



RETAIL MANAGERS

NATURE OF THE WORK

Retail managers oversee the work of sales and related workers, such as salespersons, cashiers, customer service representatives, stock clerks and order fillers, sales engineers, and wholesale sales representatives. They interview, hire, and train employees. They also may prepare work schedules and assign workers to specific duties. They ensure that customers receive satisfactory service and quality goods. They also answer customers' inquiries, deal with complaints, and sometimes handle purchasing, budgeting, and accounting. Many of these employees hold job titles such as *sales manager* or *department manager*.

Responsibilities vary with the size and type of establishment. As the size of stores and the types of goods and services increase, retail managers tend to specialize in one department or one aspect of merchandising. In large retail establishments, they are often referred to as department managers. They provide daily oversight of individual departments, such as shoes, cosmetics, or housewares in department stores; produce or meat in food stores; and car sales in auto dealers. Department supervisors establish and implement policies, goals, and procedures for their specific departments; coordinate activities with other department heads; and strive for smooth operations within their departments. They supervise employees who price and ticket goods and place them on display; clean and organize shelves, displays, and inventories in stockrooms; and inspect merchandise to ensure that nothing is outdated. Retail managers also review inventory and sales records, develop merchandising techniques, and coordinate sales promotions. In addition, they may greet and assist customers and promote sales and good public relations.

In small or independent stores, retail managers not only directly supervise sales associates, but they also are responsible for the operation of the entire company or store. Some are self-employed business or store owners.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Most retail managers have offices within the store itself. While some of their time is spent in the office completing merchandise orders or arranging work schedules, a large portion of the time is spent on the sales floor.

Work hours vary greatly among retailers. The schedule of managers often depends on consumer needs. Most work 40 hours a week, but longer hours are common, especially over holidays, busy shopping hours and seasons, sales, and store inventory. They are expected to work evenings and weekends, but may be rewarded with a weekday off. Hours can change weekly, and managers sometimes may have to report to work on short notice, especially if many employees are absent. Independent owners set their own schedules, but hours must be convenient to their customers.

EMPLOYMENT

Retail managers hold about 2 million jobs. About are self-employed, most of them as store owners. About 45 percent of retail managers are wage-and-salary workers employed in the retail sector; some of the largest employers are grocery stores, department stores, motor vehicle and parts dealers, big-box stores, and clothing and clothing accessory stores.

TRAINING, OTHER QUALIFICATIONS, AND ADVANCEMENT

The educational backgrounds of retail managers vary widely. Those who have postsecondary education often hold associate or bachelor's degrees in liberal arts, social sciences, business, or management. Recommended high school or college courses include those related to business, such as accounting, marketing, management, and sales, and those related to social science, such as psychology, sociology, and communication. Retail managers also must know how to use computers because almost all cash registers, inventory control systems, and sales quotes and contracts are computerized. To gain experience, many college students participate in internship programs that usually are developed jointly by schools and businesses.

Having previous sales experience is usually a requirement for becoming a retail manager. Most managers have sales experience or experience as a customer service representative. In these positions, they learn merchandising, customer service, and the basic policies and procedures of the company. The type and amount of training available varies by company. Many national retail chains and companies have formal training programs for management trainees that include both classroom and on-site training. Training time may be as brief as 1 week or may last more than 1 year, giving trainees experience during all sales seasons.

Classroom training may involve interviewing, customer service skills, inventory management, employee relations, and scheduling. Management trainees may work in one department while training on the job or rotate through several departments to gain a well-rounded knowledge of the firm's operation. Training programs for retail franchises are generally extensive, covering all functions of the company's operation, including budgeting, marketing, management, finance, purchasing, product preparation, human resource management, and compensation. College graduates usually can enter management training programs directly, without much experience.

Retail managers must get along with all types of people. They need initiative, self-discipline, good judgment, and decisiveness. Patience and a conciliatory temperament are key when dealing with demanding customers. They must motivate, organize, and direct the work of subordinates and communicate clearly and persuasively with customers and other supervisors.

Managers who display leadership and team-building skills, self-confidence, motivation, and decisiveness become candidates for promotion. A postsecondary degree may speed their advancement into management because employers view it as a sign of motivation and maturity—qualities deemed important for promotion to more responsible positions. In many retail establishments, managers are promoted from within the company. In small retail establishments, where the number of positions is limited, advancement to a higher management position may come slowly. Large establishments often have extensive career ladder programs and may offer the opportunity to transfer to another store in the chain or to the central office. Although promotions may occur more quickly in large establishments, some managers may need to relocate every several years in order to advance.

Supervisors also can become advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers—workers who coordinate marketing plans, monitor sales, and propose advertisements and promotions—or purchasing managers, buyers, or purchasing agents—workers who purchase goods and supplies for their organization or for resale.

Some retail managers who have worked in their industry for a long time open their own stores or sales firms. However, retail trade and sales occupations are highly competitive, and although many independent owners succeed, some fail to cover expenses and eventually go out of business. To prosper, owners usually need good business sense and strong customer service and public relations skills.

JOB OUTLOOK

The employment of retail managers is expected to be rather consistent from 2014 to 2024. Growth in the occupation will be slow as retail companies increase the responsibilities of retail salespersons and existing sales worker supervisors.

The Internet and electronic commerce are creating new opportunities to reach and communicate with potential customers. Some firms are hiring Internet managers are in charge of maintaining an Internet site and answering inquiries relating to the product, to prices, and to the terms of delivery. However, Internet sales and electronic commerce may reduce the number of additional sales workers needed in stores, thus reducing the total number of additional in-store supervisors required. Overall, the impact of electronic commerce on employment of retail managers should be minimal.

Projected employment growth of sales worker supervisors will mirror, in part, the patterns of employment growth in the industries in which they work. For example, faster-than-average employment growth is expected in many of the rapidly growing service-providing industries. In contrast, the number of self-employed retail managers is expected to grow slowly as independent retailers face increasing competition from national chains. Unlike mid-level and top-level managers, retail store managers generally will not be affected by the restructuring and consolidation taking place at the corporate headquarters of many retail chains.

Candidates who have retail experience—as a salesperson, cashier, or customer service representative, for example—will have the best opportunities for jobs as supervisors, especially in retail establishments.