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THE ULTIMATE
SHOW GUIDE

Know It All



PETER-TOLIN BAKER

VISUAL MERCHANDISING SPECIALIST

P-T B DESIGN SERVICES

ptb@ptbdesignservices.com

DURING A PARTICULARLY hectic week removing and installing new creatives for several clients, I was reminded yet again of what an expansive, multilayered and multitasking job it is to be a visual merchandiser. Perhaps the thought came to me as my crew and I were patiently scraping off seemingly hundreds of frosted cut-vinyl snowflakes on dozens of vitrines. Or perhaps it was as I completed the accounting and billing for another installation. Or was it as I helped to park and unload the cargo van in the sub-zero wind on a snowy, dark night along a particularly elegant block on Madison Avenue in New York?

Few jobs require such a range of both creative skills and business knowledge as visual merchandisers. On any given day, we can be a stylist, builder, interior designer, accountant, laborer, driver, lighting technician, repairman, graphic designer or painter. Wearing multiple hats is a regular job requirement for any visual merchandiser; it's never boring!

But the flipside to being engaged in such interesting and diverse work is the need to keep up with a full range of current industry news, styles and trends. To be a successful visual merchandiser, you must continue to expand your job knowledge by reaching out beyond the comfort zone of your own job, company or department, and be actively engaged with the retail design industry at large.

You can divide the job knowledge into three key areas:

Technical subject matter expertise: includes possessing up-to-date knowledge of the visual merchandising and retail industries, as well as being sought out as an expert by your colleagues and peers.

Business industry knowledge: includes understanding issues relevant to the organization and



business you work for—and being able to apply cross-functional knowledge to the job.

Global and regional perspective: infers keeping abreast of market trends, opportunities and the competition; considering your own work from a global or regional context, as well as addressing cultural and geographic differences in strategies and approaches.

Most likely you are building your job knowledge and expertise simply by doing your job—and doing it well. However, to really move the needle and be fully engaged in a manner that further develops your job skills and expertise, it is important to take the initiative and seek opportunities that expand your knowledge of the visual merchandising industry outside of your own job parameters. This helps improve job performance and builds a foundation of support for your career development and growth.

As a resident of New York, inspiration and learning for me comes from a variety of sources,

including simply walking the streets observing architecture and people, shopping local retailers, attending local art and design events, and visiting theaters, museums, movies and restaurants, as well as fashion shows, designer show houses, vendors and supplier showrooms.

Further market research includes reading and looking at a range of retail related news media, via print and online, such as this publication, and other fashion design magazines and websites.

I also am a believer in the value of networking and building up your own contacts and connections. This has value for both your current job and future career opportunities.

Participating in local or national organizations that focus on retail environments is the ideal opportunity to connect with other industry professionals, including the Retail Design Institute and PAVE.

Tradeshows also provide a comprehensive insight into what's driving retail design and visual merchandising—providing both a valuable visual reference, as well as an opportunity to network with industry colleagues.

You may even consider taking a class through an extended education program at your local college or arts center—be it a drawing class, computer design, fashion design or art history course.

The important thing is to plug-in, look sharp, have some fun outside of your normal workday and challenge yourself on feeding your creative brain. Ask yourself—where are you finding your inspiration? **dar**

BASED IN NEW YORK, PETER-TOLIN BAKER IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH RETAIL DESIGN AND VISUAL MERCHANDISING VIA P-T B DESIGN SERVICES (OWNER), THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (ADJUNCT PROFESSOR), RETAIL DESIGN INSTITUTE NY CHAPTER (BOARD PRESIDENT), AND AS A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO DESIGN:RETAIL.