

MANAGING FOR SUCCESS

Make Your Arguments Like A Top Trial Lawyer

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In training trial lawyers to win over juries, Noelle Nelson urges them to speak with brevity and clarity. This works equally well for executives who want to gain persuasive power.

"The challenge is to reduce and clarify your language so that you express your point well," said Nelson, author of "The Power of Appreciation in Business."

In a courtroom, jurors can tire of listening to dry or disorganized attorneys for days on end. That's why Nelson instructs lawyers to follow a three-point road map in communicating their case:

- Open with a one-sentence theme. Prepare your remarks by identifying the central idea you want your audience to remember. Prune it down to its essentials and begin by stating it boldly to the group.

Your theme should set the stage for everything that follows, thus helping your listeners process your remarks. Examples include, "When you value your employees, they value you in return" or "To compete in a global marketplace, we must redefine excellence."

- Tell a story to illustrate your theme. Use your anecdote to reinforce the importance of your theme or underscore its relevance to your audience.

To support your main point that "We cannot compromise our ethics," for instance, briefly discuss a tough dilemma you faced and how you resolved it.

If your story is particularly dramatic or compelling, lead with it and let it be a transition in introducing your theme. But only make the switch if your story will grab everyone's attention, Nelson says.

- Think in threes. "Give three supporting points to nail down your logic," Nelson said. "People can easily retain three ideas in their head."

At the same time, apply what Nelson calls the "pace and lead technique." Instead of voicing disapproval, build rapport by adopting the tone, tempo and word choice of the other person.

After five or 10 minutes of mirroring the speaker, assert your point by shifting to a more blunt tone.

"It's like pacing a racehorse," Nelson said. "Start by letting them hit their stride and then leading them to see things your way."