

NORDSTROM

Opening Doors to a Lifelong Career

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How many of us can say we started working our dream job at 15-years old? Senior Manager of Public Relations John Bailey has a career journey as magical as the holiday season itself. And it all starts with a tuxedo...

How did you start your career at Nordstrom?

A long time ago, Nordstrom had a subdivision of stores called Place Two. They were like miniature versions of our Full-line stores. A lot of them were in college towns, and one was in Bellevue, outside Seattle, near where I grew up.

My mom knew the Accessories' manager who told her they were looking for somebody to help open the doors during the holiday party. Apparently, they had hired someone and rented them a tuxedo, but this person could no longer do it, and the Accessories' manager thought I was the right size -- and she was right! The tuxedo fit me perfectly. I was hired for one night, at 15-years old, to open the doors for a couple of hours at the holiday party to greet people as they came in and help customers carry gifts and bags out to their cars.

At the time, Blake Nordstrom was the regional manager, and he told the store manager that I was a nice touch and they should consider keeping me around through the holidays. Next thing I knew, they were asking me to come back, wear the same tuxedo, and continue helping people with their bags.

How did you transition out of that role and into your next one?

Right before Christmas, someone asked me if I would help set up for the Men's Half Yearly Sale. I did that, had a good time, worked hard and was asked if I would like to come back and what I would like to do. I told them I would love to sell, so the following summer I came back as a salesperson at the sweet age of 15-years old. That's how I literally got my foot in the door.

How did that translate into a role in public relations?

I worked for Nordstrom off and on through high school and college and started working full time in the summer of 1993. Just before 1995, after I graduated from Washington State University, I started getting the itch to see what I could find for myself that would put my PR degree to use.

I started meeting with various marketing people at the corporate office in Seattle, and I heard there was going to be a job opening at our South Coast Plaza store in southern California doing events and PR for six stores in Orange County. I applied for the job, and I got it! I went from one of the smallest stores in the company to one of the highest-volume sales stores. Within my first few weeks, I got to help put on a fashion show for an LA-based designer and a personal appearance with supermodel Elle Macpherson. It was awesome. I was really lucky that someone believed in me and allowed me this opportunity. After three years, I moved back to Seattle to help focus on opening the flagship store in Seattle in 1998.

And now you've opened the New York Flagship as well!

Yes! And in between those, I helped lead the PR efforts in our Canadian expansion. I opened Calgary, Ottawa, Vancouver and three stores in Toronto. I've probably opened about 60 stores in my career in Nordstrom.

And now, I've been in New York for a little over eight months. I remember sitting in meetings for years and hearing people ask when Nordstrom was going to open in New York City. Being inside the NYC Flagship on opening day and being a part of this historic milestone in our company's history was, beyond a doubt, one of the coolest, most special things I've ever done. It was beyond anything I could have ever imagined. There was such significance to what we were all doing, and we were doing it together as a team.

What are you most excited about for 2020?

I'm so excited to continue to build buzz and excitement around what we're doing here in NYC. We've had such an incredible reception, but we know there is more to do to spread awareness not only to the people who live here but also to the global tourists.