



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Retail Gets Real: How Coach Puts the Consumer at the Center of Brand Growth

About NRF Foundation RISE Up

RISE Up is the NRF Foundation's training and credentialing program that helps students and job seekers build foundational workplace skills for careers in retail and beyond. RISE Up focuses on communication, teamwork, customer service, professionalism, problem-solving, and workplace readiness through industry-recognized credentials and real-world learning experiences.

Classroom activities help students apply RISE Up concepts through structured exercises that reinforce learning and support exam readiness.

RISE Up Skill Connections

This classroom activity supports skills related to:

- Communication and active listening
- Customer service and customer experience
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Leadership and professionalism
- Adaptability and continuous learning
- Understanding customer needs and behaviors
- Technology in the workplace
- Retail industry knowledge and trends

Benefits of RISE Up

- Employability skills needed to land jobs and get promoted in retail
- Flexible delivery options (classroom, online, or blended)
- Scenario-based learning using realistic retail situations
- Hands-on activities that allow learners to practice skills in a safe environment

Purpose of the Classroom Activity

This classroom activity allows students to explore how retailers use consumer insights to better understand their customers, strengthen relationships, and drive business growth. Through a conversation between Bill Thorne, NRF SVP, Communications and Public Affairs, and Jennifer Yue, Senior Vice President of Strategy and Consumer Insights at Coach and Tapestry, students will examine how data, observation, and innovation influence business decisions and customer experiences.

This activity helps students connect consumer behavior and business strategy to real-world retail careers and workplace skills.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

- Explain how retailers gather and use consumer insights.
- Identify examples of how Coach uses consumer insights to better serve customers.
- Describe the role data and innovation play in business growth.
- Analyze how understanding consumer behavior helps retailers make business decisions.
- Connect concepts from the podcast to careers in retail, marketing, and consumer insights.

Suggested Course Connection

This classroom activity could be used in:

- Marketing
- Business Foundations
- Entrepreneurship

- Fashion Design & Interior Design
- Career Exploration
- Consumer Sciences
- Retail & Hospitality Pathways
- School-Based Enterprise Programs
- DECA or BPA preparation activities

Instructor Pre-Work

Students should have started a RISE Up course and have prior exposure to the following sections (or equivalent content):

- Understanding customer needs and consumer behavior
- Communication and active listening skills
- Teamwork and collaboration in the workplace
- Customer service and relationship building
- Marketing concepts and target customers

Optional extension topics:

- Consumer insights and market research
- Gen Z consumer behavior and shopping trends
- Artificial intelligence and technology in retail
- Brand strategy and customer experience

Before class:

- Decide whether students will complete the activity as a class, in groups of 3–4 students, with a partner, or individually.
- If using groups, decide whether to assign groups in advance or allow students to select their group members.
- Determine whether all students will listen to the full podcast or whether each group will be assigned to one of the four sections.
- Determine how students will share their responses, such as through a written response, discussion, or presentation.
- Prepare access to the Retail Gets Real podcast and test the audio, internet connection, and classroom technology.
- Review the podcast questions and instructor answer key.

Instructor Tip

Consider pausing the podcast at the end of each section to review key takeaways, address questions, or allow students time to discuss their responses before moving on.

Time Needed

- 60–90 minutes, depending on whether students complete the activity independently or participate in group discussion and extension activities.

Materials Needed

- Printed or digital classroom activity
- Internet access to play the Retail Gets Real Podcast
- Pens or pencils (optional)
- Markers or presentation materials (optional)

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Introduce the purpose of the activity and review the learning objectives.
2. Review key vocabulary and activate prior knowledge about customer needs, consumer behavior, and customer experience.
3. Open the Retail Gets Real podcast and explain that it is divided into four sections.
4. Have students listen to the podcast and answer the questions for each section. Pause after each section as needed.
5. Ask students to compare responses with a partner, group, or the class.
6. Facilitate a discussion about how Coach uses consumer insights, data, observation, and technology to support business decisions.
7. Have students complete the reflection questions and connect the podcast concepts to retail careers and workplace skills.
8. If time allows, assign one optional extension activity.

Optional Extension Activities

- Consumer Observation Study: Observe an in-store or online shopping experience and identify three ways the retailer responds to customer needs.
- Gen Z Shopping Trends Analysis: Research one Gen Z shopping trend and explain how it could influence a retailer's decisions.
- AI in Retail: Research one way a retailer uses AI and describe one benefit and one potential challenge.
- Retail Career Connection: Research a career in consumer insights, marketing, strategy, data analytics, or customer experience and create a brief career profile.

Links & Resources

- Retail Gets Real: How Coach Puts the Consumer at the Center of Brand Growth: <https://nrf.com/podcast/how-coach-puts-the-consumer-at-the-center-of-brand-growth>
- RISE Up Portal: <https://riseup.kaleidolearning.com/>
- RISE Up Help Center: <https://docs.kaleidolearning.com/RISEUpSupport/index.html>
- NRF Foundation: <https://nrffoundation.org/>

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Retail Gets Real: How Coach Puts the Consumer at the Center of Brand Growth

Objectives

By the end of this activity, you will be able to:

- Identify how Coach gathers and uses consumer insights.
- Describe how data, observation, and customer feedback support business decisions.
- Analyze how consumer behavior influences retail products and experiences.
- Explain how AI and technology are shaping retail.
- Connect ideas from the podcast to retail careers and workplace skills.

Background

Coach is one of the world's best-known luxury brands. In this Retail Gets Real podcast episode, Jennifer Yue, Senior Vice President of Strategy and Consumer Insights at Coach and Tapestry, discusses how Coach puts consumers at the center of decision-making. The conversation explores how retailers learn from customers, use data and direct observation, respond to Gen Z shopping behaviors, create meaningful store experiences, and balance technology with human connection.



Activity

Listen to the NRF Retail Gets Real podcast: How Coach Puts the Consumer at the Center of Brand Growth.

Then answer the questions for each section of the podcast. Be prepared to discuss or present your responses.

Student Directions

1. Open the [NRF Retail Gets Real podcast, How Coach Puts the Consumer at the Center of Brand Growth](#).
2. Review the vocabulary words before listening.
3. Listen carefully to each section of the podcast and take notes on key examples and ideas.
4. Answer each question using complete sentences and evidence from the podcast.
5. Complete the reflection questions.
6. Be prepared to share one key takeaway with the class.

Podcast Format

A 23-minute podcast with four sections that cover the following:

Section 1: Understanding the Consumer

(Approx. 0:00–7:58)

- Jennifer Yue shares her career journey and explains why listening to consumers is critical to business success. Students will learn how Coach studies customers and noncustomers, and how consumer insights help drive brand growth.

Section 2: From Insights to Action

(Approx. 7:58–14:22)

- Learn how Coach combines data and direct consumer experiences to make business decisions. Students will explore how consumer

understanding helps teams work together to create products and experiences that meet customer needs.

Section 3: The Changing Role of Retail (Approx. 14:22–18:44)

- Explore why physical stores continue to matter in a digital world and how retailers are creating meaningful experiences, connections and communities for consumers.

Section 4: The Future of Retail and Leadership (Approx. 18:44–23:00)

- Discover how AI and technology are shaping retail while human connection remains essential. Jennifer Yue also shares leadership lessons about curiosity, teamwork, and adapting to change.

Vocabulary Words

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Technology that enables computers to perform tasks that usually require human intelligence.

Authenticity: Being genuine, honest, and true to a brand's values.

Brand Purpose: A company's reason for existing beyond making a profit.

Consumer Insight: Information about customer behaviors, preferences, and needs that helps a business make decisions.

Consumer Obsession: A strong commitment to understanding customers and putting their needs at the center of business decisions.

Customer Experience: A customer's overall impression of and interactions with a brand.

Gen Z: The generation generally born from the late 1990s through the early 2010s.

Personalization: Providing products, services, or experiences tailored to an individual customer's preferences.

Questions

Section 1: Understanding the Consumer (Approx. 0:00–7:58)

1. How does Coach learn about its customers today?

2. Why does Jennifer Yue believe observing consumers is important?
3. What can retailers learn from talking to customers that they might not learn from data alone?
4. Why should a company try to learn about people who are not yet customers?

Section 2: From Insights to Action (Approx. 7:58–14:22)

1. Why does Coach encourage its leaders to spend time with customers and learn about their experiences?
2. How can firsthand experiences help teams make better decisions?
3. How does Coach combine data and consumer experiences to better understand customers?
4. How does putting customers first help Coach grow its business?

Section 3: The Changing Role of Retail (Approx. 14:22–18:44)

1. Why are physical stores still important?
2. How are younger consumers changing the role of retail stores?
3. How can retailers build a sense of community?
4. Why are real-world experiences still important in a digital world?

Section 4: The Future of Retail and Leadership (Approx. 18:44–23:00)

1. How does AI help create personalized shopping experiences?
2. Why can't technology completely replace human connection?
3. According to Jennifer Yue, what will retailers need to do to succeed in the future?
4. Why does Jennifer Yue believe curiosity is an important leadership skill?

Reflection Questions

1. What was the most important idea you learned about consumer insights, and why?
2. Which example from the podcast best showed how customer understanding can influence a business decision?
3. How can retailers balance technology with human connection?
4. Which skill discussed in the podcast, such as curiosity, teamwork, active listening, or adaptability, is most important for your future career? Explain your answer.

Optional Challenge: Apply Your Learning

Choose a retailer and identify one customer need or shopping trend that may affect its business. Recommend one action the retailer could take and explain how consumer insights could support your recommendation.

Answer Key (*Sample Responses*)

Section 1

1. Coach shifted from relying primarily on data and surveys to direct consumer observation and immersion.
2. Observation reveals emotional motivations that data alone may miss.
3. Direct engagement provides a deeper human understanding of customers.
4. Growth often comes from understanding future customers, not only current ones.

Section 2

1. To create shared understanding across departments and build empathy for consumers.
2. They challenge assumptions and improve decision-making.
3. By combining data with direct consumer experiences and observations.
4. It aligns teams around customer needs and creates better consumer experiences.

Section 3

1. Stores provide connection, trust, and community.
2. Younger consumers view stores as places for experiences and interaction, not just transactions.
3. Through events, engagement and relationship-building.
4. They help create stronger customer relationships and memorable experiences.

Section 4

1. Through personalized recommendations and digital experiences.
2. Human connection remains important for building trust, relationships, and community.
3. Retailers must balance technology with meaningful customer experiences.
4. Curiosity helps leaders learn, adapt, and discover new opportunities.