Sales Worker Supervisors

(0*NET 41-1011.00, 41-1012.00)

Significant Points

- Applicants with retail experience should have the best job opportunities in this occupation.
- Overall employment is projected to grow more slowly than average; the number of self-employed sales worker supervisors is expected to decline.
- Long, irregular hours, including evenings and weekends, are common.
- In many retail establishments, managers are promoted from within the company; a postsecondary degree may speed a sales worker supervisor’s advancement into management.

Nature of the Work

Sales worker supervisors oversee the work of sales and related workers, such as retail salespersons, cashiers, customer service representatives, stock clerks and order fillers, sales engineers, and wholesale and manufacturing sales representatives. Sales worker supervisors are responsible for interviewing, hiring, and training employees, as well as for preparing work schedules and assigning workers to specific duties. Many of these workers hold job titles such as sales manager or department manager. Under the occupational classification system used in the Handbook, however, workers with the title manager who mainly supervise nonsupervisory workers are called supervisors rather than managers, even though many of these workers often perform numerous managerial functions. (Sales worker supervisors oversee retail salespersons, cashiers, customer service representatives, stock clerks and order fillers, sales engineers, and wholesale and manufacturing sales representatives, all of whom are discussed elsewhere in the Handbook.)

In retail establishments, sales worker supervisors ensure that customers receive satisfactory service and quality goods. They also answer customers’ inquiries, deal with complaints, and sometimes handle purchasing, budgeting, and accounting. Their responsibilities vary with the size and type of establishment. As the size of retail stores and the types of goods and services increase, these workers tend to specialize in one department or one aspect of merchandising. (Managers in eating and drinking places are discussed in the Handbook statement on food service managers.)

Sales worker supervisors in large retail establishments, often referred to as department managers, provide day-to-day oversight of individual departments, such as shoes, cosmetics, or housewares in large department stores; produce and meat in grocery stores; and sales in automotive dealerships. These workers establish and implement policies, goals, objectives, and procedures for their specific departments; coordinate activities with other department heads; and strive for smooth operations within their departments. They supervise employees who price and ticket goods and place them on display; clean and organize shelves, displays, and inventories in stockrooms; and inspect merchandise to ensure that nothing is outdated. Sales worker supervisors also review inventory and sales records, develop merchandising techniques, and coordinate sales promotions. In addition, they may greet and assist customers and promote sales and good public relations.

Sales worker supervisors in nonretail establishments supervise and coordinate the activities of sales workers who sell industrial products, automobiles, or services such as advertising or Internet services. They may prepare budgets, make personnel decisions, devise sales-incentive programs, assign sales territories, or approve sales contracts.

In small or independent companies and retail stores, sales worker supervisors not only directly supervise sales associates, but also are responsible for the operation of the entire company or store. Some are self-employed business or store owners.

Working Conditions

Most sales worker supervisors have offices. In retail trade, their offices are within the stores, usually close to the areas they oversee. Although they spend some time in the office completing merchandise orders or arranging work schedules, a large portion of their workday is spent on the sales floor, supervising employees or selling.

Work hours of supervisors vary greatly among establishments, because work schedules usually depend on customers’ needs. Supervisors generally work at least 40 hours a week. Long, irregular hours are common, particularly during sales, holidays, busy shopping hours, and times when inventory is taken. Supervisors are expected to work evenings and weekends, but usually are compensated with a day off during the week. Hours can change weekly, and managers sometimes must report to work on short notice, especially when employees are absent. Independent owners can often set their own schedules, but hours must be convenient to customers.

Employment

Sales worker supervisors held about 2.4 million jobs in 2002. Approximately 36 percent were self-employed, most of whom were store owners. Additionally, 43 percent of wage and salary sales worker supervisors are employed in the retail sector. Some of the largest employers are grocery stores, department stores, motor vehicle dealerships, and clothing and accessory stores. The remainder works in nonretail establishments.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Sales worker supervisors usually acquire knowledge of management principles and practices—an essential requirement for a supervisory or managerial position in retail trade—through work experi-
ence. Many supervisors begin their careers on the sales floor as salespersons, cashiers, or customer service representatives. In these positions, they learn merchandising, customer service, and the basic policies and procedures of the company.

The educational backgrounds of sales worker supervisors vary widely. Regardless of the education they receive, recommended courses include accounting, marketing, management, and sales, as well as psychology, sociology, and communication. Supervisors also must be computer literate, because almost all cash registers, inventory control systems, and sales quotes and contracts are computerized.

Supervisors who have postsecondary education often hold associate’s or bachelor’s degrees in liberal arts, social sciences, business, or management. To gain experience, many college students participate in internship programs that usually are developed jointly by individual schools and firms.

The type and amount of training available to supervisors varies from company to company. Many national retail chains and companies have formal training programs for management trainees that include both classroom and on-site training. Training time may be as brief as 1 week, but may also last up to 1 year or more, because many organizations require that trainees gain experience during all sales seasons.

Ordinarily, classroom training includes topics such as interviewing and customer service skills, employee and inventory management, and scheduling. Management trainees may work in one specific department while training on the job, or they may rotate through several departments to gain a well-rounded knowledge of the company’s operation. Training programs for retail franchises are generally extensive, covering all functions of the company’s operations, including budgeting, marketing, management, finance, purchasing, product preparation, human resource management, and compensation. College graduates usually can enter management training programs directly.

Sales worker supervisors must get along with all types of people. They need initiative, self-discipline, good judgment, and decisiveness. Patience and a mild temperament are necessary when dealing with demanding customers. Sales worker supervisors also must be able to motivate, organize, and direct the work of subordinates and communicate clearly and persuasively with customers and other supervisors.

Individuals who display leadership and team-building skills, self-confidence, motivation, and decisiveness become candidates for promotion to assistant manager or manager. A postsecondary degree may speed a sales worker supervisor’s advancement into management, because it is viewed by employers as a sign of motivation and maturity—qualities deemed important for promotion to more responsible positions. In many retail establishments, managers are promoted from within the company. In small retail establishments, where the number of positions is limited, advancement to a higher management position may come slowly. Large establishments often have extensive career ladder programs and may offer supervisors the opportunity to transfer to another store in the chain or to the central office if an opening occurs. Although promotions may occur more quickly in large establishments, some managers may need to relocate every several years in order to advance. Supervisors also can become advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales managers (workers who coordinate marketing plans, monitor sales, and propose advertisements and promotions) or purchasing managers, buyers, or purchasing agents (workers who purchase goods and supplies for their organization or for resale). (These occupations are covered elsewhere in the Handbook.)

Some supervisors who have worked in their industry for a long time open their own stores or sales firms. However, retail trade and sales occupations are highly competitive, and although many independent owners succeed, some fail to cover expenses and eventually go out of business. To prosper, owners usually need good business sense and strong customer service and public relations skills.

Job Outlook

Candidates who have retail experience—as a retail salesperson, cashier, or customer service representative, for example—will have the best opportunities for jobs as sales worker supervisors. As in other fields, competition is expected for supervisory jobs, particularly those with the most attractive earnings and working conditions.

Employment of sales worker supervisors is expected to grow more slowly than the average for all occupations through the year 2012. Growth in the occupation will be restrained somewhat as retail companies hire more sales staff and increase the responsibilities of sales worker supervisors. Many job openings will occur as experienced supervisors move into higher levels of management, transfer to other occupations, or leave the labor force. However, as with other supervisory and managerial occupations, job turnover is relatively low.

The Internet and electronic commerce are creating new opportunities to reach and communicate with potential customers. Some firms are hiring Internet sales managers, who are in charge of maintaining an Internet site and answering inquiries relating to the product, to prices, and to the terms of delivery—a trend that will increase demand for these supervisors. Overall, Internet sales and electronic commerce may reduce the number of additional sales workers needed, thus reducing the number of additional supervisors required. However, the impact of electronic commerce on employment of sales worker supervisors should be minimal.

Projected employment growth of sales worker supervisors will mirror, in part, the patterns of employment growth in the industries in which they work. For example, faster-than-average employment growth is expected in many of the rapidly growing services industries. The number of self-employed sales worker supervisors is expected to decline as independent retailers face increasing competition from national chains.

Unlike middle- and upper-level managers, store-level retail supervisors generally will not be affected by the restructuring and consolidation taking place at the corporate and headquarters levels of many retail chains.

Earnings

Salaries of sales worker supervisors vary substantially, depending upon the level of responsibility the individual has; the person’s length of service; and the type, size, and location of the firm.

In 2002, median annual earnings of salaried sales worker supervisors of retail sales workers, including commissions, were $29,700. The middle 50 percent earned between $22,790 and $40,100 a year. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $18,380, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $55,810 a year. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of salaried supervisors of retail sales workers in 2002 were as follows:

- Building material and supplies dealers ........................................... $32,780
- Grocery stores ........................................................................... 29,940
- Clothing stores ......................................................................... 28,060
- Department stores ..................................................................... 27,390
- Gasoline stations ........................................................................ 25,000

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<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Median Earnings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale electronic markets and agents and brokers</td>
<td>$74,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional and commercial equipment and supplies</td>
<td>$72,970</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merchant wholesalers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insurance carriers</td>
<td>$63,220</td>
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<tr>
<td>Machinery, equipment, and supplies merchant wholesalers</td>
<td>$60,450</td>
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<td>Federal Government</td>
<td>$50,570</td>
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Compensation systems vary by type of establishment and merchandise sold. Many supervisors receive a commission or a combination of salary and commission. Under a commission system, supervisors receive a percentage of department or store sales. Thus, supervisors have the opportunity to increase their earnings considerably, but they may find that their earnings depend on their ability to sell their product and the condition of the economy. Those who sell large amounts of merchandise or exceed sales goals often receive bonuses or other awards.

Related Occupations
Sales worker supervisors serve customers, supervise workers, and direct and coordinate the operations of an establishment. Others with similar responsibilities include financial managers, food service managers, lodging managers, and medical and health services managers.

Sources of Additional Information
Information on employment opportunities for sales worker supervisors may be obtained from the employment offices of various retail establishments or State employment service offices.

General information on management careers in retail establishments is available from:
➤ National Retail Federation, 325 7th St. NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20004.

Information on management careers in grocery stores and on schools offering related programs is available from:
➤ International Food Service Distributors Association, 201 Park Washington Ct., Falls Church, VA 22046-4521.

Information about management careers and training programs in the motor vehicle dealers industry is available from:
➤ National Automobile Dealers Association, Public Relations Dept., 8400 Westpark Dr., McLean, VA 22102-3591. Internet: [http://www.nada.org](http://www.nada.org)

Information about management careers in convenience stores is available from:
➤ National Association of Convenience Stores, 1600 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314-3436.