The Center recently completed the landmark American Retail Excellence study. The study is the first survey of its size and scope ever undertaken, and some of its results have been published as a book entitled "American Retail Excellence: A Key to Best Practices in the Retailing Industry."

The study was funded by a generous grant from American Express in partnership with the National Retail Federation Foundation.

After an extensive effort to identify "best practice champions," the Center analyzed a large number of ideas, policies, and procedures submitted by retail industry participants. Entries were received from a wide variety of large and small retailers. Experts selected 46 "best practice champions" to profile in the book. The profiles outline each practice, the rationale behind the practice, how it is implemented, and the benefits that result from the practice.

Topics covered in the study include branding, building customer traffic, employee recruiting, retention, and training, customer service, loyalty programs, marketing, loss prevention, use of customer information, use of Internet / Web technologies, and other topics of interest to retailers.

The study was conducted by co-principal investigators Erik Gordon, Director of the Center, and Bart Weitz, Executive Director and Founder of the Center, along with Cecilia Schulz, Associate Director, Kathy Brown, Program Director, and Margaret Jones, Administrative Assistant of the Center, as well as outside experts.

Commenting on the study, NRF President and CEO, Tracy Mullin, said...
Successful information sessions at the University of Florida should be fun, entertaining and educational. Recruiters need to understand that they are dealing with students who come to the information sessions wanting to know several key items, such as starting management position, the starting salary, length of time between promotions, benefits and company culture. Many students also inquire about corporate jobs. Students view information sessions as opportunities to seek companies that are willing to help them grow personally, professionally and financially.

Successful information sessions would start with a short history of the company, including a vision of where the company is headed. Showing videos with an overview of the culture of the company is a bonus. J.C. Penney’s video features students from all over the U.S. explaining about the company and the internship and management positions. It is students speaking to students, which is a lot less intimidating and a lot more believable. Office Depot’s video shows customers explaining what they expect from the company and how they want to be served. Both companies use their videos effectively and in the process they allow their corporate culture to show through.

Companies that do not have a video should have other ways to break the ice. Some companies have recruiters mingling with the students before the information session begins. This helps the students to become more at ease and inclined to ask questions during the meeting.

As a potential associate, the student wants to know what a typical workday would be like with your company. It is a good idea for the retailer to state both the pros and cons of the industry and not try to sugar coat the cons. For example, Wal-Mart approaches this by asking the students to share their thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages to a career in retailing. This gets the issues out into the open where they can be addressed. Students respect this because they realize the company is being honest with them. Recruiters need to be prepared to offset the cons with pros. In the end students will see that

What Inquiring Minds Want To Know!

by Julia Mohs
the pros do far outweigh the cons.

There are issues with salary that need to be addressed. To begin, state the starting salary! If your company starts a salary based on experience, then tell the students. Students want to know and it can easily be tied into a discussion about training and promotions, the length of time involved between promotions and career paths. Some retailers provide charts showing students the different career paths, salaries and proposed times between positions. J.C. Penney demonstrates this in a skit format. A student is selected from the audience and brought to the front, representing a certain level of management. At this time the salary, length of time in that position, and responsibilities of that position are discussed. By participating in this, students can see the correlation between more responsibilities and an increase in salary. All new recruits want to be promoted quickly, but what they need to understand is they have to be good.

Students want to know about benefits, but they are afraid to ask. So, use the information session as a forum for discussing the advantages to your company’s benefits! It is another way for the retailer to gain the interest and respect of the student. Benefits covered should include the length and type of training program, vacations, personal days, sick pay, health and dental, and relocation expenses. Sears utilizes their management schedule as a benefit to promote a balanced lifestyle for both work and leisure. Students are also looking for companies that are willing to give community support through volunteerism. Sears stresses the importance of volunteer work and encourages their associates to be involved.

A successful information session should cover all of the above, yet each company should allow itself to be creative and unique in its presentation. Retailing is fun, exciting, challenging, and fast paced. The information session should exemplify this and allow students to get a first hand look into the world of retailing.

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RETAILING SMARTER 2000

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Rachmil Lekach, Chairman, President and COO, Ecomv, Inc. (Perfumania.com)
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Robert McCormes-Ballou graduated in the fall of 1992 from the University of Florida with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Political Science and a minor in Economics. After two summers where he interned with Xtra Superfoods and Dillard’s Department stores he realized that a career in retail could be very promising. “My internships gave me the real world experiences to understand that the presentation and selection of products are the cornerstones to success in retail.”

Robert is currently Senior Buyer of Paper for Office Depot. In this capacity, Robert implements the basic retail principles of presentation and selection by applying them to paper, legal pads and envelopes. Robert’s philosophy of merchandising comes from Ralph Waldo Emmerson; “Society is always taken by surprise by any new example of common sense.” The most radical example of common sense is to actually apply what you know and continue to learn new concepts everyday. Many people learn the same information and can lay out the same plans but in retail it is the execution and the application of the plans that sets the retailer and the individual apart from the competition.

Gators in Retailing

"NRF has long been committed to identifying winning strategies in the retail industry. American Express shares a similar vision, and through their support, the NRF Foundation is able to recognize world-class retail operations and share them in the first of what we hope are many studies to come."