



THE FASHION BUSINESS  
**Drapers**

## Who do you need in your retail dream team?

By Emily Sutherland

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*Drapers imagines the perfect top team for retailers*

Last week, **Boden** became the latest retailer to shake up its senior leadership team, after CEO **Jill Easterbrook announced plans to step down at the end of the year.**

On her departure, Paul O’Leary – currently Boden’s CFO – will become chief operating officer. Julian Granville will continue in his role as executive chairman. Boden also appointed its first chief technology officer in March, to support its online growth.

The industry is changing quickly, and it is more important than ever to recruit well for the core C-suite functions of finance, marketing, HR and creative direction – not to mention find a CEO with the ability to inspire.

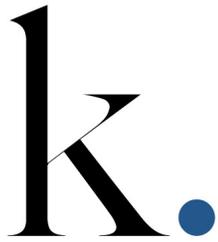
Drapers asks the experts what the ideal skills mix would be to lead fashion retail teams through turbulent economic conditions, and meet ever-increasing customer expectations.

### The all-round leader

A perfect retail chief executive or managing director should be something of a conductor, able to keep their team working together in perfect harmony even when the pressure is on.

Retail adviser Andrew Jennings, who has led businesses including **House of Fraser**, Saks Fifth Avenue and Brown Thomas, explains: “If you want to move a business from good to great, you need an inspirational leader. The leader provides the inspiration, and it is the job of senior management to make sure their plan is ruthlessly implemented.”

Caroline Pill, vice-president at headhunter at Kirk Palmer Associates, argues: “You need someone who can orchestrate rather than someone who is particularly specialised in one field. Understanding the bigger picture, as opposed to looking for short-term wins is key. A



good leader needs the perfect balance of strategic vision, ability to motivate their teams, understanding of logistics, supply chains and technology, and knowing who to hire.”

Although retail leaders traditionally stem from a finance background, increasingly an entrepreneurial mindset and a willingness to hear new ideas make the ideal retailer leader.

“You need someone who can come in and not just do things the way they have always been done – someone who will look at issues from a different standpoint,” argues Richard Hollister, founder and managing director of search firm Retail Executives.

### **The human resources hotshot**

Industry experts Drapers spoke to for this piece were in agreement: retailers need to arm themselves with a top-notch human resources boss.

“When I was a chief executive, the two roles I kept closest to me were the finance director and the HR director,” explains Julia Reynolds, chair of childrenswear brand Frugi and former CEO at lingerie retailer Figleaves. “A good HR chief doesn’t just make sure appraisal forms get filled in: it is about developing people, creating tools to help people progress and coaching the leadership team.”

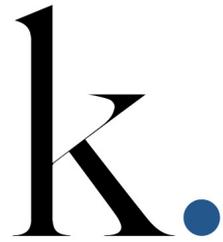
Maria Hvorostovsky, founder and managing director of HVO Search, is equally emphatic: “A really good human resources person has a massive impact on a business, and they are not given enough credit for what they do. They need to really understand people, succession and planning, as well as being a businessperson first and foremost.”

Dave Mann, director at recruitment firm Michael Page, agrees that retailers need to ensure they have a human resources hotshot on their top team, particularly as the changing retail landscape means teams across a variety of different functions are being redrawn. Redundancies and restructurings are rife across retail, making good human resources skills even more of a necessity.

“Retailers need a really heavy-hitting human resources director because of all the changes the industry is going through. This is somewhere you need someone with expertise and really strong experience. It is not a place to take a punt on someone untested.”

### **The marketing maestro**

Retail marketing is completely changing, and so are the requirements for an exemplary chief marketing officer. This role needs a complex tool kit of skills, from the ability to influence key stakeholders to a cross functional approach.



“You need someone who understands the customer and the new ways of approaching marketing: everything from understanding data to interpreting trends,” adds Hvorostovsky. “They need to understand how all the different business functions work, from product to technology to finance, and translate marketing campaigns into tangible key performance indicators.”

Today’s fashion consumers are more concerned with social and environmental causes, which is changing the role of marketing officers, she adds.

“Customers now expect brands to stand for something: it isn’t just about the product. They care about the values of a business and the story of the business, and it is the chief marketing officer’s job to make sure these values are being translated into every single fibre of the business.”

Reynolds adds that hiring a good marketing director can be like “finding hen’s teeth”: “You need someone who can bash the data and think creatively with a very open mind, and that’s rare. They need to have their finger on what’s new and be able to adapt very quickly. Finding someone with the right skillset can be very difficult.”

### **The customer champion**

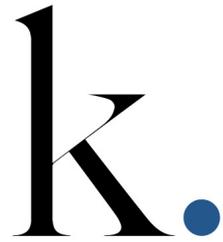
A relatively new role in a retailer’s arsenal, a chief customer officer is the eyes and ears of the customer within a head office.

“Chief customer officers often have a marketing background. They are in charge of brand engagement, and it is their job to champion the customer,” explains Fran Minogue, managing partner at Clarity Search. “They own insight, they are the guardian of the customer and they educate the rest of the business about the customer.”

She argues businesses need someone who can keep up with the retail industry’s pedal-to-the-floor rate of change.

“The retail industry is changing so fast that the nature of leadership roles is also changing very quickly,” she explains. “There is a shortage of really great senior roles that have the ability to be forward looking but also bring organisational experience with them.”

Kirk Palmer Associates’ Pill adds: “This is someone who can focus on the customer journey at all the key touch points and always has the customer’s perspective in mind. You need someone efficient, someone open minded and who has plenty of experience across different operating models. Flexibility and the ability to be reactive are also paramount.”



### **The product person**

As Jennings puts it, “in fashion, the creative force is critical”. A crack top team is nothing without a visionary product person who can make your offer distinct from the rest of the market.

“The creative director is the radar for the business and knows exactly what the customer is looking for,” Jennings continues. “You’ve got to stand out from the pack. Look at what **Christopher Bailey** did for **Burberry**: he took it from a trench coat brand to a fashion force.”

He adds, however, that a good product chief has to marry vision with good commercial sense: “When a brand has the right creative person, it is magnetic. But the right person is also commercial and understands what the customer wants to buy – and for what price.”

Reynolds agrees: “There needs to be a creative person at the forefront of the business, and they probably have one of the most difficult roles. They need to embrace change and be a team player. You can’t do this job by yourself. Being robust is key. This is a role with some big highs and lows.”

### **The finance force**

Given increasingly tough times on the high street, retailers need to make sure there is someone making sure the numbers stack up.

“A chief finance officer needs the technical skills, but, more importantly, they need to not just be a bean counter,” explains James Hyde, director at FH Executive Search.

“They need to understand the commercial aspect of the business, people and make unpalatable decisions, as well as be brave and invest for the future. Most importantly, though, they need to be the perfect foil for the CEO.