

Get paid to shop!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Personal
Shopper**



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1. Introduction

As a personal shopper you will have a career that other people envy – getting paid to shop.

Shopping is North America's number-one hobby. When people aren't at work or home, their favorite place to be is the shopping mall. When they go on vacation, their preferred activity is shopping – even visitors to Las Vegas prefer shopping to gambling!

Many of us grew up with a love of shopping. A survey by Kurt Salmon Associates, a leading consulting firm to the retail industry, found that 88 percent of girls age 13 to 17 say they love shopping. We hear adults say they are “born to shop,” “shop ‘til you drop,” and “when the going gets tough, the tough go shopping.”

So if people love to shop so much, why do they need to hire personal shoppers? Because by the time most of us reach adulthood, we no longer have time to do everything we want to do. A March 2005 study by the Families and Work Institute reported that one in three American

employees was chronically overworked, while 54 percent had felt overwhelmed at some time in the past month by how much work they had to complete.

People have less time for leisure, including shopping for clothing, gifts or even food. With the growing demands on their time, busy people are increasingly turning to personal shoppers. As a result, there are more opportunities than ever before to turn your love of shopping into a career.

You will discover how to get started and succeed in this fabulous career in this guide, the *FabJob Guide to Become a Personal Shopper*. This chapter lays the foundation for the rest of the guide. In the pages that follow, you will learn about the profession of personal shopping, different job titles that are commonly used, the many benefits of the career, and the steps to getting started.

1.1 Personal Shopping as a Profession

1.1.1 What Personal Shoppers Buy

A personal shopper is, simply, someone hired to shop for other people. While some personal shoppers specialize in a particular area, others may shop for virtually any product or service their clients want.

Many clients use personal shoppers when they spend the most money, typically during the winter holidays. According to 2008 data from the National Retail Federation, the top holiday gift desires among those surveyed (in order of most desired) were:

- Clothing and accessories
- Books, CDs, DVDs, video games
- Gift cards
- Toys
- Consumer electronics
- Personal care/beauty items
- Jewelry

As a personal shopper you could be hired to shop for any of these products – or any others that someone wants to give as Christmas or holiday gifts. However, while the December holiday season is a particularly busy time for personal shoppers, people need to buy things all year long.

One of the most popular specializations for personal shoppers is women's fashion. Personal shoppers are hired by all types of people from busy executives to working moms to help them look fabulous. Here is how *New York Magazine* described the work of personal shoppers in a 2001 "Best of New York" feature:

"...it's time to hit the stores, where they pick out things you would never see, like a Prada-esque suit on sale for \$150, or a top that, combined with your old black pants, will make a very current, chic little outfit."

These days, few people have the time they need to research markets, both brick and online, that offer an incredible number of things to choose from as corporate gifts or personal purchases. Add to that the fact that many people do not trust their own taste, and you have a ready-made population of potential clients ready for your help.

But personal shoppers are not only hired by individuals. A very lucrative specialty for some personal shoppers is buying gifts for corporate clients to give to their customers or employees.

Do you remember the famous shopping scene in the movie *Pretty Woman*? Julia Roberts' character needed a formal evening outfit for her date with Richard Gere's character. She went into a Beverly Hills boutique in her "working girl" clothes (too-short skirt, too-shiny boots, too-skimpy top, too-big hair) and almost got handed over to the police. It turned out all right in the end, but she certainly could have used the advice and assistance of a personal shopper.

If you work as a personal shopper for a retailer, most of your clients are likely to be wealthy and professional, but a few of your clients may need as much help as Julia Roberts' character. Just imagine how fun and rewarding it would be to help them look fabulous.

1.1.2 Who They Work For

Shopping careers offer two main options, both of which are covered in this guide: running your own business catering to various people or businesses; and working for a single large retailer or specialty boutique.

Working for Your Own Clients

Starting your own personal shopping business gives you the freedom and challenge of working with a variety of clients. In addition to clients who are too busy to shop for themselves, personal shoppers are also hired by people who are overwhelmed with the selection when it comes to making purchases, and want an expert to do their shopping for them. You may also work for clients who are physically unable to shop, and tourists unfamiliar with the shopping options available.

Depending on what each client needs, you may be hired to buy a whole wardrobe, or a single special item. Here are some possibilities:

- Being hired by busy executives to buy their gifts for the holidays
- Taking care of shopping for senior citizens and others who find it difficult to get around
- Shopping for high-end clothing, furniture, food, and other items for wealthy families
- Finding the perfect gift baskets or promotional items for a company to give to its important clients
- Purchasing all the new appliances and home furnishings for a client's newly built home, from storage to stereos

You will consult with clients about what they need and how much they want to spend, then you will make recommendations, find stores and companies that supply what your clients want, do the shopping and, if necessary, arrange for gift-wrapping or shipping. For your regular clients, you will keep track of their preferences and sizes, and remind them of special occasions when they will need gifts.

Chapter 3 has more information about the various tasks involved in personal shopping.

Working for a Company

If you prefer the security that comes with being an employee, consider working as a personal shopper for a company.

The retail industry is far ahead of any other industry in terms of sheer numbers of jobs for personal shoppers who want a steady paycheck. Most of these positions are with upscale stores. Among the many retailers that employ personal shoppers are: Bloomingdale's, Holt Renfrew, Macy's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Tiffany & Co. There are also many boutiques and other retailers throughout North America that offer personal shopping services to their customers.

Susan Olden, vice president and director of Fifth Avenue Clubs for Saks Fifth Avenue, and a 34-year veteran in the retail business, concurs. While Saks doesn't release exact numbers, we do employ personal shoppers in 46 of our stores and there are lots of jobs out there," she says.

Although the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics doesn't offer employment projections for personal shoppers, they do predict that jobs for retail salespersons (a starting point for many would-be personal shoppers) will increase 12 percent between 2006 and 2016.

As a personal shopper for a retailer, your clients are the store's customers. You will establish relationships with them and keep track of their important dates (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.).

Whenever they need something, you will shop within your own store to find the perfect item – such as a gift, a business outfit, or an accessory for their home – then coordinate everything involved in the purchase, including any alterations, gift wrapping, and delivery.

Unlike a straight sales position, you are not expected to staff cash registers and make yourself available on the floor to serve customers. You are expected to communicate with customers and to make every effort to set up appointments convenient for them.

Working for a retailer is such a fabulous job that some personal shoppers stay in the position for many years. An example is Betty Halbreich, who was Bergdorf Goodman's personal shopper for over 20 years, helping celebrities, executives, and other clients find the perfect outfits.

1.1.3 Benefits of a Career in Personal Shopping

There are many reasons why personal shopping is an excellent career choice. The benefits of a personal shopping career include:

No Formal Education Is Necessary

While many personal shoppers have related training or education, generally no degree is required to become a personal shopper. No special education, experience, or connections are needed to get started and succeed. (In this guide we will show you how to get experience, and explain how to make connections.)

Low Cost to Get Started

Unlike other occupations that can cost thousands of dollars to enter, you can become a personal shopper no matter what your current financial situation is. You can even start your own personal shopping business at home with few or no upfront expenses. If you have access to transportation, a computer, and a phone – you have all you need to get started.



High Income Potential

If you start your own personal shopping business you can earn up to \$50 or more per hour, depending on your location and clientele. Some of the personal shoppers you'll read about in this guide earn \$500 or more per day. If you are a personal shopper working for a large department store, your base pay may be supplemented or fully comprised of commission on sales. The more (and more expensive items) you sell, the more you make.

Opportunity to Build Good Relationships

Becoming a personal shopper gives you the opportunity to build good relationships with your clients and with your vendors. You'll get thank-you notes and calls (of course, you have to give those as well), and some of your relationships may turn into friendships.

Flexible Schedule

Personal shoppers work by appointment. Although they must be available when the busy people who use their services can fit them in (e.g. lunch times or either very early or very late in the day), they can often develop a schedule with a great deal of latitude.

If you start your own personal shopper service, you will have even greater leeway to set your own hours and days of work. While you may decide to sometimes work evening or weekend hours to accommodate clients, you can take "time off" whenever you want.

Make a Difference in People's Lives

Few other jobs allow you to constantly create win-win-win situations. Your clients win, the organizations you shop with win, and you win. Winning is not, however, the only name of this game – joy might be a better term. As a personal shopper, you'll create joy for all the clients you serve.

Remember how it felt the last time a recipient of a gift from you got that look of total pleasure on their face? It was one of the most gratifying experiences on earth, for you and for them. As a personal shopper,

you'll have the chance to recreate that experience over and over again all year long.

A Typical Day For a Personal Shopper

A personal shopper's day might begin with an early meeting with department store buyers to find out what is coming in for the new season. Then the shopper would check phone messages and attend to anything that came up in those messages. She might:

- Have a coffee meeting with a client who is interested in having her help him purchase an engagement ring
- Confirm for a client that her new business suit's alterations have been done
- Call two or three clients to let them know their favorite cosmetic company is hosting a seminar at their boutique on Saturday morning they may want to attend
- Send a thank-you note to a client who has given her a referral that turned into more business
- Spend an hour in a shoe store looking over its new seasonal stock, and taking notes
- Work with an up-and-coming fashion designer to arrange an exclusive showing of the designer's new line (called a trunk show) for the shopper's client base

As you can see, personal shoppers have busy but varied days. Often the nature of their work depends on their own interests. Even within a retail employment setting, personal shoppers have a great deal of leeway to create their own job.

If a personal shopper has a particular interest in event planning, she can offer to get more involved with the marketing or publicity department in planning such things as fashion shows. If her interest is in fashion education, she may be able to convince her employer to help her set up a series of seminars at the local high school. Later in this guide you will find many ideas of exciting activities you can do as part of your career.

Interesting Job with Opportunities to Learn

One thing you won't be as a personal shopper is bored. You'll be constantly learning about trends and what's coming onto the market in the near future. You'll get to know all items carried by retailers in your area.

More than that, you'll get to know what accessories go with what outfits, or what add-on pieces of home décor go with which bedroom suite and so on. Even if you'll work for one particular store, you've also got to know what competing stores offer, and why your products and services are better for your clients.

Opportunity for Advancement

While personal shopping is itself a dream career, it can also be a stepping-stone to another fabulous job. Once you're a successful personal shopper, many avenues for branching out will present themselves. You are only limited by your own imagination and desire.

For example, if your specialty is purchasing home furnishings, you may find yourself interested in becoming certified as an interior decorator. A single corporate gift-buying job could lead to full-time work within that corporation. Many personal shoppers expand their businesses to include errand-running or image consulting services. It's even possible that you could get hired exclusively by a celebrity to make all his or her purchases, from outfits for public appearances, to pool equipment, to PDAs.

1.2 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Personal Shopper* is arranged to take you step-by-step through getting started and succeeding as a personal shopper. These steps, and the chapters they appear in, are as follows:

Chapter 2, *Getting Ready*, covers important preliminary steps to prepare you for becoming a personal shopper. Here you will discover the skills employers and clients are looking for, and the best ways to develop your skills and learn personal shopping.

Chapter 3 offers advice on *How to Be a Personal Shopper*. This chapter explains the steps involved in personal shopping and how to do them. It also explains how to find and choose vendors (companies that supply products and services).

Chapter 4 focuses on *Getting Hired*. If you want the security of a full-time job, this chapter will give you information to help you get that job. You will discover who hires personal shoppers, how to find job openings, how to prepare a resume, and how to do well in an interview.

When you're ready to *Start Your Own Business*, you will find some good advice in Chapter 5. You will find practical information on setting up your office and getting ready to open for business, including setting your fees. In Chapter 6, you will discover practical tips for *Getting Clients*.

The guide includes many insider tips generously shared by successful personal shoppers. You will also read about the experiences of a variety of personal shoppers, including the success story of a woman who has shopped for a princess, a personal shopping business that charges hundreds of dollars an hour, and a personal shopper who is paid \$1,500 per day to take clients on shopping trips to Paris.

By applying the information in this guide you will be well on your way to your own fab job as a Personal Shopper!