

# Your career: a life long journey

Your career is more than simply a job or an occupation. Your career is the combination of learning and work (both unpaid and paid) that you undertake throughout your lifetime.

Our careers are influenced by many things, such as our interests, our age, our education, our families and our cultural values, all of which change. In the past most people had the same job or an occupation for life, but these days most people will make changes throughout their career.

It's up to you to actively manage the process of building your career, rather than just letting it happen. But as you get started, talk to those who can help and support you along the way.

There is a misconception that opportunities for career progression within the retail industry tend to be limited.

When most people consider retail as a career possibility, they often think of casual part-time roles in shops or working shifts, including weekends and irregular hours. However, the retail industry is big business with numerous facets to it.

There is no one set career pathway in retail, and a range of options are available.

In order to rise to the very top within retail the more qualifications and experience you have the better.

With a suitable degree behind you, some organisations may offer fast track management training schemes allowing you to enter the industry at a higher level.

Many people enter retail by finding jobs through family and friends. It allows you to follow your passion when you find employment in line with your hobbies and interests. For young people, the retail industry provides a good opportunity to make money and still have a good social life. Often these jobs are part-time or casual in the first instance.

## **Laying the foundations – getting started in retail**

People don't get into retail just to sell – they get into retail to develop relationships. Retail is primarily about the emotional experience, not just the “cash 'n' carry” aspect. Retail is about understanding consumer behaviours and habits to cater for the needs of your customers. Business success largely depends on the quality of customer service that employees provide.

And customers are becoming better informed through easier access to information, so their expectations are increasing.



## Laying the foundations – (continued)

They expect retail staff to have thorough knowledge of products and services and be able to address issues and resolve complaints. In order to progress in your retail career you will need to acquire these core skills as well as gain a broad range of on job experiences. Increasingly, the ability to work with and manage people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds is becoming an essential skill.

It is while still at the store level – through contact with other staff, job postings or internal marketing – that the majority of employees realise there's more to retail than what they can see at the shop floor level.

Not all employees want the traditional vertical career progression. Some prefer the operational 'shopfloor' positions, but are looking for variety in roles and flexibility instead of promotion. These experienced personnel are highly valued employees and this can be a rewarding career destination for some people.

## Moving into supervisory positions

After starting in part-time or casual roles, many employees then move into full time positions. You would then gain experience in your role and attend training programs (in-house or external). Generally you would have been with the organisation for a while and proved yourself to be reliable and trustworthy and gradually given increasing levels of responsibility before progressing. For example, an employee may be asked to undertake a task normally completed by their supervisor or line manager, such as planning a roster.

If you successfully complete these higher-level tasks, you would be identified by your line manager as having potential and be given opportunities to demonstrate whether you can rise to the challenges of a supervisory position. When managers are recruiting shopfloor staff, the majority feel that positive personality characteristics are the most important thing they look for. Online recruiting is becoming more utilised by retail businesses.

Employees moving to the management stream will then be given their first career break and face increasing responsibility. This may be moving from a cashier to a service manager role or from a sales assistant to assistant manager.

Not everybody who works in retail necessarily wants to progress into management. Career advancement – and management in particular – might mean better pay, but with that comes an increase in responsibility too, which doesn't suit everybody.

## Retail career pathways offer a myriad of options beyond the shopfloor...