

FROM THE SOURCE:



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Scott Phillips, Kmart

BY JUSTIN GREY

BIO: Scott Phillips

Hailing from Townsville in far north Queensland, Scott Phillips is a young executive at Kmart and has been earmarked as a potential future leader in the business. At the 2015 NRA Young Retailer Of The Year Awards, Scott won the Leadership Award for demonstrating strong leadership potential. Scott has just turned 25 and anticipates a long career in retail. He has held various roles with Kmart over the last nine years and is currently store manager at Kmart Helensvale on the Gold Coast.



Scott Phillips at the 2015 NRA Young Retailer Of The Year Awards.

Justin Grey: You got your first job in retail when you were 14 years old. Who was the employer and what was the role?

Scott Phillips: Fortunately, my Mum was the store manager at IGA Townsville and helped me secure my first retail position there, working in the produce department. I was eager to learn and develop my experience, so took on every opportunity to work additional shifts and take on new responsibilities.

JG: A lot of young people don't look to retail as a legitimate, long-term career path – they see it as something they do on a casual basis until they finish school and start their actual career. Is this something you had to consider when deciding on what you wanted to do for your career?

SP: Definitely! Retail was always just something I did until I got a 'real job'. While in high school I was always more focused on sport than my academic results, and consequently I left school with little to no idea what I was going to do with my career. When I moved to Brisbane with my parents at 18 years, I secured a full-time role at Kmart Browns Plains. During my time there, I studied fitness, working weekends and evenings as a personal trainer. Six months in with Kmart Australia, I was given the role of duty manager and assisting the weekend team. From this point onwards I developed a real hunger to be a retail leader.

JG: Do you feel there's sufficient support out there – from colleagues, parents, career advisers, employers – for young people who decide they legitimately want to make a career out of retail? If not, what more could be done?

SP: I believe there is negative stigma around pursuing a career in retail. People often treat it as a lesser field to work in, and in turn are less confident to pursue it as an option. Fortunately though, I have received overwhelming support from the people I have around me and feel extremely privileged for the opportunities that Kmart Australia has given me. Kmart Australia has a number of programs in place to develop leadership skills and for personal growth. People are generally very surprised when I talk to them about the scope of my role and ever-evolving opportunities available at Kmart Australia.

JG: How long have you been with Kmart for and how do you feel you have progressed as a young retail executive over that time?

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SP: Collectively I have been with Kmart Australia for around nine years. I have made significant progression over this time, both personally and professionally. I was 18 years old when I first applied for a leadership role and many people didn't believe I was capable of upholding those types of responsibilities at such a young age. This only drove my hunger to succeed, and three years later I was managing the Kmart Armidale store as the youngest store manager in the business, all shortly before my 23rd birthday. I have progressed through many different stores since my time at Armidale, moving into a higher trading store each time and picking up opportunities to work on new projects.

JG: What various roles have you had within the company over that time?

SP: I began my journey with Kmart Australia as a junior casual and then progressed



through to a full-time team member, store layout coordinator, duty manager, trainee manager, general merchandise manager, stock inventory manager, before ultimately being appointed as a store manager. Holding such a variety of roles has allowed me to build an intricate understanding of all aspects of the Kmart business model, which has benefited me greatly.

JG: You recently moved from managing the newly opened Kmart store at Oxenford to managing Kmart Helensvale. What prompted that move?

SP: Opening Oxenford was an incredible experience and without a doubt the highlight of my career. The transformation started from a patch of dirt to a 6000sqm retail store that we built from the ground up. Shortly after Christmas, there was a vacancy at the Kmart Helensvale store and I jumped on the opportunity to move and manage this store. Helensvale is one of the highest trading stores within our business and this opportunity was a challenge I couldn't let pass.

JG: What responsibilities sit on your shoulders in your current role at Kmart?

SP: In my current role as a store manager, I lead a team of over 200 team members, with five direct reports. This includes overseeing the entire end to end operation of the store, while positively influencing culture through great leadership and maintaining a safe working environment for all my direct reports. I consistently display positive values and behaviours and at all times demonstrate a high level of integrity, striving to create a high performing team by coaching and mentoring others, identifying strengths and managing performance issues as needed. This requires a high level of communication,

tailored to the target audience, while actively keeping my team motivated and energised. I analyse financial and point of sales margin reports, identifying areas of growth and opportunity within the business. I network with internal and external stakeholders, providing meaningful feedback to continually support the growth of the business. As a high volume retailer with a continually evolving low cost model, I have to be responsive and adaptive to change, with the ability to manage multiple priorities. I have a demonstrated ability to effectively champion innovation, developing ideas through fostering, persuading and applying different ways of thinking.

JG: Managing a department store is no small task. What are some of the key challenges you're dealing with in running a store at such a young age?

SP: One of the biggest challenges I have found personally in leading a store at such a young age, would be the people piece. Having been with the company for a significant period of time, I have a profound understanding of the business operation model, strategy and processes that continue to drive the success of our brand overall.

Leading such a large team brings great diversity. This at times has challenged my skillset around how I continue to lead, motivate and manage performance of my team consistently at all levels and is something I'm constantly working on to ensure I can be successful in my role.

JG: What sort of things has your employer done to support and contribute to your ambitions to further your career as a retail executive?

SP: Kmart Australia has been extremely

supportive of my ambitions. I feel privileged to work for a company that values their people and internal succession. I have been involved in numerous projects over the last few years that actively contributed to my ambitions to grow as a retail leader within the company. This includes taking part in the Store Leadership Development Program (SLDP), facilitating full-day training sessions with groups of up to 15 new and existing managers within the business, and travelling interstate to participate in workshops aimed at reviewing and refining processes across the business.

JG: *Do you see yourself staying in retail for your full professional life?*

SP: I thoroughly enjoy the challenges associated with working in the retail environment and can't see myself deviating from this in the foreseeable future. The retail sector is continually evolving and each individual retailer is unique in their own way. This allows a significant opportunity to continually challenge and expand your capabilities.

“It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the role – but it's important to be humble throughout your journey.”

JG: *What is the career trajectory for you from here? Eventually you will outgrow store manager roles – what do you see coming after that?*

SP: My current role as a store manager still has a lot to offer me in terms of growing my



leadership capability. I am really focused on building a strong foundation for my future and don't want to, “run before I can walk”, as they say. The next step for me would be a multisite role within Kmart Australia, which would see me accountable for 10 or more stores, with 60 plus managers and over 1,500 team members. This is something I am actively working towards and look forward to achieving in the future.

JG: *What are some of the key challenges in being a young leader in retail?*

SP: Being a young leader in retail definitely comes with some challenges. Firstly, I think age-related scepticism is something young leaders will face. It's important to reflect on what you were hired to do and continue to deliver great results. If you have the talent, skills and desire to accomplish your goals, you can, regardless of your age. Demonstrating humility is often another challenge associated with being a young retail leader. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the role – but it's important to be humble throughout your journey.

JG: *What new perspective do you feel a younger person like yourself can bring to retail leadership?*

SP: I think young retail leaders can add substantial benefits to any organisation. Young retail leaders are rarely set in their ways - they are open and adaptable to change and different ways of thinking. They challenge the status quo and are continually looking for ways to enhance to operations.

JG: *Do you have any mentor-type figures in the industry who you look up to and who may help guide you as a leader?*

SP: I feel incredibly fortunate to have met some phenomenal and well-rounded retail leaders who I would consider mentors and who are my ‘go-to’ when I need validation or advice. Peter Newland was my first manager at Kmart Australia and Jeff Wilson, my zone manager, are two people that have had significant contributions to shaping the leader I am today. I recently begun working with Catherine Van Der Meulen after winning a mentor program through the National Retail Association late last year, and she has already challenged my thinking and provided great support and guidance. If I had one piece of advice for anyone who is an up and coming young retailer, finding a mentor will be invaluable to your growth and development.

JG: *What are your plans for 2016 in terms of your ongoing development as young retailer leader?*

SP: I have a robust development plan established for 2016 to really take my capabilities as a retail leader to the next level. The move to Kmart Helensvale will be a huge benefit to my development as this requires a high level of leadership to deliver great outcomes.

Also, I am hoping to participate in the 2016 Westfield Retail Study Tour held in May, an intense and accelerated learning program. I will continue to be a part of the Kmart Store Leadership Development Program.

