

A templative tale from  
**Mischief Marketing**

**Mischievous Barbra**

[ excerpted from Chapter 12 (print edition) ...]

**Mischief Marketing Presentation/Orchestration Tactics**

As we grow up and learn about the world, we're taught a lot of things that we later find out are simply not true. And the things we're told about marketing and selling are no exception.

For instance, most of us have been told over and over again pretty much the same things about how to (supposedly) impress people: "Put your best foot forward." "You'll never have a second chance to make a good first impression." And so on.

But is this advice correct? No.

Or to be more precise about it we should say — Not always.

Think about it: If there were easy, sure-fire rules for success, everybody would be using them, wouldn't they? Indeed, they'd be stupid not to. And everybody would be just as successful at marketing a business — or at making art, or literature, or music — as all of us happen to be at the easy, sure-fire task of sitting on a couch chomping tortilla chips and watching *Seinfeld* reruns.

To learn something genuinely new about meeting the challenge of presenting yourself or your offering, let's look at the Streisand story again:

## The Gumless Girl

An aspiring singer shows up at a Broadway audition. Shy and clumsy, she can't seem to do anything right. She chatters nervously. And her shoes don't even match. To make matters worse, she's chewing gum.

When the moment comes for her to perform, she crudely spits out her gum and sticks it under the seat of a chair. Then she sings.

Her raw talent and the sheer power of her voice — the effect is so astounding it mesmerizes everyone in the theater. After she leaves, the auditioner decides to follow a hunch and inspect the chair.

No trace of gum.

That “shy” singer's name? **Barbra Streisand.**

### Tailoring the Tale

The first thing to notice about this tale is that — from the moment she stepped into the audition situation — Barbra did NOT do what everybody else there was doing.

In almost every audition situation in every theater or movie studio in every part of the world, every day, everyone is doing virtually the same thing — trying to look cool.

👉 **Mischievous Presentation Tactic: Don't always try to look cool.**

The story tells us that Barbra not only made little or no attempt to look cool, she actually went out of her way to look *uncool*. This had the effect of making her stand out of the crowd immediately.

Of course, this kind of strategy is risky. After all, if the reason you stand out of the crowd is that you're a little weird, you'll want to do something as soon as possible to correct that impression. In other words, this is a two-pronged strategy.

By looking *uncool*, Barbara instantly distinguished herself from everyone else at the audition — even before she did anything on stage.

*Show me a guy who's afraid to look bad, and I'll show you a guy you can beat every time.*

— Rene Auberjonois

👉 **Mischievous Presentation Tactic: Use a surprise attack.**

The next thing we learn from this story has to do with the element of surprise.

Wanna know one of the best things you can do in any situation? Surprise people. Everybody loves a surprise. One way to surprise people is by doing the opposite of what they expect (as we've noted). Another way is to set up a low expectation, then deliver a high-quality offering.

In this tale, we see that Barbra first set up a low expectation in the minds of her auditioners. They had already noticed her (she'd stood out because she was so uncool) and they had already concluded that she didn't have much talent. They were very wrong. And so, when they finally heard her sing, they were very surprised.

Some years ago, comedian Andy Kaufman used a similar mischief marketing tactic. Kaufman eventually became one of the stars of the hit TV series *Taxi*. But at the beginning of his career, when he was unknown, he used to do a very unusual act.

*[... Chapter 12 (print edition) continues at this point ...]*

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