

The principle behind Trump's deals

Back in 1949, psychologist George Kingsley Zipf discovered the “Principle of Least Effort”: Most people, most of the time, are turned back by modest hurdles that they could overcome with only a little effort.

Donald Trump consciously applies Zipf’s Principle (also known as “Ziff ’s Principle”) by negotiating in ways that take advantage of the other side’s laziness. Here’s how:

- **He has *his* people do the legwork.** When Trump is negotiating, he’ll say, “We will make that phone call for you,” or “We’ll do that land survey for you.” By shouldering the grunt work, Trump steers things his way.
- **He answers questions** that people are too lazy to answer for themselves. When Trump is trying to sign investors on for a property, he’ll prepare the spreadsheets for them and highlight the bottom line: “Return on your money will be 20 percent a year.”

Making things easier for Zipfstruck opponents is a great way to take the power position.

— Adapted from *Trump Strategies for Real Estate*, George H. Ross, Wiley.