in there. These are the stories. These are not the stories of them reading textbooks about physics and computer science.

We forget that unfettered play and unstructured play, where children have to make the rules themselves and discover how to develop leadership roles and how to be compassionate to people that are doing a little worse and doing a little better and bring everyone up, you can't teach that with structure. You have to let them sort of experiment through trial and error.

They're going to make a lot of mistakes. That's when there's a nice opportunity to give a little bit of correctives. I'm not there yet because my kids are only two, but I really bemoan the idea of shoveling my kids

from one structured ballet, to the Ultimate Fighting Challenge, to wrestling, to football, to lacrosse. I want them to just go into the street and make up some games with the kids and then tell me what it is that they invented when they come home.

It's disappointing that in 2009 no one had written a book on curiosity. The thing is that we all think we know everything about this because we know what it's like when something new happens. We know what it's like to have a movie trailer come on before we see our movie and then, "Oh my God, I've got to see that when it comes out this summer."

We know what it feels like but what we forget is we don't have to passively wait for something to fall into our lap that's interesting. We can wield this and we can reclaim this as a strength that we can use at any time we want to and modify things, and change our mindset. We come home from work and look at our romantic partner, our children, our roommates and say, "I'm going to look for something that's different about them."

That tiny bit of change in what I'm focusing on changes the dynamics of the relationship. I'm not looking for the same patterns. I'm not looking to not tell them a story that happened at work because I already know in advance in my head that they're not going to be interested. Test it out. Explore things. Look at things from different perspectives.

Most of the time we have our eyes off of the prize. We focus in schools on intelligence. We focus in college on getting high salaried, secure jobs. In relationships we're looking for security. These are all good things, but if the goal is fulfillment and growing as a person, meaning in life, these things don't really add that much. All they do is provide an early foundation, that's it.

Chris: So, Todd, can you give people your website address? I know a lot of people that are listening today would love to find out more about you and what you're doing. You've got a great blog and you are very inspirational as far as getting people to think about reducing anxiety and leveling up-leveling the curiosity.

Todd: It's my name - [ToddKashdan.com](http://ToddKashdan.com). So if you can't remember it you can just Google my last name. So it's Kashdan, K-A-S-H-D-A-N. And my first name, Todd, T-O-D-D. So just [ToddKashdan.com](http://ToddKashdan.com).

That's the end of our interview and I hope you've enjoyed it. For more great health related interviews, go to Michael Senoff's [HardToFindSeminars.com](http://HardToFindSeminars.com).