

Calling the shots with some chutzpah



Typically, a CEO who seeks to impress an important client will defer to the client's wishes. But Linda Kaplan Thaler isn't a typical CEO.

As chief executive of a big New York advertising agency, Kaplan Thaler recalls a 2001 meeting with Coldwell Banker Real Estate Corp. Her team was among the finalists to win the Coldwell Banker account, and the real estate firm invited Kaplan Thaler and her associates to a preliminary interview.

Coldwell Banker faxed a list of questions to her team and asked for specific answers. The real estate firm wanted to use the written responses to screen the finalists before scheduling a separate meeting to analyze creative pitches.

But Kaplan Thaler and her crew broke the rules. In the days leading up to the meeting, they developed a great idea for an ad campaign. Even though they knew the client was not ready to hear creative proposals, they presented their idea anyway.

The ad featured real estate agents dancing the tango with clients. This reinforced Coldwell Banker's eagerness to portray itself as the "perfect partner."

"We circumvented the process, the client just couldn't get our tango jingle out of his head, and a few weeks later we won the account," Kaplan Thaler writes.

Ultimately, the campaign was a success: It heightened consumer brand awareness by almost 35%.

The experience illustrates Kaplan Thaler's preference for compressing multiple meetings into one. Rather than gather people only to lay the groundwork for the next time, she prefers to meet once and skip directly to an action plan.

— Adapted from *Bang!*, Linda Kaplan Thaler, Robin Koval and Delia Marshall, Currency Doubleday.