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## WORKING IN RETAIL

The retail sector is arguably the largest employer of labor globally. In the US alone, over 16 million people are retail workers, that's one retail worker for every ten persons in the country's entire workforce.



This huge retail workforce on its part exists to serve the primary purpose of promoting sales and ensuring top draw consumer experience. And they do so by acting in several roles; retail workers can be salespersons, stock clerks, managers, first-line supervisors, cashiers, and much more.

As an aspiring retail worker, regardless of whichever schedule you decide to pursue, the core mandate of promoting sales and guaranteeing consumer satisfaction should be your guiding light. In this guide, you will learn how to deliver on the two to make for a successful career in retail.

## RETAILING - THE BARE MINIMUMS

What does it take to be an effective retailer? Like any other job position retailing requires a particular set of skills. These skills enable you to deliver on the core objectives of promoting sales and memorable customer experiences. They are the bare minimums for success in the sector, but It's important to note that the requirements change over time. Ten years ago, no one expected computer literacy from retail workers. Today, it's a necessity!

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### THE TRAITS CHECKLIST

As a retail professional, the skills you'll need to perform optimally can be put into four main categories:

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#### BASIC SKILLS

- literacy and numeracy

To function in any retail position, you have to be both literate and good with numbers. It's nothing out of the ordinary, but most employers will require that you're comfortable with reading, writing, and performing basic calculations, at the very least. Expect to take many literacy and numeracy tests when you start applying for jobs.

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### INTELLIGENCE

You will interact with people of very diverse backgrounds. Navigating the sometimes complex environments that come with these interactions requires that you possess some form of mental and emotional intelligence. You'll need to understand people and decode their persona from merely speaking with them. Intelligence goes a long way in determining how successful you will be in this regard.

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### PERSONAL SKILLS

- Adaptability

The retail sector is very dynamic, and it continually changes with the going trend. Through the course of your career, you'll have to adapt to new and sometimes exciting situations, all the while maintaining a positive attitude to learn, improve, and innovate.

- Fluid communicator

We've already established that as a retail professional, you'll be doing a lot of interacting. You need to be an excellent communicator to make that work. You must be well-spoken, relatable, likable, and, sometimes even, persuasive. Part of succeeding in the retail market space falls to how well you're able to establish rapport with consumers and your colleagues.

- Detail-oriented, thorough, and structured

The fast-paced and dynamic nature of the retail market space means you must hone in on both your organizational skills, as well as your ability to multi-task. You'll often be asked to complete several tasks within a specified period, maintaining organization, and still sticking to the details while you complete these tasks is critical.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

- Be an effective team player

For most of your career, you'll be working in teams. Being a team player requires cooperation, collaboration, and the will to partner with team members to achieve specific goals.

- Service-oriented

The customer is king, and nowhere is that phrase more relevant than in the retail services industry. As a retail professional, you have to be strong-willed with a passion for providing consumers with positive experiences in all situations.

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## PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

The professional requirements for a role in retailing are not too demanding. Most employers will require a high school diploma or something of the sorts. When you get on the job, however, you might be asked to undergo some bit of training, and the extent of training you'll receive will depend on the organization. Big retail outlets, for instance, will want to get you up to speed with inventory management, checkout systems, and the likes. For a retailing position at your neighborhood mart, a short course on handling cash registers would suffice.

### A few things to note

- During the training period (whether extensive or brief), you need to ask questions and clarify anything that appears confusing.
- Sometimes, for certain roles, the training might extend beyond the basics to include some job-specific coaching.
- Knowledge of computers and how they work is an added advantage. Most retailers, especially the big ones, will have some sort of computing system in-house. A retail associate who can use these systems right off the bat will be the preferred candidate.

Now that we've outlined the skills you need to excel in the retail world, let's move over to the actual process of excelling. Let's discuss what you need to do, how you need to act, and the best practices in the industry you should adhere to.

## GETTING INTO THE RETAIL ATTITUDE

Positivity, relatability, adaptability, and approachability, we've already outlined these traits as essential to your career in retail. In the real world, you'll be using them to form positive associations with both customers and your colleagues as well.

As a starter point, here's a rundown of what the retail attitude entails. You should always set out to work each day with these cardinal guiding lights leading your interactions.

- Maintain an open mind and always respect the opinions of others (colleagues and customers) even if it goes against your personal beliefs. Remember that everyone is entitled to an opinion.
- Approach and treat consumers equally and with respect, regardless of their age, appearance, social status, or race. A customer is a customer, irrespective of who they are and what they do.
- Don't let your personal affairs get in the way of your professionalism. If you've been having a bad day, it's always a better option to take a day off rather than transfer the aggression to customers or colleagues.
- Everyone loves a good listener. So, take the time out to listen to what customers (and colleagues) have to say, especially when they're complaining. Most times, all they need is a listening ear to vent out their frustrations.
- Enthusiasm and positivity are contagious. Consumers can sense an enthusiastic retail associate from a mile, and the best part is that they tend to reciprocate with the same energy. If you want your job to be easier, a smiling face, a positive mindset, professionalism, and competence should take center stage in your day to day activities.
- Customers first always. When consumers get the king treatment at any retail outfit, they picture that organization as royalty.

## STARTING RIGHT EVERY MORNING

If there's one thing you should take from this guide, it's the fact that attitude and mindset are critical to performing exceptionally at your next retail position. Often, however, things happen, and there's the temptation to carry these over to your job. To prevent this from happening, complete the following checklist before leaving for work.

- Start your day with positive reaffirmations as opposed to settling for doom and gloom  
Today will be a good day. Today will be better than yesterday.
- Approach every activity lined up for the day with this notion that today will be better than yesterday.

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This is not a guarantee that today will be indeed better than yesterday, but what it does is allow you to approach everything with positivity. Negativity sets you up to issues and more problems.

- Make sure you get enough rest and eat healthily

Stress and poor nutrition will affect your productivity and job efficiency on many fronts. Rest and eat well, so you're 100% fit to tackle all the challenges that lie in wait.

### HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU

When consumers reach out to talk in a retail store, they're either searching for someone who's more knowledgeable than them or someone whom they can relay their queries and complaints to. In both cases, that person has to be confident. Confidence plays a role in how you approach the consumer and, ultimately, their experience from any encounter they have with you. This is all to say that as a retail worker, you have to be confident in all situations.

Your competence on-the-job influences your confidence. If you know what you're doing, then it's easier to approach situations without second-guessing yourself, more reason why you should learn as much as you can during the training and onboarding process of your role. Much more on-the-job experience will come as you settle in through observing and, of course, through asking questions.

If you're the shy type, now's the time to open up and look forward to interacting with others. Being friendly and sociable can help to beat the shyness blockade. Try to approach all interactions with a smile and remember that consumers and your colleagues are usually regular people like you.

Confidence can also be down to how people picture you. But often this is not something you should pay too much attention to because people can be wrong or right with their assessment of who you are. What you should do, however, is attempt to make the best impression of yourself at every opportunity.

## CONDUCTING YOURSELF IN THE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Retail work, for the most part, has a relaxed and informal feel to it likely because of the constant interaction with consumers and the almost always market-style setting of many retail firms. In any case, that's not a waiver to lose your professionalism. As a retail professional, you need to be friendly, upbeat, and approachable, but in a professional way. And part of doing that is understanding how and when to interact with both consumers and colleagues.

### INTERACTING 101

The basic premise of interaction in the workplace environment can be summed up in one sentence; treat others as you would want them to treat you. For purposes of clarity, however, here's what you should do.

#### **Do's**

##### Speak in clear, concise language

The retail sector has a very diverse workforce and an even more diverse group of customers. Often, you'll come across people for whom English is a second language. It is your job to make sure communication is as fluid as is possible regardless of the persons' English background. What you can do is:

- Use simpler words and sentences – corporate lingo and complex-sounding words can be challenging to grasp for many people.
- Keep it short and concise – the longer you talk, the likelier it is for someone to zone out of the conversation.
- Avoid shouting – shouting or raising your voice is just plain rude.
- Talk slowly and smoothly – this way, you provide the listener with more clarity and time to understand what you're saying.

##### Call people by their professional names

Except you've struck a very personal accord, emphasis on very, you should always address both customers and colleagues by their professional names. Calling people nicknames they've not identified themselves with can be downright provocative and offensive. And while some people might not complain vocally, at least not immediately, this practice sets the tone for future workplace issues.

##### With jokes, less is more

Jokes are perfect conversation starters, but there's a caveat, any joke you're telling on the job should be neutral, unbiased and wholly lighthearted. Jokes touching on sensitive areas tend to stir up controversy. So, make sure to stay away from things related to topics like sex, ethnicity, race, and so-called dark humor.

### Respect people for who they are

The people whom you work with and provide services to will have peculiar beliefs, personalities, and attitudes. As long as they don't negatively affect you or your work, it is your responsibility to respect these people and their beliefs regardless of what they are.

- As an example, you might come across a customer who's a proud and probably vocal supporter of the LGBT movement. Drumming up a negative impression about them because of their belief is not only unprofessional, it's also discriminative and downright unlawful.

## COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

You've probably heard this before; communication is a two-way street, and nowhere is this more correct than in the retail sector where you'll deal with consumers and colleagues that don't just want to be spoken to but also want to be heard.

How effective you are at communicating – both in terms of speaking and listening – will go a long way to determine how successful your retailing career pans out to be. Most employers will rate you on this metric, as will consumers and your colleagues.

### **What you can do**

#### Listen and then listen some more

Most people love being heard, yet very few persons take the time out to listen to others speak. If you're going to stand out in your role as a retail professional, you have to be an excellent listener.

#### Listening is an active process

Many people hear, but very few actually listen. Listening is hearing, understanding, and acting on what's been said to you. If you're going to do this, you have to:

- Focus when being spoken to

When someone is talking, your attention should be fully centered on that person and what he/she is saying. Anything otherwise, and you risk missing what they're saying and appearing rude while doing that.

- Zone-in not zone-out

With your attention on the speaker, the next thing is to make meaning out of what they're saying. Try to pick up on their mannerism as they voice their opinions. Are they angered, appeased, jovial or professional?

- Contribute positively

One area where most people falter in active listening is how they contribute to the discussion while listening. Some don't contribute at all, and others, even though they contribute, end up making the conversation more about themselves than it is about the speaker.

When listening, your sole aim should be to understand what's being said. Don't interrupt the speaker just to chime in your views, instead wait for a pause. Don't dwell too much on relating the issue at hand to yourself or your experience. Most importantly, ask relevant questions that encourage your speaker to tell you more about how they feel or what they're saying.

When you stick to these unwritten commandments of listening, it becomes easier to connect with customers and colleagues. What's more, your management will appreciate you for it.

### RIDING THE ROUGH DAYS OUT

Like any workplace environment, retailing is not all an entirely rosy affair. What with the sheer number of people you interact with (and their different personalities) there's bound to be some bad days. Like it or not, these bad days are make-or-break moments. How you handle the situation will go a long in determining just how successful your career in retailing turns out to be.

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### DEALING WITH STRESS

Retail work takes its toll on you, and the job can get stressful fast. When you're stressed, rather than take it out on unsuspecting customers (or colleagues), you can:

- Pause, take a deep breath and relax.
- Start up a friendly discussion to lighten things up.

- Listen to some music or engage in any other relaxing activity that's compatible with your job.
- If everything else fails, take a time-out.

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### MAINTAINING YOUR COOL

Sometimes things can go from stressful to annoying. When situations like this present, you have to manage your emotions.

- As always, start by taking a deep breath. You'll be surprised what that gulp of fresh air can do to your sense of clarity and calmness.
- Get a hold of the situation. Try to understand what's annoying you and exactly how you feel about the situation.
- Pause, take another breather and think it through. Once you've understood your feelings and what's stirring up those feelings, think about it and try to visualize how it all sizes up to any reaction you plan on taking.

Did someone call you a name you don't appreciate? Do you feel insulted? Do you want to bear down your mind to them? Will that create a scene? Will this affect business operations? Will this affect your professional reputation? Thinking through everything this way enables you to see the bigger picture.

- Decide on your next course of action. And by course of action, I mean anything that deescalates/defuses the situation. Often this means taking more time out to process the whole situation. After that time, it's very unlikely that you'll be feeling as agitated as you were in the first instance.
- With a clear head, you can then move to address the situation appropriately. In the case of a customer or colleague insulting you, for instance, you can work with management to see if that person deserves a talking to or additional disciplinary action.

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### TAKING CRITICISM POSITIVELY

Criticisms will come, and contrary to what you may think, they contribute to making you a better retail person, but only if you take them in good faith. At this point, it's important to note that not all criticisms are well intended. Some people might throw criticisms your way just to spite or rattle you. Regardless, what matters is how you take it and how you act on it.

- Welcome all feedback good or bad

When people criticize you, don't get defensive. Hear them out and pick the key points from what they say.

- Crossmatch what they've said with what's on ground

It's easy to pick out your weaknesses if you assess yourself. If someone says you don't communicate properly, there will be signs to corroborate what they've said if it's indeed true that you don't communicate well. For instance, you might see that you have a hard time communicating with your colleagues, or you might notice that some other people have complained about the same issue.

- Criticism is a way to help you

When criticism is valid, take it as valuable advice from someone who's concerned.

- Act on it

Advice is meant to make us better, but only if we act on them. When you work to address issues that necessitate criticism, you're not only doing away with criticism; you're making yourself a better retail professional. All this rounds-off to helping you achieve the goal of making your customers happier.

## MAKING THE CUSTOMER HAPPY

In case you still haven't got the memo, making the customer happy is the focal point of your job. A happy customer is a returning customer. They're potential sales and referral associates, and for most businesses, they're the key to sustainability and profitability in the long run. To deliver on this goal here's what you need to do:

*Send out a positive vibe on every interaction*

We've touched on this earlier on; consumers respond best to retail workers that approach them with positivity and a cheerful attitude. As a boilerplate checklist, when you're on the job:

- Wear a calm and reassuring smile.
- Acknowledge a customer when they walk up to you.
- Display enthusiasm, but always accord consumers enough space to get comfortable.
- Put up an open and receptive attitude.
- Try to enjoy the company of customers.
- Try to be the 'bigger person' when push comes to shove. Remember, the customer is always right (even when they're wrong).
- Try to make the customer feel like king.
- Last but not least, remember that first impressions matter a lot. Always endeavor to look, act, and communicate smart on the job.

## IDENTIFY THE NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

When a customer enters your facility, they're looking to satisfy a need or want. Often, they'll need help with meeting this need. Your job is to get up to speed with the customer and his/her need.

The first thing to do to achieve this is to make them feel comfortable. If you've got your first interaction game going perfectly already, this will be a breeze. Consumers like to feel important. They don't want to be 'just another customer,' and the best way to make them feel this way is by paying attention to detail and doing those 'little' things.

Notice a customer is having a hard time getting her ward off the child seat? Go over and offer to help. Are they finding it hard to locate an item on the shelf? Ask politely for what they're looking for. Is the customer a return client who visits every other week? Learn their name and greet them with it the next time they come shopping... you get the idea.

Once they're comfortable, the next step is asking questions to identify what they need. Some consumers already know what they need before they come in, so this might not be needed. As

an example, a starter question could be – excuse me sir/madam, how can I help you get what you need today.

### SATISFYING THE NEED

With the knowledge of what the customer wants, you can then proceed to deliver on their needs. Often this is a simple case of walking to an aisle and retrieving a product, but other times it might be more complicated. You might have to, say, for instance, process a refund or replacement, or explain out some details. Whichever is the case, patience on your part is critical. Take the time, and if the need is, go the extra mile to make sure the customers' needs/wants are satisfied. Of course, it follows that the wants/needs have to be reasonable in the first place.

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### CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'VE EARNED A RETURNING CUSTOMER!

When consumers' needs are well attended to professionally and courteously, they will most likely return and, in many cases, return with their friends. That's more business for you and your organization and another feather in your professional hat.

That all said, there's a lot more to learn as you progress on your career, and you'll pick up these lessons and many other skills as you advance in the job - nothing beats the hands-on in-person experience you'll gain from working full-time. Try to get a mentor as you start to provide additional guidance, and always remember the one cardinal rule of the retail industry – satisfy the customer and make them happy.

## RETAILING – THE SPECIFICS

Through the course of this guide, we've focused mostly on the groundwork of retail working – the bare essentials.



In the next section, we turn our attention to the specifics by describing the various roles available in the typical retail firm.

## JOB ROLES IN RETAILING

### SALES ASSOCIATE

Retailers want to turn in a profit, and sales associates are catalysts to achieving that goal. A sales associate is the bridge between a customer and their next purchase. In many ways, they work to transform potential customers into actual paying consumers.



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Making this happen is a function of connecting with the consumer and their needs whilst presenting available solutions to satisfy those need in the best light possible.

So, in addition to communication and the other people skills we've already described, to flourish as a sales associate, you need to be a savvy marketer. You need to know your way with words, and it goes without saying that you must have a firm understand of your stores' product/service catalog.

### Working as a sales associate

What differentiates a sales associate from a full-time marketer? I'll summarize by saying that while a marketer advertises products and services to attract potential customers a sales associate's primary job is to convert already 'attracted' potential customers.

This job requires more precision and subtlety than the typical marketing job. In the case of retailing, the majority of conversions you'll be trying to pursue will be in-house as consumers shop. Specifically, you'll be tasked with:

- Helping consumers find the best products/service for their needs in-shop.
- Attending to and remedying consumer complaints and issues to guarantee their continued patronage.
- Providing additional information on products and services on consumer request.
- Ensuring that there's an on-shelf stock of products/services available to satisfy consumer demand.

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## CUSTOMER SERVICE PERSONNEL

A customer service personnel is a retail organization's first point of contact when consumers have enquiries, queries or complaints to make. Their role is similar to that of sales associates with the key difference being that a sales associate primarily works to promote sales, ergo revenue. In contrast, a customer service personnel works to improve consumer satisfaction, ergo brand appeal.

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## WORKING AS A CUSTOMER SERVICE PERSONNEL

To excel in this role, if you ever take it up, you'll need to master the people skills we've described already. You must know how to communicate, how to listen and, very important, how to deescalate tense situations. Nowhere in the retail world does the phrase 'consumer is king' hold more value than in the customer service department.

## CASHIER

Cashiers are the cash handlers of any organization. What they do is help consumers complete purchases by accepting payment in exchange for the good/service procured by the consumer. Payment in this sense extends past those collected as cash. If you take up a job as a cashier, you'll be processing credit card, debit card, gift card, coupon and food stamp payments as well.



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## WORKING AS A CASHIER

Obviously, to work as a cashier, you must know how to handle and account for money. On the job, you'll be doing a lot of back and forth with receiving cash and giving out cash (as change). Specifically, you'll be tasked with:

- Accepting payments.
- Making account of the payments you've received.
- Identifying and accounting for items purchased by customers.
- Issuing documentation (usually as receipts) for purchased items.

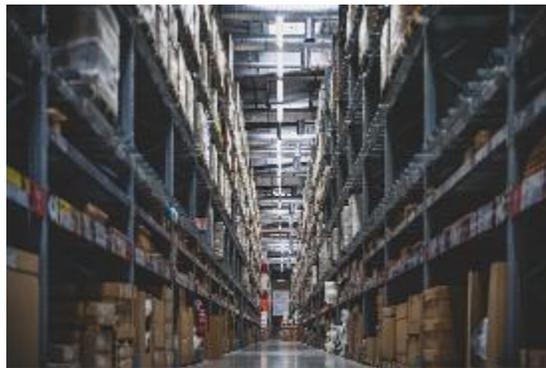


Performing these roles requires you to be familiar with several cashier specific workplace tools and equipment. You'll be asked to operate a cash register, electronic scanner, calculator, paging system, among other things. Don't worry if any of this sounds alien to you; most retailing firms provide on-the-job training to get you up-to-speed with the equipment they ask you to use.

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## STOCK AND MERCHANDISE ORGANIZER

Retail stores have to be organized with symmetrically placed products and eye-catching displays. The person in charge of making all this happen is the stock/merchandise organizer.



The ideal stock merchandiser should have an eye for orderliness and organization. Creativity, ingenuity and an eye for detail are huge advantages since, for the most part, your responsibility is catching the attention of consumers.

### Working as a stock merchandise organizer

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If you pick up a job as a stock/merchandise organizer, you'll be charged with arranging and creating displays for products and/or services to maximize buyer interest and promote sales. Specifically, you'll be tasked with:

- Ensuring products/services are placed in their predetermined strategic point in-store.
- Creating the best visual appeal for products on display.
- Working with marketing/advertisement teams to promote specific offers, products or services through strategic placement and eye-catching designs.
- Collaborating with the inventory stock operator to ensure a steady supply of products/services to fulfill consumer demand.

Unlike the other roles we've covered, many retail outfits will require that you demonstrate proven expertise with stock or at least present evidence of experience that you've worked in a similar role before hiring you. If your goal is to land a job as a merchandise organizer, an excellent way to get past this experience blockade is to take up a similar role and then build up experience from there.

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## THE STORE MANAGER

A store manager is the grand orchestrator of all the business activities that go on in a typical retail organization. He/she is charged with managing the affairs of a retail firm. Management here extends from the day-to-day tasks that facilitate the fulfilment of buyers' demand to the long term strategies that guarantee business profitability and sustainability.



### Working as a store manager

The store manager position is one where demonstratable experience is an absolute necessity. You will be leading the entire workforce of the retail firm, so it's only logical that you have experience with leading people and coordinating retail activities on a large

scale. Again, a good way to walk around this experience blockade is to take up similar roles, like that of a sales associate in the interim. In fact, this is a well-trodden route to the store manager position that many current managers will admit to having taken.

- if you do take up a store manager position, you'll be expected to:
- Lead other employees to deliver a memorable retail shopping/buying experience for the consumer.
- Troubleshoot and resolve issues/problems that may arise in the day-to-day running of the retail store.
- Work with relevant departments to develop brand improvement and sales promotion strategies.
- Lead the retail team to achieve specific goals as outlined by management.

### THERE'S MORE TO LEARN

For every role outlined here, there's more to know and learn than we've covered. What we've outlined here is what's enough to get you started – most of the additional knowledge you need will be picked up on the job through practice and experience. Experience is particularly important if you're gunning for top-of-the-ladder positions as would be a store manager.



If that's your goal like we've established earlier, a good strategy will be to take up starter positions – something in the lines of a sales associate or cashier – to rack up experience and the required technical know-how before applying for the 'bigger' positions. While doing this, you should aim to become more proficient in both the basic and complicated aspects of retailing. Expertise provides the key to open many recruitment doors. When you're skilled at fulfilling the goals and objectives of employers, securing your dream retail job will be much easier than you envisaged.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE RETAIL WORKPLACE

Retail work much like every other job out there has its health and safety considerations. One mistake many people make once they take up a position in retailing is to picture it as 'just another walk in the park.' It's not. When on the job, you have to make a conscious effort to guarantee your safety.

The conscious efforts you will take are primarily dependent on the organization, and the role you take up. The exact health and safety protocol for a sales assistant, for instance, will be markedly different from that of a customer services personnel. To give you a head start, however, let's summarily outline the basics of retail health and safety that cuts across every retailing role.

## GUARANTEEING HEALTH AND SAFETY IS A JOINT EFFORT

Guaranteeing workplace safety in the retail building is a joint effort that requires collaboration between the organization, it's managers, other staff and you the employee. To play your role as an employee, you need to first understand your responsibilities.

### *Your responsibilities*

As an employee in a retail outfit, the prerogative is on you to:

- Understand and implement the requirements for safety specific to your workplace.
- Suggest to management areas in which you feel safety can be improved.
- Safely conduct yourself in the workplace environment.
- Ask for clarification and if the need is, additional safety training, in areas where you're unsure of the standard safety practices.
- Address unsafe conditions that might arise as you go about your job.
- Report safety incidents that arise in your workplace even if you've successfully corrected them
- Immediately report injury or harm affecting you or your co-workers.

### *Their responsibilities*

We've already ascertained that safety is a team effort. On the part of your employers, it's their job to:

- Provide the necessary training required for safe working in the establishment.
- Provide necessary first aid equipment to aid the first response to safety incidents. Additionally, employers are responsible for providing PPE equipment in jobs where they are needed.
- Ensure that the establishment is safe and conforming to local safety rules and regulations.

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- Create a robust safety program complete with written safety policy and incident management procedures.
- Provide an enabling environment for employees and upper management to uphold laid down safety guidelines, rules and procedures.
- Immediately address reported safety incidents with a view to resolving them.

### REFUSING TO WORK IN UNSAFE ENVIRONMENTS

Sometimes situations may arise where your employer asks or compels you to work in an unsafe environment. If a work setting possesses any risk that can harm either you or your colleagues, you have the right to refuse work in such conditions without fear of being reprimanded for refusing. Don't be afraid to speak up in such situations, as often such an issue only exists because everyone else before you kept mute.

### AVOIDING HARM AND INJURY

Some retail jobs come with a fair bit of manual/mental assignments. It's usually nothing out of the ordinary but to ensure you don't get hurt while performing these tasks, it's best to follow the following safety practices.



### AVOIDING SPRAINS AND STRAINS

Sprains and strains are usually a consequence of repeated movements (over an extended period) or overexertion of a particular part of your body. As a retail worker, say a cashier, for example, you might find yourself engaging constant monotonous movements. An example would be arching your back to pick up items from a consumers' shopping cart repeatedly through the course of the day. Over time this can cause a sprain or a strain.

To stay healthy, stick to these two cardinal rules:

- Halt work immediately you notice any symptom of a sprain or strain, then report to your supervisor or management. Symptoms could be anything from pain to redness, swelling or even numbness.
- Sprains and strains are majorly caused by repetitive movements or those carried out from awkward positions. Switch up how you perform your assigned tasks from time to time and always avoid working in awkward or twisted situations.

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## AVOIDING INJURY FROM WORKPLACE CONDITIONS

The typical retail workplace comes with several potential sources of hazards. From wet and slippery floors to the often narrow walkways and stacked shelves; there's always a reason for you to keep an eye out for potential danger.

As standard, you should keep to the following safety rules:

- If it's your job schedule, make sure to keep everything arranged and sorted out. Otherwise, call on the attention of whosoever is responsible for any form of disorganization as would be loose items, items on the walkway etc.
- Wear comfortable, appropriate and fitting clothes/footwear when on the job.
- Again, if it's your schedule, make sure to clean up spills or mark spilt areas to alert others of the potential danger. Otherwise, call the attention of whosoever is responsible.
- Avoid carrying large items and if you must make sure you can see in front of your path.

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## AVOIDING INJURY FROM HANDLING PRODUCTS

Depending on which retail job you eventually take up, lifting and handling items or consumer goods could become a major part of your daily schedule. When you do it the wrong way, you might subject yourself to a long list of injuries that can leave a lasting impact.

Here's how to stay safe:

- The lighter the item, the better. If an object is heavy, don't attempt to lift or carry it by yourself. Instead, use machines/tools or in the case where that's unavailable, ask for help from your colleagues.
- Don't lift from an awkward position.
- When lifting, use your knees as a pivot, not your waist. Your knees are a stronger, more balanced pivot compared to your waist. If it seems impossible to lift with

your knees, then you shouldn't be attempting to carry that particular item in the first place.

- Once lifted, the item should ideally be in between your knees and your shoulders.
- Remember, repetition is a recipe for strain and sprains. Don't go on with one lifting or carrying chore for extended periods. Switch it up and take breaks often.

### FINALLY, A NOTE ON ROBBERY

Contrary to what you have seen in movies, during a robbery, your primary concern should be safety. There's no point putting yourself in danger to protect the money in the cash register; remember that money can be replaced, your life is irreplaceable.

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### PREVENTING ROBBERIES

Most full-fledged retail establishments have security protocols in place to checkmate robberies and shoplifting. What you can do on your part is stay vigilant. Watch out for odd loitering and strange or oddly parked vehicles. It also pays to interact with would-be customers that enter into the building. If someone starts acting fishy after you greet them, that's a sign that something might be wrong.

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### WHAT TO DO IN THE CASE OF A ROBBERY

If a robbery does happen, the most important thing, as we've already reiterated is to protect yourself. Usually, your employer will provide you with guidelines and protocols on how to go about this, but in any case here are some handy tips.

- Keep your cool

It's hard to keep yourself calm and collected in the face of danger, but it's usually in your best interest if that was the case. A good trick is to assume the robber was one of your everyday customers.

- Do what you're asked

Cooperating with a robber might sound counterintuitive, but it's a proven method to keep the entire episode short and under control.

- The faster it ends, the better

A robber is only going to get more anxious and nervous with time. Reason why you should work to make sure the robbery doesn't continue for too long. If he/she asks for where the money's kept, don't hesitate or try to delay.

## Certified Retail Professional

- Don't pull any stunts

Except you're a trained security officer, you should never engage the robber or attempt anything surprising. Robbers are often on edge with a predisposition to act irrationally. Inform him/her of any action you plan to take before taking it and keep everything simple.

- Document everything

When the robbery is over make a note of what you can remember as it relates to the incident.

- Call the police

Contact the police through emergency numbers as soon as possible.

That about rounds up this crash course on safety and coincidentally this entire course on retailing. As we've already reiterated, this guide was meant to take you through the baby steps of retailing. There's a lot more to learn, but most of that is better learnt with experience and practice. What you need to do for now is work to master the sort-after habits and traits of the typical retail worker outlined in this text.

You'll need them to navigate the many straightforward and sometimes complicated scenarios that arise in the typical retail establishment. Plus, with them in hand, you're better set up to absorb the knowledge and expertise that'll catalyze your progression in this career path. With experience and with in-depth knowledge of how you should conduct yourself, congratulations (again), you're well on your way to becoming a successful retailer.