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TURN WEAKNESS INTO STRENGTH

“You can play a shoestring if you’re sincere.” John Coltrane (iconic jazz saxophonist)

Trust is an important element of persuasion. Most people come to the negotiating table prepared to discuss the strengths of their position, and try to hide their weaknesses, even when those faults may be generally known. However, arguing against your self-interest, by admitting a small weakness in your argument (or product or business), creates the perception that you and the organization you represent are honest and trustworthy.

Social psychologist Kip Williams and her colleagues discovered that when jurors heard a lawyer mention a weakness in his own case before the opposing attorney brought it up, jurors evaluated him as more trustworthy and were more favorable to his overall case in their verdicts because of that perceived honesty.

Another study had the same results for an expert witness testifying for the plaintiff in a civil trial. When the plaintiff’s witness volunteered the weakness in his testimony and then explained why the weakness wasn’t especially important, verdicts were more likely to be in favor of the plaintiff (65 percent) than when the defense attorney was the one to first bring up the issue (43 percent).

This tactic can apply to mediation as well. During negotiations, if there is a small component of weakness in your leverage, mention it up front, instead of having it discovered later. The other side is likely to see you as more trustworthy. This can make your strong points even more persuasive, and possibly turn your "shoestring" of weakness into a winning point.