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core, the nearby Villa Maria Metro station and two bus lines feed pedestrian traffic along its entire length, which currently boasts 122 businesses (including 75 retailers). And because parking is limited on Monkland and side streets, there's little likelihood of larger stores displacing the independents that give the neighbourhood its charm.

While that may suit some residents just fine, it can be a challenge for businesses in the area, says Sally Richmond, store manager for one of three Ten Thousand Villages (or *Dix Mille Villages*, as it's known in Quebec) locations in the Montreal area. "Some customers say they drive around looking for parking but give up and drive away. It's not so bad in summer when people can walk, but it's a real problem in winter," she said.

Another big challenge facing the area is the lack of an official organization to attract more people to the area, according to Danny Roseman, owner of Ciel Bleu and head of the unofficial Monkland Avenue Merchants Associ-

ation. "You mention Monkland Avenue to people downtown and most have no idea where it is, even though 70% of our clients come from outside NDG," he says.

Still, he wouldn't want to be in business anywhere else. "One of the advantages of Monkland is that in seven blocks you have a cross-section of every type of business imaginable," Roseman said.

Plus, the area is definitely attracting attention. Three years ago, according to Roseman, there was one clothing retailer who did about \$700,000 in annual sales; today, four or five are doing between \$2.5 million and \$3 million in sales each.

To encourage this continued growth, Roseman tried to solve the parking problem a few years ago by proposing an underground lot on Girouard Avenue, but it was turned down by locals because it would have been located under a green space. Roseman and others have also in the past organized sidewalk sales and street festivals, which have attracted upwards of 35,000 people and raised money

for both the Shriner's Hospital and Montreal Children's Hospital.

Nowadays, he has discontinued those efforts and focused on an application for an SDC (société développement commercial) designation for Monkland, which would allow the area to access government funding to promote itself and give it a stronger voice at city hall. If that happens, then Monkland Avenue might no longer be the best-kept secret in town... and businesses like Le Maître Boucher, a destination butcher and anchor tenant on the avenue for the past 30 years, may have to find bigger digs (even though it moved into a more spacious spot just two years ago).

"The difference between Monkland and, say, Rue St. Denis is there are a lot more young families and tenants on Monkland, and people seem to be friendlier," says Herman Levesque, who runs the business with his two sons. "The biggest challenge we have is to keep things simple and small and not lose the ambiance that makes Monkland special." ☐



retailHR

JUL/AUG 2009

From the mouths of managers

They're the public face of your business and your brand, and no one plays a more important role in bringing staff and head office together. But what really makes your store managers tick? Delegates attending STORE 2009 came to find out.

ONE BY ONE, the people up on the giant screen talked about their lives as store managers... and it wasn't always a pretty sight.

There was the one woman, for instance, who recalled arriving at a new store location to take on the store manager role there... only no one remembered to tell the employees that she was coming on board.

"I was given the keys and told who to call if I had a problem," another manager said, recalling her first day on the job. Another noted dryly: "I was asked to 'fill in'... and I'm still 'filling in' after 10 years."

Then there were other anecdotes about dealing with difficult staff, coping with conflicting directives from head office, trying to keep a handle on the hundreds of quick decisions required of them every single day, working hard to become a top-notch coach, salesperson, accountant, merchandiser, visual display artist, motivational speaker...

Welcome to a typical day in the life of a store manager. "There's an old adage: as goes the manager, so goes the store," Kevin Graff said to an audience of retail executives at STORE 2009 — Canada's Retail Conference. "They will be the difference between a staff turnover rate of 18% or 80%."

As President of The Graff Retail Group, an Oakville, Ont.-based retail consulting firm that specializes in improving the performance of sales staff, Graff is in



Kevin Graff: "As goes the manager, so goes the store."

a unique position to know something about the importance of having the right people in the right positions — and the importance of delivering the right training opportunities to keep them happy.

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Now's the time for HR to shine



RETAILERS OF ALL SIZES know the toll this recession has taken on our industry's bottom line. And it doesn't take an HR professional to understand the toll the economic numbers are having on our people, as well.

According to a National Employment Survey released in June by Rubin Thomlinson LLP, an employment law firm in Toronto, the biggest concern in workplaces right now is low employee morale, with

seven out of ten businesses surveyed reporting that morale issues are their top challenges.

It's not hard to figure out why: 56% of the companies surveyed said they have terminated employees over the past 12 months as a result of the recession, and of the companies that terminated employees, 80% reported downsizing 1% to 10% of their workforces in the past 12 months.

Even in companies that have not had to resort to layoffs, respondents said they have used a variety of cost-cutting measures to manage the downturn, including trimming budgets, instituting hiring freezes, reducing bonuses, reducing hours of work, making cuts in training, and adjusting benefits.

"The story behind the numbers is a human story," says Janice Rubin, an employment lawyer and founding partner of Rubin Thomlinson LLP. "Employers are reporting that workers are suffering from low morale and feeling uncertain about their jobs and their future. Workloads are also increasing in the face of staff reductions, adding to workplace stress."

She adds that if the recession continues to go on and results in further uncertainty in the workplace, then "we will likely see employee burn out, an increased number of stress leaves, workplace harassment issues and more mistakes being made."

Amidst all this, HR professionals — particularly those in the retail industry, with its own recession-related challenges — are in a unique position. After all, HR departments are not immune to budget cuts affecting other parts of the organization, but these are arguably the times when HR's presence is needed more than ever: to guide management's personnel decisions, to ensure proper treatment of affected employees, to re-engage the company's workforce, and to ensure everyone is aware of the company's intentions in a timely and informative manner.

It's a tall order, but in my experience retail HR professionals are up to the challenge. More than anything, it's up to every one of them to ensure that senior management understands the value a good HR strategy can provide, in both good times and bad.

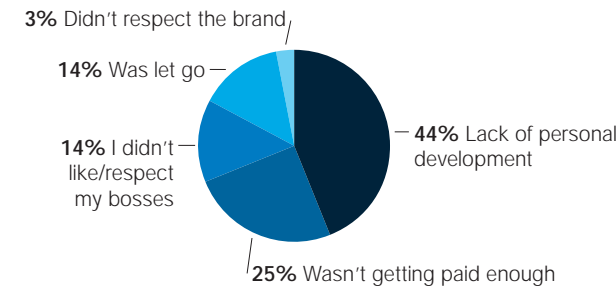
One more thing: You'll notice in the following pages an announcement about a new initiative that we here at RCC are very excited about. I'll leave my colleague, Peter Pilarski, to give you the details, but in a nutshell RCC is partnering with Alberta Employment and Immigration and HR AdWorks to develop an HR Web portal and marketing campaign in Alberta to interest young people in retail careers. If successful, this pilot project could eventually be a huge benefit to retailers across the country.

The project is also a timely reminder that, no matter what challenges the retail industry may face today, we must always keep planning for the future... because the future always has a knack of arriving when you least expect it.

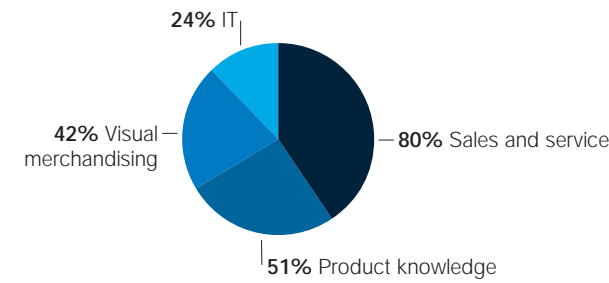
Cheers,

Andrew Siegwart
Vice-President, Membership Services
Retail Council of Canada

Why did you leave/quit a previous job?



What are the areas in which your staff needs additional training (choose all that you agree with)?



SOURCE: THE GRAFF RETAIL GROUP

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At the conference, the co-author of *Winning Retail* and *Selling with Passion* shared a short film in which several store managers were interviewed about the stresses and rewards of their jobs, and he also shared the results of a recent survey commissioned by Graff Retail that explored the attitudes of store managers employed to oversee retail chain locations.

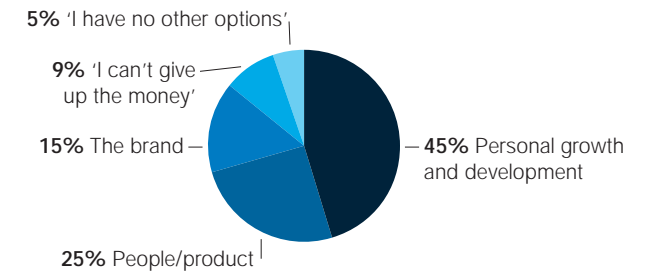
One of the more interesting results of the survey was that 32% of the managers polled said the company brand was the deciding factor in their decision to work for a particular company, ahead of "the people," "the product" or "I just needed a job." In other words, companies that rely on their brand image to attract quality salespeople appear to be employing a successful strategy.

But the numbers get more interesting when the survey gets into the reasons why the store managers stay in their current positions, or why they chose to leave past places of employment. Of the managers surveyed, a full 44% said they left a previous management position because of a lack of opportunities for personal development, well ahead of such reasons as not enough pay (25%) or conflicts with upper management (14%).

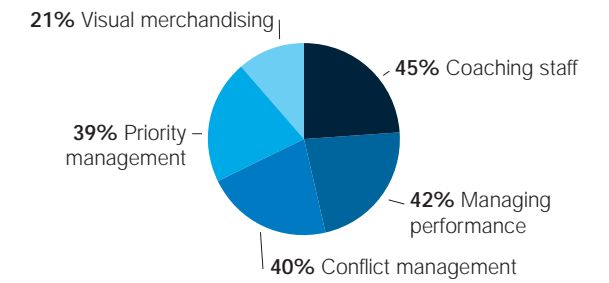
Similarly, 45% of the managers surveyed said the No.1 reason they stay with their current employers is "personal growth and development," well ahead of "people/product" (25%) or "the brand" (15%) — the same brand, incidentally, that attracted them in the first place.

"We build up these organizations to attract employees," Graff said. "It brings them in the store, but

Why do you stay in your current position?



What are the areas in which you, the store manager, require additional training to improve performance (choose all that you agree with)?



it doesn't keep them there. The main thing that got them there isn't what keeps them there."

No doubt about it: more than anyone else, store managers determine the success of individual store locations, and all the sharp marketing and merchandising in the world can't compensate if a store manager isn't up to the task. As the link between store staff and head office, the store manager plays a crucial role in ensuring that corporate objectives are successfully understood by every member of the team, and that concerns and intelligence from the shop floor are successfully relayed to upper management.

The many different roles expected of store managers may be part of the reason why it can sometimes be hard to find a good one to fill a job opening. A 2006 survey conducted by Retail Council of Canada and Monster Solutions of more than 100 retail employers found the majority of respondents (60%) agreeing that store manager positions are the hardest to fill, with one-third of respondents saying it takes an average of 21 to 30 days to fill a management position.

Why are store managers a special case? As the RCC/Monster survey noted: "On the surface, it appears that store managers simply amplify the issues of skilled labour and wage competition. Prospective store managers must hold a more specialized set of skills than sales associates, something the labour shortage exacerbates. This is especially true for specialty stores requiring expert knowledge of a category. As well, retailers must compete with other industries that raise the salary expectations among management candidates."

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HR Calendar

If you would like to advertise an upcoming event for retail HR professionals, please send your information to cdnretailer@retailcouncil.org.

5th Annual Northern Symposium

SEPTEMBER 21 - 22 | PRINCE GEORGE, B.C.

The B.C. Human Resources Management Association presents "Winds of Change: HR Strategies in the New Economy" for HR professionals in northern B.C. www.bchrma.org

Smart HR: Evolving Business Through People

SEPTEMBER 23 - 25 | HALIFAX

Presented by the Human Resources Association of Nova Scotia (HRANS), this industry convention and trade show brings together HR stakeholders from across Canada. www.atlantichrconference.com

NRF Human Resources Executives Summit

OCTOBER 13 - 15 | SAN DIEGO

Join fellow retailers and experts in an intimate setting to explore real-world issues that are top of mind for today's human resources executives. www.nrf.com/events

2009 SAHRP Provincial Conference

OCTOBER 21 - 23 | SASKATOON

The third annual conference of the Saskatchewan Association of Human Resource Professionals discusses "Building Capacity: HR from Partner to Leader." conference.sahrp.ca

2009 Eastern Ontario HR Conference & Trade Show

OCTOBER 22, 2009 | OTTAWA

A co-production of the Ottawa Human Resources Professionals Association (OHRPA) and the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA), this is a full day of HR learning and professional updates. www.hrpa.ca/HRPA/Events/0910Conferences.htm

HRPA Annual HR Law Conference

OCTOBER 28, 2009 | TORONTO

This is *the* employment law conference of the year, with some of Canada's most respected employment lawyers on hand to provide commentary and advice on our evolving legal climate. www.hrpa.ca/HRPA/Events/0910Conferences.htm



STORE delegates add their thoughts to Graff's idea walls.

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That makes sense to Graff, who has seen firsthand the difference the right person and the right training system can make in a retail environment. He goes on to add that filling the store manager's position is also difficult in light of the fact that managers are often called upon to possess many different skills to help them successfully carry out their duties.

For starters, good store managers have strong communication and leadership skills, the ability to function well within a team, a well-developed work ethic, and good sales skills. Add to the list exceptional decision-making, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills; robust administrative skills; a customer focus; and a sharp business sense. "You go down the list and say, 'Wow, these people need to know a lot,'" says Graff. "It's not an easy job. That's why, for the right person, retail is an absolutely wonderful career."

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The goal of the project is for the website to be self-sustaining through job placement and ad revenue and to expand it to all demographics in the rest of Alberta and, eventually, all of Canada. The initial funding for the pilot project will go towards the development of the portal itself and for the launch of the initial advertising campaign. Retail Council of Canada will seek additional grant funding for the project's expansion in the fall, when the portal is expected to go online.

This project falls within the mandate of the Marketing Work Group, which is a sub-committee of the Alberta Labour Supply Task Force. The Task Force is comprised of senior HR executives of RCC member companies operating in Alberta. The mandate of the Task Force is to develop and implement an industry-

Adding to this pressure to be a jack-of-all-trades are the challenges that the current economic environment are presenting store managers, especially in areas of the country hardest hit by layoffs in the manufacturing and natural resource industries (think Southern Ontario auto-parts towns and timber communities out West). While some industry analysts suggest that a downturn can be an opportunity for retailers in search of talented employees, tougher times can also mean fewer resources for store managers to work with: a recent survey of U.S. store managers by Forrester Research found that 82% believe they have more work than ever before, but 42% reported receiving a flat or decreased budget in response to their demands.

A worrying trend? Perhaps, says Graff, who notes there's also good news out there for HR professionals tasked with finding exceptional store managers. First, most store managers appear content in their current role, with 68% of respondents in the Graff Retail survey agreeing with the statement "it is clear what is expected of me as a store manager." As well, Graff says retailers keeping a close eye on the bottom line should be encouraged by numbers suggesting the majority of store managers like their jobs because of the opportunities for personal growth they provide, and not because of the money.

Still, Graff did note one area of the survey that should be a concern for any retail company hoping to keep its store managers engaged: when asked how often their district manager visited the store, 44% of store managers said "less than once a month" — a number that Graff said is simply not enough to maintain the lines of communication in these uncertain times.

"Most district managers visit stores less than once a month. How can we manage them if we're seeing them less than once a month?" he asked the audience. "The bottom line is this: the more we invest in our people, the better the results they'll give us."

By Mitchell Brown

managed Alberta Labour Supply Strategy. The goal of the Marketing Work Group is to develop and implement marketing initiatives to promote retail in Alberta, educate targeted groups about potential career paths within the sector, and increase the visibility of retail employment opportunities throughout the province.

Retail Council of Canada thanks all members of the Task Force and Work Groups for their tireless work and invaluable advice. The retail industry employs vibrant, skillful and dedicated people in an impressive variety of careers, and the volunteers on these committees are a great example of what we can do when we work together.

By Peter Pilarski, Director, Government Relations and Membership Services (Alberta), for Retail Council of Canada



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HR PLANNING

Preparing for tomorrow today

Does the recession have you up at night worrying about your company's HR strategy? If so, remember that every crisis comes complete with its own set of opportunities.

THE RETAIL SECTOR, a major driver of the economy, prospered in the opening years of the new millennium, with the years 2000 to 2007 showing an average 3.6% increase in consumer spend.

Then came 2008. Along with the rest of the economy, retail was hammered, particularly durable goods; after years of 5% growth, consumer spending on durable goods is expected to show an 8% – 9% decline in 2009. The forecast for a recovery back up to 2008 levels is not until mid-2011 or 2012 for durable goods. Unemployment has risen to 8.4% and is forecast to peak in 2010 at a startling 9.5% – 10.5%.

On top of this, the minimum wage is due to increase in every province and territory across the country (excepting B.C., Nunavut, and the Northwest

Territories) by 6% – 18%. Of the 750,000 Canadians working at minimum wage, many work in retail.

What does all this mean for retailers?

While the economic clouds are gloomy in terms of revenue projections, retailers are offered a very considerable silver lining in the area of talent development; that is, the depressed economy will offer a several-year relief period in the problem of talent shortage. More and better people will be available as staff to Canada's retailers. Not only will it be easier to find qualified talent, but voluntary turnover will drop significantly.

For forward-thinking retailers, this new availability of talent will not only ease recruitment strain, but

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