

# Image consultant poised for success

By Jean Van Rensselaar

As a former attorney and the owner of Nate & Dot Image Consulting, Jennifer Sara Levin knows exactly what clients need to succeed in the business world—particularly when it comes to interview skills, networking, and professional attire.

She says interviewers are looking for two things—credentials, of course, and more ephemeral personal qualities such as likeability.

"I have been spending a lot of time with people on interview skills," she said. "Interviewers want to know if you're qualified, but they also trying to see if you are someone they'd like to work with, or have dinner with at the end of the day, or can be trusted to have dinner with a client."

Levin starts by asking clients why networking makes them uncomfortable and then she teaches them how to overcome those hurdles.

"What really makes people uncomfortable is that they don't know what to say, how to articulate it, or how to take that second step," she said. "You leave a networking opportunity with all these business cards and what do you do with them?"

She suggests writing something on the back of each card to identify the person.

"You should write where you met them and something to jog your memory," she said. "I met someone who was talking about his baby and I wrote 'baby' on the back of the card."

Another reason people don't like networking is that it seems insincere.

"It is insincere if your attitude is that you are only planning to network for a month and get a job," she said. "But it's not if you really want to build a professional relationship."

"Don't think of it as networking; think of it as relationship-building. You are going out to find people that you want to have professional relationships with."

Nate & Dot, named after Levin's stylish grandparents, offers customized personal branding and presentation programs for individuals, educational institutions and companies.

Levin's initial consultation is free. The next step is a full assessment that runs \$250. The assessment includes designing a personalized program composed of a combination of modules that could include: presentation, wardrobe, interviewing, priority evaluation, business etiquette, networking, key messaging, and resume enhancement.

According to Levin, these skills are invaluable for getting into the right college or grad school, looking for a new job, lobbying for a promotion, and even dating.

Levin conducts individual sessions and company seminars.

As far as dressing professionally (see sidebar), Levin said that nothing beats a perfectly tailored suit. She believes that it doesn't matter how much the suit costs, as long as the fabric drapes well (not too stiff) and the suit has been tailored to perfection.

"Ready to wear" is generally a misnomer, she said. "Most business attire needs to be tailored."

Levin advises spending money on high quality accessories.

"You can wear inexpensive, well-tailored clothes with expensive accessories and shoes and people will assume that you are dressed expensively," she said.

## Tips for Interview Dress

### Men and Women

- Clothing should be well-tailored
- Clothing should be well-pressed.
- Shoes should be polished and well-made.
- Bring a briefcase or tailored tote (no backpacks, etc.)

### Men

- Wear v-neck undershirts under dress shirts.
- Ties should be tied with care with the top button buttoned.
- Suit coats should fit in the shoulders.

### Women

- Wear fitted suits w/knee-length skirts.
- Wear heels.
- Go for a look that is polished and understated.



Jennifer Sara Levin's Nate and Dot Image Consulting offers customized personal branding and presentation programs for individuals, companies and educational institutions.

(Photo by Dietrich Wolfram)

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## Quick Facts

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"People walk into interviews and don't know how to say that they are better than the next person, what sets them apart."

She recommends that clients prepare for interviews by determining three key messages that they want to convey and—importantly—an anecdote to illustrate each message.

For example, instead of simply telling the interviewer that they are proactive, interviewees should be ready to explain how they trained for and ran a marathon, or taught themselves how to fix a bicycle.

"You need to show them, not tell them," she said. "People want to hear something that they can relate to, something that builds a bond. You need to understand that an interview is a conversation, people like people that are like them."

"When you're in an interview, you'll find that if the interviewer does more talking than you do, it means they are very interested in you and that's always a good sign."

Those key messages should also find their way into the resume.

Levin prefers the term "personal branding consultant" over "image consultant."

"I can preach until I'm blue in the face that image is the whole thing," she said. "But what it really is, is personal branding. People get what that means."

Levin graduated from Northwestern University Law School in 2002 and still teaches there. While practicing corporate law, she worked with clients to problem solve and achieve both their career and social objectives. At Nate & Dot she combines that training, with a strong background in art and photography to develop and market each client's image and presentation skills.

"As a corporate lawyer I was trained to negotiate and that led to drafting resumes and preparing people for interviews," she said. "On top of that, I've always loved fashion; I stand by classic dress. I have a good eye and I know what's out there."

Levin knows most people don't like to network—she knows because that's what her clients tell her. However, she believes networking is critical to success.

"People need to be focused on building a business network all the time," she said.