



Making Others Aware of Your Weaknesses Can Make You More Trusted

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago I was on vacation with my wife in Paris and was trying on shoes and found a pair of dress shoes that I really liked a lot. I had never seen a pair of shoes like this before and they were extremely comfortable. After trying them on and walking around the store in them, I told the salesman that I would take them.

"You would be an idiot to buy them here," he told me. "The shoes are made in the United States and there is a duty charged on them, taxes are charged here and they are way more expensive here than back home. Let's look on the computer. I bet you can save over \$200 if you buy them online from a store in America."

To my astonishment, the man logged into a computer and did a few searches and showed me that if I bought them online I could save hundreds of dollars on the shoes. I was very happy that he had made me aware of this and, of course, I did not purchase the shoes. Instead, I browsed around the store and ended up purchasing something else that was unique and I could not have found back home.

I have often thought about this incident because the salesman had prevented me from buying something because it was not in my best interest. When you think about this sort of approach to selling, it is incredibly rare. The man had already sold me the shoes (I was ready to buy) and yet he made sure I understood that purchasing the shoes was not in my best interest. Since that time I have shopped in countless stores and do not remember the people I have done business with. I remember this man, however and I trust the store I was in. I will go back there when I am in Paris again.

When I used to be a legal recruiter on a full time basis, I was extremely selective about the people I would work with. I was also very upfront in telling certain people I could not work with them because their qualifications were such that they did not match what the market was demanding and looking for at the time. I would tell people:

"Look, I would help you if I could. But my involvement is going to make it harder for you to get a job because there are so many people like you out there with similar qualifications. You are better off applying to employers on your own."

The more I told people I could not work with them, the more people seemed to trust me. They knew that if I worked with them, I was doing so because I believed I could help them. People trusted me. I was looking out for their best interests.

The best businesses out there are transparent and are looking out for their clients' interests. When you go to Amazon.com and do a search, Amazon will show you things that it is selling as well as the same thing that other vendors are selling at what is often a cheaper price. Amazon is happy to show you competing prices and in the process of showing you that you have other options (that may be cheaper) the site is able to earn your trust. I shop at the site because I know they will most often be giving me the best deal possible and will show me the best prices out there even if they do not benefit them.

One of the greatest and most successful advertising campaigns of all time came when the first Volkswagen Beetle was introduced to the United States. At the time the Beetle was introduced, American manufacturers were doing well, turning out giant, gas guzzling automobiles that were visually exciting (with fins and so forth). Gasoline was also very cheap at the time and there was not really a very good case to be made for purchasing a small foreign, vehicle.

Charged with the seemingly insurmountable task of selling their case in the United States, Volkswagen's advertising agency did not promote the vehicle's strengths. For example, they could have pointed out that the car was inexpensive, was well built and had good gas mileage—but they did not. Instead, the agency decided to highlight the fact that the cars were ugly: "Ugly is only skin deep" their magazine advertisements declared. These "negative campaigns" actually ended up helping the vehicle get a strong foothold in the country.

When you mention the drawbacks of something—regardless of what it is—the people you are speaking to cannot help but reach the conclusion that you are to be trusted. The reason this is such a powerful and persuasive technique is because when you make yourself trusted by someone they are much more likely to believe you when you start talking about your true strengths.

In the recruiting realm, pointing out your candidate's weaknesses can often be a very useful method in getting people to notice them. I have been amazed in the past where there were negative aspects of a candidate's background such as firings and other issues that I needed to reveal to a law firm about a candidate. Despite all of the negative stuff that was in the candidate's background, I have seen incidents where they got hired instead of an attorney with nothing negative in their background. It was as if addressing the negatives in the background enabled me to get attention to the positives that never would have been there in the first place.

What does all of this mean to your career and life? My opinion is that all of us are aware of our weaknesses no matter how much we may try and hide them. Our lack of certain skills and abilities simply cannot be covered up no matter how hard we try. When you are going into interviews with employers, negotiating promotions and so forth, it can be extremely useful to sometimes bring out and address your weaknesses before you talk about your strengths. People are more likely to pay attention to your strengths if you have also made people aware of your weaknesses. You will have more credibility.

In making people aware of your weaknesses it is exceptionally important that you are careful about which ones you make them aware of. Despite how long ago it was, I can still remember the debate that occurred between Walter Mondale and President Ronald Reagan in 1984. At the time many people were discussing the fact that Reagan was very old and might be too old for another term. In the debate Reagan agreed that he was very old but added the caveat: "I will not make age an issue in this campaign. I am not going to exploit for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience."

Reagan used a very effective method to address his age-related weakness. He acknowledged his weakness in a way that was also his strength. You should seek to address your weaknesses in a similar way in your interviews and in negotiations

—making your weakness appear to be complementary to your strengths. You need to make sure that when you address weaknesses you are following these up with complementary strengths.

In your career you need to remember to always address your weaknesses and attempt to offset them with strengths that are complementary when they become an issue. You want to be trusted and you want your weaknesses to be overlooked.

THE LESSON

Address your weaknesses, and offset them complementary strengths when they become an issue. You want to be trusted and your weaknesses to be overlooked. When interviewing, you must bring up and address your weaknesses to your employers before bringing up your strengths. Employers are more likely to pay attention to your strengths if they have already been made aware of your weaknesses, and you in turn will have more credibility. You must always be sure to follow up a discussion of your weaknesses with complementary strengths.

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