



# Constructing a Foundation for the LP Profession

By James Lee, Executive Editor

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Gene Smith is president of The Loss Prevention Foundation, a not-for-profit organization charged with administering the retail loss prevention industry's certification programs. Prior to joining the Foundation, he spent fifteen years with the executive search and consulting firm, Downing & Downing, leaving as president in 2007. Early in his career, Smith held various loss prevention management positions with Federated Department Stores, Consumers Catalog Showrooms, Revco Drug Stores, and Montgomery Ward.*

*Smith has been recognized as a distinguished alumnus of Eastern Kentucky University for his service in the area of loss prevention and security. He is a member of the Academy of Criminal Justice Science, Alpha Phi Sigma, Loss Prevention Research Council, ASIS International, and serves on the advisory committee of the National Shoplifting Prevention Coalition. Smith is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and a regular contributor to LossPrevention magazine.*

**EDITOR:** Start by telling us the mission of The Loss Prevention Foundation.

**SMITH:** Our mission is to advance the loss prevention profession by providing relevant, convenient, and challenging educational resources. We support this mission through our two certification programs, LPQualified (LPQ) and LPCertified (LPC), and by our professional membership program that offers on-line educational resources. Basically, we're here to provide LP professionals the tools and assistance to advance their careers in the loss prevention industry.

**EDITOR:** How is the Foundation structured?

**SMITH:** The Foundation is a not-for-profit 501(c)(6) organization that was founded in 2006 specifically to manage the development of the certification programs. The Foundation staff reports to a board of directors made up of twenty-one senior retail executives and seven solution providers. The board represents just about every segment of retail, including discount, department store, specialty, drug store, automotive, grocery, electronics, and home improvement. The board governs our day-to-day operations, approves the strategic business plan, and conducts two meetings per year where all Foundation business is reviewed and approved in detail. Members of the board also serve on all of the ten committees that do much of the Foundation work. [See sidebar page 33 for a list of the Foundation board of directors.]

**EDITOR:** You mention the Foundation is a not-for-profit organization. Why is that important?

**SMITH:** We wanted our mission and motives to be very clear to the entire industry. The

board wanted to establish the Foundation to represent all loss prevention professionals, all solution providers, and partner with all retail trade associations. All revenues over and above a reserve amount must be reinvested back into building a better organization for the membership. As a not-for-profit we are subject to a yearly independent external audit to ensure that we are meeting our fiduciary requirements as set out by the board and the federal government.

**EDITOR:** The Foundation has two certifications, LPQ and LPC. What are the differences and why two?

**SMITH:** When the board looked at the industry, they saw an educational need at two levels in a person's professional growth—one at the very beginning of one's career and the second as someone moves into middle and upper management.

Therefore, the LPQualified was designed to be a benchmark education for entry-level loss prevention professionals, such as store-level LP managers and supervisors, select hourly LP personnel, and other retail employees who might want to move from the sales floor or operations into LP. Also, it is intended to give baseline LP knowledge to someone outside of retail, such as college students, military, and law enforcement, who is interested in entering the LP profession.

The LPCertified program is a certification that was designed as advanced education for loss prevention managers and executives with more than three years of LP experience, including district and regional LPMs and others who want to advance their loss prevention careers.

**EDITOR:** Why should someone get certified and what are the benefits?



**SMITH:** Like many other professions, certification validates that a person has achieved a specific level of knowledge as set forth by that profession. This has a number of benefits to both the individual and the industry.

For the individual, certification demonstrates to both current and prospective employers that you are motivated to learn and further develop your industry knowledge. It serves as a valuable resume builder, endorsing your knowledge base and promoting your commitment both as a retail professional as well as a qualified LP professional. It essentially places you above your competition in the job market. Most importantly, certification is a means to enhance one's performance. It expands your knowledge and expertise, confirms your understanding, and challenges your perspective.

From the industry perspective, certification reinforces industry goals and objectives and promotes overall professionalism. Certification communicates to our peers inside retail as well as to those outside of retail that loss prevention is indeed a profession that takes pride in our knowledge and contribution to the success of the retail industry. Because of all this, many companies are now adding certification as a preferred requirement in their job descriptions.

**EDITOR:** How do individuals go about obtaining a designation of LPQ or LPC?

**SMITH:** The first step would be to register on our website [[www.LossPreventionFoundation.org](http://www.LossPreventionFoundation.org)] for access to the on-line coursework material. Once registration is completed, access to the coursework is immediate. Both certifications are delivered on-line with video scenarios, pictures, text material, and practice review questions at the end of each module. Once someone has completed the coursework, they must pass a proctored examination taken at select examination locations around the country. Once they pass the exam, they receive a certificate and their name is posted on the Foundation website for future verification. The certified individual is then permitted to use the LPQ or the LPC designation after their name. The LPQ coursework and exam is available now, and the LPC will be released later this year.

**EDITOR:** Can someone take the exam without doing the coursework?

**SMITH:** Yes, but the coursework is designed to be a comprehensive study guide that touches on all of the areas addressed in the exam. In fact, the exam questions were generated from the coursework. The only caveat is if someone fails the exam, they must purchase the coursework before they are allowed to retest.

**EDITOR:** Over the past three years the Foundation has received endorsements or formed alliances with other associations. Talk about those.

**SMITH:** We are supported by a variety of organizations and associations, not the least of which is the Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA) who backed our mission from the very beginning and continues to be a strong supporter. Others include Hospitalitylawyer.com who promote security and safety in the hospitality industry, the International Organization of Black Security Executives (IOBSE), the Loss Prevention Research Council (LPRC), the National Association for Shoplifting Prevention (NASP), the National Food Service Security Council (NFSSC), the Center for Interviewer Standards & Assessment (CISA) who administer the CFI certification, Food Marketing Institute (FMI), and, most recently, the Retail Council of Canada (RCC).

These partnerships and endorsements demonstrate a growing global support base for the Foundation and certification. With the help of the RCC, we just launched certification into Canada. We have also begun discussions with members representing the United Kingdom.

Just a few weeks ago, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reviewed the LPC's safety and risk management module, which led to drafting a partnership agreement. NIOSH is the federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related injury and illness.



For the individual, certification demonstrates to both current and prospective employers that you are motivated to learn and further develop your industry knowledge. It serves as a valuable resume builder, endorsing your knowledge base and promoting your commitment both as a retail professional as well as a qualified LP professional. It essentially places you above your competition in the job market.

**EDITOR:** Given the Foundation is focused on education, how do you fit with the academic community?

**SMITH:** The board of directors wanted to make sure that everything that the Foundation did had input and support from the academic community. That's why we have assembled an academic committee made up of many well-known and respected individuals associated with a wide range of universities, including Eastern Kentucky University, Grand Valley State University, Loyola University, Northeastern University, North Carolina Central University, Northern Michigan University, Rutgers University, University of Florida, University of Houston, and University of North Carolina.

**EDITOR:** What role does the academic committee play?

**SMITH:** Committee members have reviewed certification content, served on exam committees to help draft questions, implemented a scholarship program for college students interested in loss prevention, set up a student membership program, and conducted university pilot programs utilizing certification content. While all of the academic committee members have donated much advice and assistance, two professors and universities in particular deserve special recognition. Dr. Richard Hollinger at the University of Florida has conducted over a year of pilot projects that have been extremely helpful in improving our delivery systems. Dr. Thomas Schneid at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) has relentlessly championed the academic curriculum review process. Thanks to his efforts, EKU has agreed to allow LPQ and LPC certified professionals the opportunity to apply and receive three credit hours toward their master's degree.

**EDITOR:** Many retailers and solution providers have stepped up to support the Foundation through sponsorships or providing scholarships. How does that work?

**SMITH:** The Foundation is extremely grateful for the support that has been

## Foundation Board of Directors

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given to us by the retail and solution provider communities. Since day one, both retailers and solution providers recognized how certification could benefit not only their own teams, but also the entire industry. Solution providers purchase scholarships for certification coursework not only for their team members, but also for distribution to their retail clients, colleges, military, and law enforcement. Retailers have and can still purchase blocks of certifications at discounted prices for their loss prevention associates.

**EDITOR:** Why would solution providers have their people go through the coursework?

**SMITH:** Most vendors know that retailers prefer to partner with solution providers who truly understand retail loss prevention and aren't just trying to sell their product or service regardless of the situation. What better way to demonstrate that your sales and account service representatives understand LP and are committed to helping

find the right solution than to have them certified?

**EDITOR:** Other than applying for the coursework and going for an LPQ or LPC designation, how can individual LP professionals get involved with the Foundation?

**SMITH:** Anyone can join The Loss Prevention Foundation as a member. The Foundation is the only non-profit professional association specifically representing the retail loss prevention industry. Our membership program is much more than a networking social community. Members have access to 24/7 on-line educational resources that help in personal and professional development. Resources include webinars, speaker's series, bookstore, professional articles, an assessment center, career planning, PowerPoint presentations, an academic degree database, retail LP internships, brain teasers, white papers, membership directory, and more. Members also receive a monthly newsletter and a 20 percent

discount on all certification coursework. They are also given the first opportunity to serve on many of our committees or special projects. We offer numerous membership options, including an annual, two-year, lifetime, and, for a limited time, a charter membership. We also have membership plans for students and educators.

**EDITOR:** Does one have to be a member to volunteer for one of the Foundation committees?

**SMITH:** Of course we would hope they would want to join the Foundation, but, no, we are open to anyone who is interested in serving on one of our many committees or helping on one of our many special projects. The Foundation is truly successful because of the volunteer efforts of hundreds of LP professionals who want to make a difference and give back to our industry.

**EDITOR:** You mentioned Eastern Kentucky University earlier. I know that you have a

personal connection to ECU that goes back a few years.

**SMITH:** More than a few years I'm afraid. Eastern Kentucky is where I went to college and where I was first introduced to the loss prevention industry. Just before I graduated with a degree in police administration, I was recruited by Montgomery Ward at a university career day. Like many college students back then...and unfortunately still today...I had no idea what loss prevention was. But like many LP professionals who by chance stumbled into the industry, I found out that the retail loss prevention field offered a wide spectrum of career options and a tremendous potential for professional growth that made it one of the hidden treasures of the occupational marketplace.

ECU has produced many quality loss prevention professionals over the years and has done more than a lot of universities to make their students aware of careers in LP. So it was especially gratifying to return to campus recently with several Foundation board members to participate

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## **Announcing a New Partnership Between the Loss Prevention Foundation and Eastern Kentucky University**



Learn More: Visit <http://safetymanagement.eku.edu/lossprevention> or call 1-866-277-9878 to speak with an Enrollment Advisor.



EKU is proud to now accept LPQ and LPC certification toward three credit hours in the online master's degree program in Safety, Security & Emergency Management.

This master's program can be completed in only 2 years and is offered completely online!

Choose from five different concentrations, including:

- Occupational Safety
- Homeland Security
- Ergonomics
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## CONSTRUCTING A FOUNDATION

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in an academic ceremony where the president of ECU signed a memorandum of agreement granting those individuals with our certifications academic credits. I think this certainly speaks to the quality of our certification courses.

**EDITOR:** How did your career in loss prevention prepare you for your role as president of the Foundation?

**SMITH:** One of my early positions was as an LP training manager. I learned quickly the impact that training and education programs can have on both individuals and organizations. Throughout the following ten years that included several LP director positions, I found I really enjoyed selecting and developing my team members. That led me to join a company that specialized in evaluating talent and recruiting individuals for loss prevention, safety, and audit positions. During this time, I conducted assessment interviews and career counseling for literally thousands of individuals as well as conducted many organizational reviews. In that role I had the opportunity of studying the best programs and learning from the best industry leaders. This experience has given me a thorough understanding of the educational needs of our industry, which I believe allows me to effectively lead the initiatives of the Foundation.

**EDITOR:** We understand you have a college intern at the Foundation this summer.

If a young person expresses interest in pursuing a career in retail loss prevention, what is your counsel?

**SMITH:** My first advice is to be prepared to expand your options and broaden your perspective. Retail loss prevention is a dynamic and challenging career field that requires flexibility, passion, and initiative. With that in mind, the Foundation has a student membership that gives a student complete access to all of our on-line educational resources. This is a great way to learn about our industry. They can also contact our student liaison, who is a working loss prevention professional who has volunteered to answer students' questions about the industry. I would further suggest students subscribe to **LossPrevention** magazine and research their digital archives. Additionally, we would suggest they apply for one of many retail LP internships listed on our website, which would give them a taste of the LP industry. Of course, I would certainly suggest that any student wanting to enter the field should become LPQualified.

**EDITOR:** You mentioned earlier that many college students are still unaware of the career opportunities in retail loss prevention. What is the Foundation doing to change that?

**SMITH:** Unfortunately, it is still true today that university professors and counselors continue to steer students toward the public sector or other private security opportunities rather than loss prevention.

With the help of the magazine, we have launched an awareness campaign aimed at showing professors that retail loss prevention is an excellent career alternative. We have placed ads in national publications, issued scholarships to honor students, signed up professors for free subscriptions of the magazine, attended and exhibited at national conferences, and assisted in creating more academic programs that are relevant to our industry. Since only 30 percent of individuals in our industry have a four-year degree, over time we want to attract more college graduates into loss prevention. At the same time, we also want to develop ways to make it easier for working LP professionals to enroll in college classes or finish their degree.

**EDITOR:** What new initiatives are on the drawing board for the Foundation?

**SMITH:** Of course, launching the LPCertified program later this year is a major initiative in itself. But beyond that, we just created a military transition committee at our last board meeting. We also recently met with military and Department of Labor personnel in Washington, D.C. Our objective is to get the LPQ approved as a military transition course and approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs under the GI bill. There are many skilled military personnel who could make a transition into loss prevention, and the LPQ is clearly the course that can make such a transition much easier. ■



Certification communicates to our peers inside retail as well as to those outside of retail that loss prevention is indeed a profession that takes pride in our knowledge and contribution to the success of the retail industry. Because of all this, many companies are now adding certification as a preferred requirement in their job descriptions.