

## FLASHBACK PART 11

# 20th Century Fashion History Los Angeles

BY RONALD S. FRIEDMAN, CPA

Hello again! It is April, and spring has arrived with warmer weather and blooming flowers. This month's edition of the Fashion Manuscript focuses on wellness and stress awareness in the apparel industry. Before I address where the industry is today, I want to take you back to the 1970-1980s. In the era of disco, bell bottoms and the relentless pursuit of the latest fashion trends, the apparel industry in the 1970s and 1980s was an emblem of glamor, innovation and remarkable growth. Yet, beneath the surface of glitzy fashion shows and retail extravaganzas, a pressing issue often went unaddressed: the well-being of the industry's workers. For garment workers, particularly those in bustling urban centers and offshore manufacturing hubs, the reality of the industry was far from the glossy pages of fashion magazines. Repetitive tasks, poor working conditions and a lack of labor rights created a stressful environment that rarely saw the light of discussion or reform.

There was tremendous pressure to be creative and provide fresh new lines every month. Long hours created an environment of burnout and high-pressure. I remember being in client warehouses where everyone looked stressed and overworked. Did the employees get to go home at reasonable hours and take the weekends off? Not usually! Creative burnout was common, yet the stigma surrounding mental health meant that few resources or support systems were available to those struggling silently.

It was not until the late 1980s that the conversation around wellness and stress in the workplace started to gain momentum. Influenced by the broader health and wellness movement sweeping across other sectors, some voices within the apparel industry began advocating for change. These pioneers of workplace well-being highlighted the need for better labor practices, mental health support and a holistic approach to employee welfare.

We had clients that were changing the work

environment by improving the layout of the office space. I found clients creating space for employees just to hang out and relax, with better break rooms, ping-pong tables and some quiet areas. These were rare, but it was a start. Today, we have come a long way from the 1970s and 1980s.

In an industry often characterized by fast-paced environments and tight deadlines, wellness and stress awareness have become critical topics within the apparel industry. The conversation around mental health and work-life balance has woven its way through the fabric of the fashion world, prompting companies and individuals alike to take a closer look at the industry's impact on well-being. Acknowledging the need for change, some fashion houses and apparel companies have started implementing initiatives to reduce stress and promote wellness. Employee assistance programs, mental health days, flexible working hours and in-house wellness activities are becoming more prevalent as organizations recognize the value of a healthy workforce.

#### **Sustainable Fashion, Sustainable Minds**

The rise of sustainable fashion has brought with it a focus on ethical practices, not just in terms of materials and production but also in the treatment of employees. Brands that prioritize the environment often take a holistic approach, considering their workers' physical and psychological well-being as a measure of sustainability.

#### **Designing a Supportive Environment**

Within the design and creative sectors of the industry, there is a growing emphasis on creating supportive work environments that foster creativity without sacrificing mental health. Open dialogues about stress, workload management and the importance of downtime are helping to reshape the industry's culture. The need to be in the office five days a week is in decline and companies are finding that productivity is not negatively impacted when employees work at home for a couple of days a week.

#### **Fashion Education's Role**

Fashion institutions also play a part by including wellness and stress management in their curricula. The industry can work towards a healthier future by preparing the next generation of fashion professionals with tools to manage stress and prioritize self-care.

#### **The Role of Leadership**

Leaders in the apparel industry have a responsibility to set a tone that values employee well-being. By leading by example and openly addressing the topic of stress, industry leaders can inspire change and create a more resilient and content workforce.

#### **Conclusion**

The apparel industry is at a turning point when it comes to wellness and stress awareness. Other industries have been leading the way for change, and for the apparel industry to compete for the best talent, change is necessary. By weaving well-being into the very fabric of the industry's culture, companies can improve their employees' lives and enhance creativity, productivity and, ultimately, profitability. It is time for the fashion world to dress itself in the principles of health and balance, ensuring that the thread of well-being is strong and resilient for years to come.

#### **Do Not Forget!**

The Marcum Retail Symposium is coming to Los Angeles on April 18, 2024. I hope many of you can join us to hear from two experts in the industry, Marshal Cohen and Andrew Rotondi.

Until next time, remember what I always conclude with...if you are not having fun, then do something else!

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