

For: Career Management, East Brunswick, N.J,
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For Immediate Release

**FOSTERING EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT IS CRITICAL TO MAINTAINING
TOP TALENT IN RETAIL ORGANIZATIONS, LIPPMAN ADVISES**

NEW YORK, N.Y. (7/16/08)--High-caliber retail talent is scarce and difficult to attract, but merchants can—and should—take steps to buck the trend, advised Lloyd A. Lippman, founder and CEO of Career Management, a retail, direct mail and e-commerce executive search firm with offices in East Brunswick, N.J. and Manhattan.

“Part of the reason there’s a scarcity of talent is that retailers and manufacturers simply aren’t investing in the ‘best and brightest’ candidates being produced by colleges and universities today,” Lippman told attendees at a recent American Apparel & Footwear Association conference at the Fashion Institute of Technology (F.I.T.) in New York. “Additionally, executive training programs—from which many of today’s talented and successful retail leaders have graduated—are not as prevalent now as they were 15 or 20 years ago, when so many more companies focused on developing leaders for the future.”

In a panel discussion on making the hiring of talent a strategic priority, Lippman noted that current retail training programs do not include sufficient cross-training to produce the caliber of executives that are the tomorrow’s true merchants and leaders. Other panelists included Nancy Straface, vice president, human resources, Loehmanns; Roy Cohen, vice president, human resources, Tween Brands (operator of Limited Too and Justice stores); and Aida DeColli, executive vice president, human resources, Jones Apparel Group, Inc. Joan Volpe, managing coordinator, The Center For Professional Studies at F.I.T., moderated the session.

In the past, he said, trainees spent time in stores, meeting and learning to understand customers, as well as working in the merchandising and planning areas. They subsequently applied what they had learned to satisfying customers’ needs. “Now, executives rely upon demographics, merchandising statistics, and last year’s results to lead their companies,” asserted Lippman, who also serves as an adjunct professor at F.I.T., where he teaches a course on retail leadership skills. “They have seemingly forgotten the essence of the business—consistently touching and understanding customers and, acknowledging that without them, nothing happens. But leaders must have a vision for the future that they can communicate to their organization on a regular basis.”

Lippman believes retailers must search within their own organizations for talented individuals and take all necessary steps to foster their development. “The real talent today is working in your own company, but they are not being trained, challenged, recognized, motivated or mentored to be the best that they can be,” he stated. He advised merchants to consider internal candidates who may not have the specific experience necessary to fill a given position, but are intelligent, in sync with their companies’ beliefs and values, and have potential that could be maximized with the proper training and mentoring.

Quality candidates can also be found within competitors’ ranks. Many of these individuals may prove difficult to recruit because they feel secure, productive and appreciated for their contribution to their companies’ success. Thus, attracting the “best and brightest” from other organizations requires a willingness to assign to prospective employees the responsibilities and authority that fits the job title. Being creative with compensation and offering security in the form of sign-on bonuses, performance bonuses, stock options, grants and severance agreements is equally critical, according to Lippman. “When retention is above average, customer satisfaction, productivity, and profitability also tend to be above average,” he said.

Once top-tier talent has been recruited, retailers must enlist strategic measures to retain it. Although compensation plays a role in attrition, employees are far more concerned with the level of fulfillment they get from their jobs. Statistics bear this out, Lippman said, noting that 41% of executives who participated in a recent survey by Robert Half International deemed limited career growth their rationale for seeking employment elsewhere. By contrast, only 15% of individuals queried cited salary and benefits as a viable rationale for leaving a job.

“Employees also feel that working with an understanding supervisor or manager in a cooperative and trusting work environment is important,” Lippman observed. “They care about their work and how it fits into their lives.”

Lippman urged organizations to focus on ensuring that the candidates they select are a good match for the job in question, as well as for the culture of the hiring company. Additional key measures for retention include being clear about what is expected of employees; providing personnel with the materials and equipment needed to perform their jobs successfully; and ensuring that employees are assigned to managers who care about them and their success. Retailers should also surround talented employees with co-workers who have a similar drive for quality and success, as well as provide opportunities for staff members to learn and grow.

“It is up to each company to be more than competitive when it comes to investing in the future of their organization,” Lippman concluded. “Being able to attract the best and the brightest is like a magnet: once retailers have these individuals on board, more of the same will follow.”

About Career Management

Founded in 1978, Career Management specializes in executive recruitment for all segments of the retail, catalog and e-commerce industries. With offices in East Brunswick, N.J. and New York City, the firm assists a wide variety of clients across the country, fulfilling talent needs at many levels, ranging from corporate senior management to field and store management. All associates at the firm have prior hands-on experience in the retail industry. For more information, visit, www.careers4retail.com

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