



Theresa Farnik. secondgradethrills.blogspot.com

# How higher education is driving retail success

**S**kills development and ongoing training in the FMCG sector is crucially important. Leading local retailers, including Woolworths, Shoprite, SPAR, Food Lover's Market and Pick n Pay offer a variety of higher learning and skills development programmes to their employees, while also championing learning in the wider community. Recognising the value of developing a skilled and capable workforce, these local brands are helping to build a better South Africa.

Operational efficiency also benefits from skills development as it ensures that employees know how to use the store's technology, manage inventory, handle deliveries and follow safety and hygiene standards. Improved efficiency, reduced waste and increased sales and productivity are all worthwhile benefits of ongoing training.



Prudence Mathebula

Prudence Mathebula is MD of Dynamic DNA, an ICT Training Academy that focuses on scarce skills and empowering previously disadvantaged young people. Deeply passionate about upskilling the workforce, Mathebula says, "Pursuing higher or further education

is vital for both individuals and society at large. It offers improved career prospects, personal development and growth and greater earning potential, it fosters innovation and progress and it enables networking opportunities. Simply put ...

“... higher education is indispensable for individuals to gain the knowledge, skills and competencies that can profoundly influence their personal and professional lives.”

## Build better business by investing in education

Investing in your employees' development and growth is good for business. Mathebula explains ...

“It enhances productivity and efficiency because when employees possess necessary skills and knowledge, they produce higher quality work and increased output. It also improves employee retention and engagement. Supporting the growth of your employees demonstrates that you value their well-being and are willing to invest in their future. This leads to greater job satisfaction, lower turnover rates and a more engaged workforce.”



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## Targeted training through accredited programmes

Whether in-house or through a dedicated training facility or accredited provider, local employers are ensuring that staff have access to further training that builds a solid foundation while also allowing them to explore their options and even specialise in their chosen area. This type of training grants individuals practical experience and theoretical understanding, improving their employability and career opportunities.

## Growing future leaders

For Mathebula, the benefit of helping your employees pursue higher education is a sensible way of cultivating better leaders. She says, "By developing employees' skills and knowledge, they're empowered to think creatively, solve problems and adjust to evolving business needs, thereby driving innovation and adaptability." She adds, "Investing in employee development aids in identifying and nurturing future leaders, ensuring a robust talent pipeline and reducing the risk of leadership voids, thus strengthening leadership and bolstering succession planning."

At companies such as Puratos, an international group which offers a full range of innovative food ingredients and services for artisans, industry, retailers and food service customers in the bakery, patisserie and chocolate sectors in over 100 countries around the world, developing future leaders is an integral part of their training. Structured programmes are used to develop



Food Lover's Market offers leadership and development programmes that include a four-day Leadership Training, Trainee Manager Development Programme, as well as the Leader as Coach Programme. The retailer also espouses a 'Same Faces, Higher Places' ethos, which aims to identify and develop talent from within the organisation, and is committed to empowering and upskilling their force.

a pipeline of future leaders, such as their management development programme (MDP) that focuses on strategic thinking, leadership and business acumen. They also offer a supervisory development programme (SDP) designed to build operational leadership and team management skills. These programmes include mentorship components to guide employees through their development journey.

<https://ils-rsa.co.za/>



Puratos has a variety of short courses to upskill their distribution and warehouse employees, including shelf filler training focusing on merchandising, stock rotation and customer interaction, and professional or advanced driving for delivery personnel.

## Theoretical knowledge and practical skill development

Ensuring that trainees receive theoretical knowledge combined with practical skills is essential. For example, Puratos has a number of training programmes for in-house and in partnership with accredited providers.



Nomsa Kganakga

Locally the company offers several further training opportunities. Nomsa Kganakga, HR executive at Puratos says, "Prior to the QCTO (Quality Council for Trades and Occupations) transition, we offered NQF Level 2 and 3 qualifications in Bread and Flour Confectionery Baking.

These included practical modules such as Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and Basics of



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Bread. Post-QCTO, we now offer the Occupational Certificate: Baking and Confectionery Operator (Level 3), which is a comprehensive qualification focused on theoretical knowledge and practical baking skills.”

She adds, “In collaboration with accredited training providers, we also deliver programmes in freight handling – covering logistics and warehouse operations; wholesale and retail operations – focusing on customer service, merchandising and store operations; and generic management – aimed at bridging the gap between developing leadership and supervisory skills.”

“Our training is tailored to match specific job roles within the FMCG retail and wholesale environment,” explains Kganakga. “By aligning training content with operational functions, such as bakery, we ensure that employees gain relevant, job-ready skills that directly enhance productivity and service delivery.”

She adds, “We implement the 70:20:10 learning model to ensure a balanced and effective training experience. 70% on-the-job training that allows employees to learn through real-world tasks and responsibilities, 20% coaching and mentoring that provides personalised guidance from experienced mentors to reinforce learning and support career growth, and 10% formal learning delivered via face-to-face workshops or online modules.”

The company has also successfully delivered a variety of short courses to upskill their distribution and warehouse employees, including shelf filler training focusing on merchandising, stock rotation



The training offerings provided by Puratos are aligned with the SETA framework and all their accredited programmes result in a Certificate and Statement of Results issued by the relevant SETA.

and customer interaction, and professional or advanced driving for delivery personnel. In addition, they offer Good Manufacturing Processes or GMP to ensure compliance with food safety standards, and forklift and reach truck operation to provide certification for warehouse equipment handling.

“Our training offerings are aligned with the SETA framework and all our accredited programmes result in a Certificate and Statement of Results issued by the relevant SETA. These documents detail the unit standards completed and serve as formal recognition of the employee’s skills and competencies.”

Part of the company’s BBBEE compliance includes supporting learnerships that contribute to skills development points, offering short skills programmes, collaborating with community and youth organisations, supporting local initiatives

that provide skills development, developing coaching and mentorship programmes and assigning mentors to junior staff or new hires.

Kganakga says, “Our Talent Development Team conducts a Skills Matrix Assessment to evaluate each employee’s current skill level, experience and educational background. Based on this, we select appropriate training interventions. We also

offer recognition of prior learning (RPL) to formally acknowledge the skills of experienced employees who lack formal qualifications. Through our learning platform, we offer integrated recruitment services for skilled roles such as bakers and store managers. Our recent partnership with LinkedIn Learning allows employees to access a wide range of professional development courses, which enhances recruitment and retention.”

Investing in training is not just about business at Puratos, it’s about building a strong workforce with potential, providing opportunities and creating a better future. “Our Bakery School in Tembisa has added another dimension to our strategy to develop technical skills for the bakery industry. Through this programme and in partnership with the Gauteng Education Department and FoodBev SETA, we have produced 125 matriculants who have an academic certificate and a practical qualification in baking,” says Kganakga.



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## Local retailers invest in people

Lindsey Joseph, head of Group Talent Solutions at the Shoprite Group, says, "As South Africa's largest private employer and leading retailer, we recognise that a skilled and talented workforce is crucial for our long-term sustainability. Our bursary programme plays a vital role in attracting top talent, ensuring we continue to innovate and grow."

The Shoprite Group bursary programme offers full financial support to high-achieving students pursuing degrees in accounting (CA Stream – SAICA), retail business management, supply chain and logistics, biological and agricultural sciences and food science. Wider opportunities are also available as the group understands that providing a platform to access employment is important for social growth. The group invests in employed and unemployed youth through various development programmes and supports training and education linked to youth unemployment. One of these is the Retail Readiness Programme (RRP), which is open to 18- to 34-year-olds with no previous work experience, as well as the Youth



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Employment Services (YES) initiative which offers comprehensive study bursaries in several academic fields and a range of graduate programmes.

According to Woolworths, "Every Woolworths employee is an important asset to the company. We strive to recruit, develop and retain the best talent in order to maintain our high standard of professionalism." Woolworths is registered as a private Further Education and Training College (FET) with the Department of Higher Education, and the retailer strives to cultivate a culture of learning. It offers various training and development programmes that have been designed to foster talent and equip employees with the skills needed

for success. Their investment in education is not just business-related. Tertiary funding for employees and employees' children is available if applicants meet the company's criteria, as are fully accredited NQF training programmes for internal and external learners through partnerships with SETAs and leading tertiary institutions.

The Pick n Pay graduate programme was designed to ensure that it has the greatest impact for the business and the graduates who participate. It aims to provide the business with the right mix of people and skills at the right time but also ensures that graduates are equipped with the skills and a mind-set that will position them for a successful career in any industry. The first 12 months of the graduate programme helps develop a grounding in the business, and once a graduate is placed permanently into the business their development continues.

Specialist and artisanal training is also available for certain aspects of the retailer's business. For example, the Pick n Pay Mastercut Artisan Programme is a "comprehensive butchery skills initiative" – a 12-to-18-month course that results



Puratos has implemented structured programmes that are used to develop a pipeline of future leaders, such as their management development programme (MDP) that focuses on strategic thinking, leadership and business acumen. They also offer a supervisory development programme (SDP) designed to build operational leadership and team management skills. These programmes include mentorship components to guide employees through their development journey.



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in a nationally recognised artisan qualification that provides technical skills and industry experience with the retailer.

According to a June 2024 article on the SPAR website, the global learning and development market is valued at more than R10-trillion. The article notes that job-relevant, effective staff training is essential if firms are to succeed in their respective sectors. The SPAR Academy of Learning is making strides in assisting with skills development, and the group wants to spark the next level of progress with store managers, leaders and owners coming through the academy.

Each region where the group operates has its own academy division and the programme upskills personnel at its distribution centres (DCs) and retail outlets. Mandi Pullen, SPAR's human resources

As part of their training programme, Puratos offers Good Manufacturing Processes (GMP) to ensure compliance with food safety standards, as well as forklift and reach truck operation to provide certification for warehouse equipment handling. The company's Talent Development Team conducts a Skills Matrix Assessment to evaluate each employee's current skill level, experience and educational background. Based on this, appropriate training interventions are selected.



<https://cranestraining.com/forklift.php>



The SPAR Academy of Learning provides skills development, and the group wants to spark the next level of progress with store managers, leaders and owners coming through the academy. Each region where the group operates has its own academy division and the programme upskills personnel at its distribution centres (DCs) and retail outlets. Specialist training is also a part of the company's offering, including their partnership with the SA Butchery Training School.

development manager for retail in the Eastern Cape, says, "As part of our in-store programme, we use eLearning to induct staff. This allows them to understand what their job profile entails. The training is also set up in such a way that a cashier who may be interested in cooking can learn what is required in the bakery section."

While in-person learning is still a major part of SPAR's development initiative, eLearning has been a game-changer. Pullen says that SPAR makes use of the course management system, Moodle, and for ordering, Sigma. It had 12 027 staff members registered for online learning in the Eastern Cape in June 2024. Specialist training is also a part of the company's offering, such as their partnership with the SA Butchery Training School. Pullen adds, "The group's SUPERSPARS in Newton Park and Walmer in Gqeberha, for example, carry many plant-based and health-conscious food items. It stands to reason that staff need to be educated about these products so they can advise customers correctly."

Food Lover's Market offers leadership and development programmes that are central to

nurturing their conscious leadership culture. The programmes focus on developing leadership skills and include a four-day Leadership Training, Trainee Manager Development Programme, as well as their Leader as Coach Programme. The retailer also espouses a 'Same Faces, Higher Places' ethos, which aims to identify and develop talent from within the organisation, and is committed to empowering and upskilling their force.

They have also introduced a Tertiary Education Bursary Scheme aimed at supporting the educational aspirations of the children of their employees.

The company says, "Realising the importance of access to higher education, we launched this initiative to provide financial assistance to deserving recipients, covering university or college fees, tuition packs, residence fees and additional support for essential expenses such as food and transportation.

"Our commitment to closing the social mobility gap is reflected in our focus on supporting those children who may face barriers to accessing life's opportunities."



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## What retailers want training institutions to know

Additional training through accredited training programmes enables companies to enhance the skills of their workforce in alignment with their unique requirements, resulting in improved operational efficiency and superior service delivery. But programmes must be relevant and up to date. Retailers are looking to align academic curricula with the practical demands of the retail industry, including the effectiveness of work-integrated learning programmes and the development of essential soft skills.

As an example, the wholesale and retail sector uses many of the programmes and technologies that Dynamic DNA offers. These include IT programmes such as End User Computing (NQF Level 3), Technical Support (NQF Level 4), Systems Development (NQF Level 4), Software Testing in ICT (NQF Level 5), and Systems Support (NQF Level 5). They also offer relevant business programmes such as Business Administration Services. Dynamic DNA's Prudence Mathebula says, "These programmes are designed to equip learners with the practical skills essential for specific careers in retail, IT and business, offering a blend of theoretical instruction and hands-on experience in a real work setting."

There are notable skills gaps in the local market, and each has an impact on the retail and wholesale environment. Job readiness is perhaps one of the greatest challenges for young South Africans entering the workforce or looking to progress



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upwards. Retailers want to know if potential employees possess the specific skills required for immediate employment in the retail sector. They are also interested in whether graduates are equipped to adapt to the rapidly changing retail landscape, including new technologies and business models.

From digital literacy and the ability to leverage technology in areas such as e-commerce, data analytics and supply chain management, to work-integrated learning and practical experience, retailers want to understand how effectively higher education institutions (HEIs) are integrating practical work experience into their programmes. Industry partnerships are equally important, particularly for scarce skills and specialist or artisan training.



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## Scarce skills in retailing in South Africa

Technology, logistics and customer service skills are three areas where South African retailers and wholesalers face staffing challenges. Shortages in areas such as e-commerce, data analysis, cybersecurity and supply chain management have a palpable impact on business. Customer service managers, visual merchandisers and retail managers with specialised skills are also sought after skill sets.

Puratos's Kganakga says, "Ongoing training is essential; it ensures that employees remain current with industry trends, technological advancements and evolving customer expectations – and it fosters innovation and adaptability."

Other scarce skills in the FMCG retail sector include e-commerce specialists, data analysts, cybersecurity engineers, software engineers (especially with experience in languages like Golang and ReactJS), logistics and supply chain managers, project management (warehouse management systems), and AI and machine learning.

In addition to the benefit to society, ongoing training in the retail, wholesale and food and beverage sectors is good for business. Well-trained staff provide an improved customer experience, with better service leading to happier customers and increased loyalty. It's good for your brand, too, says Mathebula. "A dedication to employee development and growth enhances your company's reputation, making it more appealing to top talent, customers and investors." **SR**

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