

WHY & HOW RETAILING EDUCATION DEVELOPED

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ABSTRACT

Education for professional, technical and practical occupations began during the last half of the 19th Century. Commercial subjects had been introduced into the public schools, and teachers of commercial subjects were prepared in schools of pedagogy in colleges and universities. The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 provided states with resources to develop institutions that would train students in agriculture, mechanical arts, home economics and other practical subjects.

Urbanization provided job opportunities for the burgeoning populations in the cities. Businesses needed workers with knowledge of commercial subjects and administrative skills. The large department stores hired young boys and girls, below the ages of 16, to work as checkers, stockers, packers, and cash boys. These youngsters who were likely to have left school by the end of the eighth grade, knew nothing of manners and customer courtesy, and possessed little ability in writing, spelling, or arithmetic. They had few skills and their compensation was meager.

Earliest efforts to train and educate retail employees were largely philanthropic 'welfare work.' The John Wanamaker Commercial Institute, the first store school, opened in 1896 to educate the young men and women whose public school education had been deficient. Educational efforts of department stores after 1900 were designed to train new employees how to make out sales checks, to perform routine work, and to inform them of store policies and procedures. There was no sales training as the conventional belief was that salesmen were born and not made.

Lucinda Wyman Prince, a member of the Boston Women's Educational and Industrial Union, believed that low paid workers earned their worth and that salesmanship could be taught. Ms. Prince organized the first classes for salesgirls in 1905. After demonstrating the effectiveness of her methods, Boston merchants (1908) agreed to give her girls work experience and to hire them after completing the Prince three month course.

The Prince method included *discovery*, *discussion*, and *outside speakers* combined with store experience. In addition, Prince worked on students' personal and psychological development. By 1912 there was a demand for salesgirls trained by her methods. Lucinda Prince began offering Teacher Training Courses, and salesmanship training introduced in Boston high schools. Teacher training courses were open to young women who possessed baccalaureate degrees.

After speaking at the NRDGA (National Retail Dry Goods Association) annual meeting in 1915, Lucinda Prince was named Educational Director for the association. Lucinda Prince's influence spread. By 1918, salesmanship courses were taught in 12 states by Prince graduates. The Research Bureau for Retail Training was established at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. Under the direction of a Prince graduate, the Carnegie Institute trained salespeople, offered professional training for the field of retailing, prepared teachers and supervisors in retailing and conducted investigations for the improvement of selling and training in retail.

Sam Reyburn, President of Lord & Taylor, and Percy Straus, President of Macy's, were among the merchants who were impressed with the work of Lucinda Prince. Believing that a school for retailing should be located in New York City, they approached New York University. In 1919, the New York University School of Retailing opened. For the first two years, the school centered on teacher training, but in 1921 expanded its mission to include undergraduate and graduate programs to prepare students for merchandising and executive positions in retailing.

By 1929, five universities across the country offered baccalaureate degrees in retailing and the number continued to increase. Over time, the focus shifted from teacher training to merchandising, personnel, and store executive positions. Lucinda Prince's effort to upgrade the position of the lowly salesgirls was, without a doubt, the motivating force for retail education in this country.