

# Retail offers career prospects as fourth largest contributor to GDP

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The career path within retail goes beyond cashiers, packers and sales assistants as the industry has an annual turnover of R1.1-trillion, employs 1.8 million of South Africa's active workforce and at 15% of South Africa's GDP, is the fourth largest contributor to the GDP.



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Because the number and variety of staff needed to keep such a major industry going are huge, there are so many more rungs up the ladder of a career in retail than just shop floor staff. Young people seeking employment and those trying to decide on a career path often do not stop to think that retailing goes way beyond that.

Retail could be the answer to school-leavers who not only face the task of deciding what to do with the rest of their lives but also battle to find jobs, with an oversupply of labour in many professions and trades. Qualifications relevant to the retail sector offer a ray of hope - they can provide young people with an avenue to a whole variety of coveted and well-paying careers.

## Skills shortage in industry

Massive skills shortages in South Africa's retail sector translate into promising opportunities for those who wish to succeed in one of many careers that could progress further than a minimum wage position.

The skills shortage in the country's retail sector was made evident by a recent analysis by the Wholesale and Retail SETA, which found that less than 6% of those employed within this sector hold a tertiary qualification and even more worryingly, almost 53% do not even have a matric certificate.

On the one hand, this means that the sector is being crippled by a shortage of skilled managers and by employees who occupy these positions but cannot perform competently. On the other hand, masses of employees in entry-level positions have little hope of being promoted to more senior positions, as they simply don't have the requisite qualifications and experience."

Employment agencies have noted the problem too. Currently, nearly 70% of the posted job adverts in the retail category are for mid-level managers and require skilled and senior labour, but only around 44% of potential career seekers possess the necessary skills. This translates into a critical shortage of about 49000 retail managers. At the other end of the scale, the demand for entry level and junior staff is very low, yet thousands of those with a matric certificate or less are clamouring for these jobs.

## **Jump entry-level competition with training**

The fact that so many young people are fighting for these almost menial jobs is quite tragic, considering that the right training and experience could fast track them right into one of over 67 other career paths that the retail industry offers. Included in these other career options are marketing, human resources, information technology, financial management, auditing, procurement, supply chain management, customer service management and administration.

The company has already helped 160 previously unemployed youth to launch into careers in the retail industry. Another 602 young people are currently "retail managers in the making" as 500 work towards an NQF5 and 100 an NQF 3 qualifications in retail through its Rural Youth Project. At the same time, they are interning at stores belonging to the company's partner retailers, AutoZone, Essential Group, TWK, The Foschini Group, OK stores, Cambridge Foods and Pep Stores in the rural parts of the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, the North West and the Northern Cape.

The company is passionate about young people and is dedicated to helping as many as possible to beat poverty and succeed beyond their greatest expectations. With the existing skills shortages in the retail sector, a qualification relevant to retailing makes a candidate the pick of the crop when it comes to recruiting in this industry. In addition, the wealth of career opportunities this sector offers gives so many young people a chance to find themselves a fulfilling place in the workforce within the retail industry.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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