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A Study to Determine Apparel and Accessories Retailer's Views on Desirable Qualities and Skills for Entry-Level Employees

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE APPAREL
AND ACCESSORIES RETAILER'S VIEWS
ON DESIRABLE QUALITIES AND SKILLS
FOR ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEES

A Study
Presented to
the Faculty of the School of Education
Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

by
Susan May
May 1986

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>LIST OF TABLES</i>	<i>vi</i>
 <i>CHAPTER</i>	
<i>I. INTRODUCTION</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>LIMITATIONS</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>PROCEDURES</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>DEFINITION OF TERMS</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>BUSINESS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>MANAGEMENT'S VIEW OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, SKILLS, AND TRAINING</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>WHAT NEEDS TO BE CHANGED?</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>SUMMARY</i>	<i>15</i>

<i>CHAPTER</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>THE RESEARCH PROCESS</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>POPULATION</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>SURVEY DESIGN</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>STATISTICAL ANALYSIS</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>SUMMARY</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>IV. PRESENTATION OF DATA</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>SUMMARY</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>CONCLUSIONS</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>RECOMMENDATIONS</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>APPENDICES</i>	<i>39</i>

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LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Apparel and Accessory Retailers Surveyed	41
2. The Ability to Make Change	20
3. Compute Basic Math Problems	20
4. Conduct and Complete a Sale	21
5. Create a Display	21
6. Obtain Quantity Sales	22
7. Ability to Use Suggestion Selling	22
8. Product and Service Knowledge	23
9. Communicate with Customers	24
10. Communicate with Coworkers	24
11. Positive Attitude	25
12. Effective Written Communications	25
13. Industriousness	26
14. Promptness	27
15. Neatness	27
16. Courtesy	28
17. Tact	28
18. Skill Comparison of Department and Specialty Stores	30
19. Trait Comparison of Department and Specialty Stores	31

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education programs were designed to benefit both the individual participants and the U.S. society, as a whole, by producing a more productive workforce. Small businesses were a vital segment of the U.S. economy employing nearly half of the nation's workforce and providing eighty-six percent of new jobs in the private sector (Wilms, 1984, p. 350). Vocational programs such as the Marketing Education program are involved in the training of entry-level employees for their future employment in the retail workforce.

Coordinators, or teachers who instruct these Marketing Education programs, attempt to manage an equilibrium between classroom instruction and on the job training. In the classroom, theory supporting retail employment is discussed. The curriculum involves topics such as salesmanship, communications, human relations, marketing mathematics, and other related topics. Students specifically enrolled in the Fashion Merchandising course study similar topics with the addition of designers, clothing styles, self image, and other related topics. On the job, students apply this theory directly to their experiences at work. The coordinator is the intermediary from the classroom to the workplace. Jobs held by Marketing Education students must be related to

the fields of marketing or distribution. Examples could be jobs at fast food restaurants, retail institutions, supermarkets, banks, and warehouses. Students enrolled in the Fashion Merchandising program, however, must be employed in an apparel and accessories related job. Examples could be department stores, specialty stores, boutiques, or accessory stores. This way, they are receiving direct training that relates to what they are studying in the classroom.

A study done by Welford Wilms in Los Angeles concluded that small firms often have difficulty finding employees with the requisite job skills and attributes (Wilms, 1984, p. 350). This study also pointed out that businesses are not using schools as resources for employees. These statements and conclusions raise important questions about our vocational programs.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine apparel and accessories retailer's views of specific desirable qualities and skills for entry-level employees from vocational education programs in Virginia Beach. As a result, this study will give Coordinators insight as to what skills they need to be teaching students in the classroom.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions will clearly be identified and answered by this study.

1. What qualities and skills would fashion retailers like entry-level employees to possess?
2. Are these skills different for department and specialty stores?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Since the Smith Hughes Act in 1917, the principal rationale for public policies that subsidize vocational education has been the notion that the kinds of jobs created by advanced technology requires special skills, which can best be taught through formal programs at the secondary levels (Wilms, 1984, p. 347).

This study was especially important in uncovering those skills that retailers believe are essential for those students entering the workforce, while participating in the Marketing Education program.

The program was designed to prepare students for entry-level employment in the retail field. Although the program may contain pertinent subject matter, it is essential to know which subject matter is most important and needs to be stressed. Furthermore, we need to compile this information from a primary source--the employer. It is the employer who ultimately trains the student. If that student is familiar with basic retail procedures and operations, attitudes and skills, then that student is more valuable to the retailer.

When these skills are determined, they should be used to evaluate or compare against curriculum currently being taught. The study should serve as an excellent indicator of what should be taught or reinforced in the Marketing Education program.

LIMITATIONS

The study was limited to fourteen apparel and accessory retailers in Virginia Beach, Virginia, specifically the beach area. This limit was established so that repetition among similar stores could be eliminated. Lynnhaven Mall was mainly utilized for this study due to its location, size, variety of retailers, and the market it serves. Hilltop North Shopping Center was also utilized for the same basic reasons, plus its employment of many Marketing Education fashion students.

PROCEDURES

Teacher-coordinators and retailers were consulted in identifying primary skills and traits that were important. A survey was created and administered. Finally, those results were analyzed and recommendations were made.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following is a listing of terminology and definitions that are relevant to this study.

1. Apparel and Accessories Retailers--Those stores that sell merchandise that is fashion oriented such as: clothing, shoes, cosmetics, accessories, etc.

2. *Cooperative Education*--An organizational pattern of instruction which involves regularly scheduled part-time on the job learning experiences and related classroom training (Crawford and Meyer, 1972, p. 387).

3. *Department Store*--A store that employs at least twenty-five or more people and sells general lines of merchandise in each of these categories: 1) home furnishings, 2) household linens and dry goods, 3) apparel and accessories for the entire family (Stone and Samples, 1985, p. 135).

4. *Fashion Merchandising*--Refers to the planning required to have the right fashion oriented merchandise, at the right time, in the right quantities, at the right prices, and in the right place (Stone and Samples, 1985, p. 15).

5. *Marketing Education*--A vocational instructional program designed to meet the needs of persons who have entered or are preparing to enter a marketing occupation (Crawford and Myer, 1972, p. 388).

6. *Specialty Store*--A store that carries limited lines of apparel, accessories, or home furnishings (Stone and Samples, 1985, p. 138).

7. *Teacher-Coordinator*--A member of the school staff who teaches vocationally related subject matter to students preparing for employment and coordinates classroom instruction with on the job training (Crawford and Meyer, 1972, p. 388).

8. *Training Station*--The place of employment of the student where he/she receives on the job training and supervision by his employer (Crawford and Meyer, 1972, p. 389).

SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

This chapter attempted to define the components involved in this study. This included an overview of the program, defining research goals, the background of the problem, and terminology.

The following chapters attempt to illustrate the business/vocational education relationship, the views of employers in general, future trends, analysis of survey results, and recommendations for the future.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Exhaustive efforts were used to find specific information concerning the type of skills that employers today would prefer from entry-level employees. Since no specific information was available, an attempt was made to review literature related to general skills and past management's opinion on the vocational program in the high school. In this section, information will be reviewed on 1) business and vocational education, 2) management's view of vocational education, and 3) what needs to be changed.

BUSINESS AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The mere mention of vocational education creates varying images and perceptions. There are images of young people making choices about their present and future life work.

Business is seen as the creative institution, drawing to it many of our talented and better minds; education is increasingly looked upon as failing to provide quality education and leadership that would reform the system (Wingate, 1984, p. 23). The business community is becoming an important, if not natural, ally in the effort to improve our educational systems. In the past, some educators have been reluctant to involve business and industry in instructional programs because:

- a) a belief that business people would not understand how schools function.
- b) a fear of criticism.
- c) a belief that business and industry would target their interests solely on vocational education.
- d) a fear that business would encroach on the professional image of educators (Ruffin, 1984, p. 55).

The correct picture is vastly different. Educators are realizing that the business community can provide support, equipment, and update education. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that fifty-eight million job openings will occur by the late 1980's. We have got to prepare students for those openings.

Historically, vocational education has played an important role in response to the changing educational and economic needs of the citizens and the nations (Clayton, 1976, p. 21). As society has become more complex, as technology has advanced, and as knowledge has increased, so have the demands upon the workforce of the nation. The majority of vocational education students are employed in the fields of their interest while taking the vocational course. The skills needed are constantly changing because of demography, international competition, new technology, and changing employer-employee relations. The most effective way to keep abreast of the changes in the business community's needs is to consult key people. Students' experiences in high school largely determine their future chances for continued schooling and meaningful employment.

MANAGEMENT'S VIEW OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, SKILLS,
AND TRAINING

In a study conducted by Welford Wilms from the University of California, employers indicated that the higher the job level (in terms of both classification and specific vocational preparation), the greater the employer's preference for applicants with vocational rather than academic training (Wilms, 1984, p. 350). Also, the study showed that when comparing vocational graduates to non-vocational graduates, the former received higher salaries for work in larger firms.

Management's responsibilities are to achieve that most economic, efficient production possible, thus keeping profit at the maximum, while obtaining optimum worker satisfaction (Kazanas, 1973, p. 45). Businesses are turning to vocational education programs for employees with some basic training. Businesses expect vocational education students to come to them with the ability to read, write, communicate, and compute proficiently. Furthermore, they feel that one of the most important characteristics of the vocational education employee as he enters the workforce is the different set of values and attitudes which he brings with him to the job (Borus, 1983, p. 45). These basic attitudes involve values, materialism, social commitment, tradition, law, authority, and morality. Most companies require minimal, functioning persons who can be trained and later developed for occupational career paths within the organization (Greenwood, 1981, p. 109).

Youth jobs can help youths explore aptitudes, abilities, and interests and learn those habits of mind and character that are important in nearly all employment relationships: perseverance, getting along with others, and other such characteristics. The benefit that the employers receive is to gain access to a pool of potential employees who can be trained at relatively low cost. Furthermore, this pool of employees can be specifically trained to benefit the business.

Why this heavy emphasis on good work habits and positive attitudes? To be of any value, employees must at least come to work regularly and promptly and do what is expected of them. If they cannot function at this basic level, their skills and literacy are unimportant. Yet, the employer's emphasis on good work habits and positive attitudes suggests that they have trouble finding workers who exhibit even these minimal qualifications (Wilms, 1984, p. 348).

WHAT NEEDS TO BE CHANGED?

The core goal of vocational education in the United States is to prepare learners for jobs that are available in the labor market. We realize, however, that most of the knowledge and skills held by the American workforce have been developed through on-the-job training (Greenwood, 1981, p. 105). It is no longer feasible or practical to consider that people receive all the training they will need throughout their careers while they are young and in school. Thus, educators are increasingly turning to employers for advice about educating for future jobs (Long, 1984, p. 18).

Just as the economy needs revitalization, so does vocational education. The following represents a consolidation of what needs to be changed in areas of content, students, equipment, and staff.

1. Content (what is taught)
 - a. Inadequate variety of programs in rural areas
 - b. Too much content taken from the most obsolete half of business and industry instead of the most up to date half
 - c. Too much content based on obsolete practices rather than on current and future work
 - d. Too little emphasis on developing entrepreneurs
2. Individuals served (who is taught)
 - a. Too little service to adults
 - b. Too little emphasis on serving people with special needs
 - c. Too few programs for the gifted
 - d. Restrictions on who can enroll
3. Equipment and Facilities
 - a. Considerable amounts of out-of-date equipment
 - b. Some obsolete buildings
 - c. Some buildings in the wrong place
4. Staff
 - a. Many instructors who are technically obsolete
 - b. Some instructors who do not know how to organize, present, or evaluate what they teach
 - c. Too many administrators who do not understand vocational education
 - d. Many counselors who lack knowledge of the work world
 - e. Salaries that are too low to attract qualified instructors in some fields
 - f. Inadequate programs for training staff and keeping them up to date

(Greenwood, 1981, p. 243).

Although it is impossible to keep up with all of the changes in business and industry, a majority of the vocational education programs are teaching theory and practice that is obsolete. Various factors tie

into this. In many cases, the teaching staff has been in the classroom too long and has been removed from enough contact with business and industry. Furthermore, the equipment that is being used is also obsolete. To obtain and utilize precise, up to date equipment is financially impossible on a school budget. Some programs are using equipment that cannot be found in any retail businesses today. We are training students on manual or simplified registers when, in reality, they will be expected to operate a complex computer terminal. Another area that needs to be kept up to date is the guidance department. They essentially place students or not place students in the vocational education courses. Some of their views of vocational education reflect what they learned when they first began as counselors. In summary, all phases of vocational education need updating and constant revitalization.

Some implications for vocational education are:

1. Increase its emphasis in reducing the "shock" in the transition from school to work.
2. Work has always been and will probably continue to be an important part of a person's life; however, the nature, meaning and value of work will change with each generation.
3. The reactions of workers to their work in the form of absenteeism, work stoppage, reduced production and increased unionization have been interpreted by business as a demand for more meaningful work.
4. Since the obsolescence of specific job skills is increasing, vocational education programs need to develop more rigorous cooperation with business and industry concerning possible student-work exchanges on an alternating basis

(Kazanas, 1973, p. 45).

Basically, the suggestion here is for vocational education to give students a taste of the world of work and to develop the attitudes and

values necessary for business. Young workers need up to date information about occupations, career pathways, and labor market conditions as well as direct work experience (Darcy, 1982, p. 46). Asked what the school should do to make young people more employable, employers most often answered that schools should give higher priority to developing pride and self-discipline in their students and to teach the three R's (Wilms, 1984, p. 349).

OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE

The future holds many changes for the retail industry, as well as the rest of the business world. The occupational structure will continue to shift toward services as opposed to production activities (National Academy of Education, 1979, p. 4).

Trends to watch for in the future are:

- a) Quality over quantity
- b) Persons over institutions
- c) Individualism over conformity
- d) Sufficiency over abundance
- e) Experience over materialism
- f) Meaningful over the impressive
- g) Knowledge over power

(Greenwood, 1981, p. 7).

We need to train and teach our students differently for the future. Competition will be greater, opportunities will be fewer, and success will be harder to achieve. We must remember that fully prepared

individuals entering the labor market are rare. Students are not in the vocational programs long enough to completely train them so that they can step into a job immediately. Schooling, training, and experience are the most accepted methods to improve the education and skill levels of the workforce (Greenwood, 1981, p. 229). Logically, a combination of school and work experience would be most beneficial. The intended benefits of cooperative education are:

- 1) the opportunity to try working in an occupation before taking a full time job
 - 2) facilitating the transition from school to work
 - 3) fulfilling personal needs and goals
 - 4) acquiring appropriate work habits and job skills
 - 5) establishing an employment record
- (ITT Educational Services, 1981, p. 58).

We must prepare the next generation of workers for future jobs and the education we provide should be relevant to the jobs that will be available. The ten core competencies that will be needed will be:

- 1) command of the English language
- 2) reasoning and problem solving
- 3) reading
- 4) writing
- 5) computation
- 6) science and technology
- 7) oral communication

- 8) *interpersonal relations*
- 9) *social and economical studies*
- 10) *personal work habits and attitudes*

(Long, 1984, p. 27).

Although these skills may seem basic, entry-level employees are being hired for jobs without possessing a majority of these skills.

The educational system should prepare an individual for a lifetime of jobs, some voluntary, some part-time, and some full-time, for through these jobs an individual gives shape and meaning to his life and derives important satisfactions.

SUMMARY

This chapter attempted to provide background information concerning management's views toward vocational education and changes that need to be made.

The next chapter explains the methods and procedures used in the effort to resolve the research problem.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In order to determine the apparel and accessories employer's views of specific desirable qualities and skills for entry-level employees, a survey was prepared. In this chapter, the process used, the population, survey design, survey administration, and statistical analysis are discussed.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

A review of the literature indicated initial skills and traits needed to be surveyed. Additional skills and traits were generated from two other resources.

First, a meeting with all Virginia Beach Fashion Merchandising Coordinators was held. They were asked for any additional skills or traits that they felt their employers desired. These comments helped to expand the survey.

Second, employers that this researcher is acquainted with were asked, in person, for their opinions on desired skills and traits they felt entry-level employees should possess.

After all resource's responses were considered, a master survey was designed. (Appendix B) The survey was sent to fourteen

representative retailers. After their completion of the survey, it was analyzed and conclusions were made.

POPULATION

The population in this study was selected from apparel and accessories retailers in the Lynnhaven Mall and Hilltop North Shopping Center, in Virginia Beach, Virginia. These retailers include: Miller and Rhoads, Leggett, Thalhimer's, Hess, Rose's Ormond, Brooks, Hit or Miss, Lerner, Pappagallo, Stitches, Fashion Accents, Lady Foot Locker, and Under Where. Employers currently, as well as not currently employing Marketing Education students were surveyed.

SURVEY DESIGN

The data for this study was collected by using a survey which consisted of qualifying and close-ended questions. Survey questions were designed from information derived from the literature review, coordinators, and retailers.

Permission to administer the survey was obtained by individual consultation with store management prior to mailing each survey. This primary consultation was conducted to increase the probability of the rate of survey return.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

After the data was collected, it was compiled and the findings reported in written and table form in Chapter IV. Statistical data was

reported in the form of percentages. Each trait and skill was handled and discussed individually.

SUMMARY

The literature was carefully reviewed to discover those skills and traits desired by apparel and accessories retailers of entry-level employees from vocational education programs.

Fashion coordinators and individual retailers were also consulted for additional skills and traits desired. After all consultations were made, a survey was designed.

The following chapters will explain the results, as well as recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of this chapter was the presentation of the data determined by research conducted during this study. The data described was the result of a survey of retail merchants that sell fashion forward merchandise in the Virginia Beach area. The survey used for this study (Appendix A) was given to the manager of each store selected.

Fourteen surveys were sent out and returned. The results were tabulated by hand. Table 1 (Appendix C) represents the stores that were surveyed.

RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY

Of those retail businesses that were surveyed, thirty-six percent (36%) of these stores were department stores and sixty-four percent (64%) were specialty stores. These percentages were representative of the types of training stations in which Marketing Education students were currently placed. The majority of students in the program were actually working in specialty stores.

The following tables represent the results of retailers ranking specific skills that entry-level employees should possess. A ranking of "1" would mean that the specific skill or trait was most important to possess. A ranking of "7" or "9" would mean that the specific skill or trait is least important to possess.

Table 2 showed that retailers felt that the ability to make change was not a high priority for entry-level employees. Only one store or seven percent (7%) of the retailers surveyed felt it was a "2" or next to most important. Thirty-six percent (36%) of those surveyed placed this skill as nearly least important.

Table 2
The Ability to Make Change

Rank	Frequency	Percent
2	1	7
4	2	14
5	5	36
6	5	36
7	1	7
Totals	14	100

Table 3 shows that thirty-six percent (36%) of the retailers surveyed felt that the ability to compute basic math problems was not extremely important. Furthermore, twenty-one percent (21%) of those retailers surveyed felt that this skill was least important.

Table 3
Compute Basic Math Problems

Rank	Frequency	Percent
2	1	7
4	1	7
5	5	36
6	4	29
7	3	21
Totals	14	100

Table 4 shows that the ability to conduct and complete a sale was overwhelmingly important to retailers. Forty-three percent (43%) of those surveyed rated this skill as being the most important. Furthermore, fourteen percent (14%) of those surveyed rated this skill as second most important.

Table 4
Conduct and Complete a Sale

Rank	Frequency	Percent
1	6	43
2	2	14
3	4	29
4	1	7
5	1	7
Totals	14	100

Table 5 indicates that a student's ability to create a display is not as important as other skills. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the retailers surveyed ranked this skill as being the least important. Twenty-one percent (21%) of those retailers gave this skill a rating of "6", meaning next to least important.

Table 5
Create a Display

Rank	Frequency	Percent
3	1	7
5	1	7
6	3	21
7	9	65
Totals	14	100

Table 6 indicates that quantity sales is not the most important skill, but is not the least important skill. Retailers ranked this skill as a "4," meaning "middle of the road." Thus, this ranks as mildly important.

Table 6
Obtain Quantity Sales

Rank	Frequency	Percent
1	1	7
3	2	14
4	8	57
6	2	14
7	1	7
Totals	14	100

Table 7 shows that suggestion selling ranks second in importance. Forty-three percent (43%) of those retailers surveyed ranked this skill as second most important. Fourteen percent (14%) ranked this skill as most important and twenty-nine percent (29%) of those surveyed ranked it as third most important. Thus, this skill is quite important.

Table 7
Ability to Use Suggestion Selling

Rank	Frequency	Percent
1	2	14
2	6	43
3	4	29
5	2	14
Totals	14	100

Table 8 indicates that basic product and service knowledge is an important skill for employees to possess. Retailers rank this skill as important with thirty-six percent (36%) of those surveyed giving it a "1." Twenty-nine percent of those surveyed rated this skill as second most important. Overall, this is clearly an important skill for marketing students to possess.

Table 8
Product and Service Knowledge

Rank	Frequency	Percent
1	5	36
2	4	29
3	3	21
4	2	14
Totals	14	100

The next set of tables represent retailers' views of selected traits that employees should possess. A rank of "1" would mean the trait is most important and a rank of "9" would mean the trait is least important.

Table 9 shows that the student's ability communicate with customers is relatively important. Retailers were split on their rankings for this trait. Twenty-one percent (21%) of those surveyed ranked this trait as first, second, and third most important.

Table 9
Communicate with Customers

Rank	Frequency	Percent
1	3	21
2	3	21
3	3	21
5	2	15
6	2	15
8	1	7
Totals	14	100

Table 10 indicates that thirty-six percent (36%) of those surveyed feel that the ability to communicate with coworkers is only somewhat important. They ranked this trait with a "4."

Table 10
Communicate with Coworkers

Rank	Frequency	Percent
3	1	8
4	5	36
5	3	21
7	2	14
8	3	21
Totals	14	100

Table 11 indicates that having a positive attitude at work is overwhelmingly important. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the retailers surveyed ranked this trait with a "1," meaning most important. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of those surveyed ranked this trait as second most important.

Table 11
Positive Attitude

Rank	Frequency	Percent
1	8	57
2	4	29
6	1	7
7	1	7
Totals	14	100

Table 12 is a clear indication that retailers feel that written communication was the least important trait for a beginning employee to possess. Ninety-three percent (93%) of those surveyed ranked this trait with a "9," meaning the least important. Also, seven percent (7%) ranked this trait with an "8," or second least important.

Table 12
Effective Written Communications

Rank	Frequency	Percent
8	1	7
9	13	93
Totals	14	100

Table 13 shows that retailers had mixed views on the trait of industriousness. Industriousness, as indicated on the survey, simply means recognizing that there is work to be done. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of those surveyed indicated that this trait was only third important. Close behind that, twenty-one percent (21%) of the retailers ranked this trait fifth and eighth. Thus, this trait had many varied views.

Table 13
Industriousness

Rank	Frequency	Percent
2	1	7
3	4	29
4	2	14
5	3	21
6	1	7
8	3	21
Totals	14	100

Table 14 indicates that an entry-level employee can probably learn the importance of promptness with time and experience. Twenty-one percent (21%) of those surveyed indicated that this trait is not as important as some of the other traits. It was ranked sixth and seventh.

Table 14
Promptness

Rank	Frequency	Percent
2	2	14
3	3	21
4	1	7
5	1	7
6	3	21
7	3	21
8	1	7
Totals	14	100

Table 15 indicates that the quality of neatness was ranked seventh, or not as important. Forty-three percent (43%) of those surveyed gave this trait a "7."

Table 15
Neatness

Rank	Frequency	Percent
2	1	7
4	3	21
6	2	14
7	6	43
8	2	14
Totals	14	100

Table 16 indicates varied views involving courtesy. Retailers felt that although this trait was important, it may not have clearly been more important as some of the other traits. Twenty-one percent (21%) of those surveyed felt this was first and second most important. Fourteen percent (14%) felt this trait was only somewhat important.

Table 16

Courtesy

Rank	Frequency	Percent
1	3	21
2	3	21
3	2	14
4	2	14
5	3	21
6	1	7
Totals	14	100

Table 17 indicates another varied response. Retailers' opinions ranged from somewhat important to least important. Only 7% thought using tact was important, with the highest ranking of only a "3."

Table 17

Tact

Rank	Frequency	Percent
3	1	7
4	1	7
5	2	14
6	4	29
7	2	14
8	3	21
9	1	7
Totals	14	100

Finally, in comparing the responses from department stores and specialty stores, in Tables 18 and 19, we find that there was a very insignificant difference between the employee's basic qualifications in the department and specialty stores. A closer look at these tables will indicate that where a department store ranks a skill or trait as important, a specialty store will rank that skill or trait similarly.

SUMMARY

This chapter reported the results of the survey of fourteen apparel and accessory retailers. The information reported will be analyzed in the following chapter. Conclusions and recommendations will also be made in Chapter V.

Table 18
Comparison of Department and Specialty Stores

Skill	Department Store			Specialty Store		
	Rank	Frequency	Percent	Rank	Frequency	Percent
Make Change	4	1	20	2	1	11
	5	2	40	4	1	11
	6	2	40	5	3	33
				6	3	33
				7	1	11
Math	2	1	20	4	1	11
	5	1	20	5	4	44
	6	2	40	6	2	22
	7	1	20	7	2	22
Sale	1	3	60	1	3	33
	3	1	20	2	2	22
	5	1	20	3	3	33
				4	1	11
Display	3	1	20	5	1	11
	7	4	80	6	3	33
				7	5	55
Quantity Sales	4	4	80	1	1	11
	6	1	20	3	2	22
				4	3	33
				6	1	11
				7	1	11
Suggestion Selling	1	1	20	1	1	11
	3	3	60	2	6	66
	5	1	20	3	1	11
				5	1	11
Product and Service Knowledge	1	1	20	1	4	44
	2	4	80	3	3	33
				4	2	22

Table 19
Comparison of Department and Specialty Stores

Trait	Department Store			Specialty Store		
	Rank	Frequency	Percent	Rank	Frequency	Percent
Communicate with Customers	1	1	20	1	2	22
	2	1	20	2	2	22
	3	1	20	3	2	22
	5	1	20	5	1	11
	8	1	20	6	2	22
Communicate with Coworkers	4	1	20	3	1	11
	5	2	40	4	4	44
	8	2	40	5	1	11
				7	2	22
				8	1	11
Positive Attitude	1	3	60	1	5	55
	2	2	40	2	2	22
				6	1	11
				7	1	11
Written Communi- cation	8	1	20	9	9	100
	9	4	80			
Industri- ousness	3	3	60	2	1	11
	4	2	40	3	1	11
				5	3	33
				6	1	11
				8	3	33
Prompt- ness	2	1	20	2	1	11
	4	1	20	3	3	33
	6	1	20	5	1	11
	7	2	40	6	2	22
				7	1	11
				8	1	11

Table 19, continued
 Comparison of Department and Specialty Stores

Trait	Department Store			Specialty Store		
	Rank	Frequency	Percent	Rank	Frequency	Percent
Neatness	4	1	20	2	1	11
	6	1	20	4	2	22
	7	2	40	6	1	11
	8	1	20	7	4	44
				8	1	11
Courtesy	1	1	20	1	2	22
	2	1	20	2	2	22
	3	1	20	3	1	11
	5	2	40	4	2	22
				5	1	11
				6	1	11
Tact	6	3	60	3	1	11
	7	1	20	4	1	11
	9	1	20	5	2	22
				6	1	11
				7	1	11
				8	3	33

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter was to report the conclusions and recommendations and summarize the findings of the research report.

SUMMARY

The problem stated was to determine apparel and accessories retailers' views of specific desirable qualities and skills for entry-level employees from Vocational Education programs. More specifically, the purpose was to ascertain:

- 1. What qualities and skills would fashion retailers desire entry-level employees to possess.*
- 2. If these desirable skills and traits differ for department and specialty stores.*

A review of the literature and teacher consultation revealed certain skills and traits that needed to be ranked.

A survey instrument was designed and distributed to area fashion retailers. All surveys were properly completed and the results were tabulated by hand. The data was then presented in table form with percentages. From this data, conclusions and recommendations for the fashion program were made.

CONCLUSIONS

In response to the research goals;

1. *What qualities and skills would fashion retailers desire entry-level employees to possess? The research has shown that the skills that retailers desired most were: the ability to complete a sale, the ability to use suggestion selling, and the ability to communicate with customers and coworkers. The traits that retailers desired most were a positive attitude, industriousness, and courtesy.*

2. *Were the skills and traits similar for department and specialty stores? Research showed that the skills and traits desired by department and specialty store managers were similar. Where one ranked a specific skill or trait as most important, the other ranked the same skill or trait similarly.*

In addition, an analysis of the findings led to the following conclusions:

1. *That the ability of the employee to complete a sale is of prime importance to retailers. Forty-three percent (43%) of the retailers surveyed ranked this skill as most important.*

2. *That the employee's ability to create a display is obviously unimportant. This skill can most likely be learned on the job in a specialty store. In a department store, a visual merchandising staff is likely to create all displays. Sixty-five percent (65%) of those surveyed ranked this as unimportant.*

3. That product and service knowledge is clearly important. Thirty-six percent (36%) of those surveyed rated this as rather important. This would include a basic understanding of fashion, such as fabric content and various product uses.

4. That a knowledge of how to suggestion sell is important. Forty-three percent (43%) of those surveyed ranked this skill as important. This would support the high ranking of completing a sale.

5. That the ability to complete basic math problems was only mildly important. Thirty-six percent (36%) of those surveyed ranked this skill as only mildly important. This could be attributed to the emergence of the computer terminal as a register. The new machines compute every calculation necessary to set-up and run daily operations.

6. That the ability to make change is mildly important. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the retailers ranked this skill as only moderately important. This low rating can be attributed to the computer terminal as well.

7. That a positive attitude is overwhelmingly important. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of those surveyed gave this trait a rank of "1." Retailers realize that this trait can be the first step toward a good working relationship.

8. That effective written communications ranked a "9," or very unimportant, by ninety-three percent (93%) of those surveyed. This rather low rating can be attributed to the importance of other traits.

9. That neatness is unimportant, in comparison to other traits. This trait ranked a "7" by forty-three percent (43%) of the retailers.

10. That the ability to recognize that there is work to be done, or industriousness, is only mildly important. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of those surveyed ranked this trait with a "3."

11. That the ability to communicate with coworkers is only minimally important. Thirty-six percent (36%) of those surveyed ranked this with a "4."

In addition, employers felt workers should possess other employability traits. These are listed in Appendix C.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and conclusions of this study, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

1. It is recommended that additional studies be done to uncover other skills and traits that today's businesses need from their employees.

2. It is recommended that the Fashion Merchandising curriculum be updated in the area of sales. New procedures for ringing up sales on computer terminals need to be incorporated into the curriculum.

3. It is recommended that the Fashion Merchandising curriculum be adjusted to include a broader area on product/service knowledge.

4. It is recommended that the Fashion Merchandising curriculum be strengthened in the area of human relations.

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MARKETING & DISTRIBUTIVE EDUCATION

FRANK W. COX HIGH SCHOOL
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In recent years, many retailers have commented that finding suitable entry-level employees is becoming increasingly difficult. The Marketing Education programs in the Virginia Beach City Schools can provide assistance for this problem. Fashion Merchandising students, through the Marketing Education Department, learn the fundamentals of selling, human relations, communications, and mathematics, among others. They are required to work and receive a grade and credit for their work performance. The student benefits by receiving employment training and the retailers benefit by employing a responsible employee.

Enclosed you will find a survey of skills and traits that entry-level employees may possess. Although this survey is a vital part of my master's program at Old Dominion University, the results will help the Virginia Beach Fashion Coordinators to create a curriculum that fulfills the employment needs of retail businesses today.

I greatly appreciate your time and assistance in completing this questionnaire. A self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience. I would appreciate the survey back by April 11, 1986. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at Cox High School, 481-6207.

Sincerely,

Susan May
Fashion Coordinator

APPENDIX C

Table 1

Apparel and Accessory Retailers Surveyed

<i>Type of Store</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<u>Department</u>	
Hess	
Leggett	
Miller and Rhoads	
Rose's	
Thalhimers	36
<u>Specialty</u>	
Brooks	
Fashion Accent	
Hit or Miss	
Lady Foot Locker	
Lerner	
Ormond	
Pappagallo	
Stitches	
Under Where	<u>64</u>
Total	100