

Job Shadowing

What is Job Shadowing?

Information is important for making a realistic, sound career decision. You can research an occupation by reading about it, talking to someone who is working in a career field, or “testing the waters” through internships and other experiences. In **job shadowing**, you visit an organization and follow (or **shadow**) a professional who is in the occupation you are considering. Shadowing provides you with a short-term opportunity (usually a few hours or a day) to gain a better understanding of what a specific position, an occupation, an “industry,” or a career field entails.

Benefits of Shadowing

Through shadowing and other experiences, you can investigate a career option that you have made. Often your perceptions of an occupation will be on target, but sometimes you will be surprised about what the position actually involves. And it is better to find out sooner, rather than later, that the job in which you are interested is not what you thought it might be.

Job shadowing can also help you to identify the skills and qualifications needed to enter a profession and observe first-hand the responsibilities of a specific position within the field. Shadowing helps you to determine if there are gaps in your knowledge, skills, or experience. The person whom you shadow can provide insight into the career field and offer suggestions for choosing classes, participating in activities, and making the most of your college years.

Shadowing experiences can sometimes develop into longer-term mentoring rela-

tionships. The initial shadowing session may be just the first of many sessions where you and the professional meet to discuss your career goals and plans. It can also lead to other opportunities where you can make additional networking contacts.

How to Arrange A Shadowing Session

You can shadow anyone in any career (from actuary to zookeeper, from teacher to news reporter, from manager to lab technician) who is willing to help students explore careers. You can shadow Clarion alumni, individuals in the Clarion community, or professionals in your hometown. Ask family, friends, neighbors, professors, and anyone you know for the name of an individual who might be interested in talking with you about his or her job and hosting you for a day at the workplace. Contact the human resources or the public relations department, or in a very small company, simply ask for the owner or the manager.

We suggest that you shadow someone who is in an entry level position (where you would probably start) so you get an accurate impression of what you would be doing in the first few years of your career. Almost any workplace is a potential job shadowing site: large corporations or small businesses...public or private...for profit or non-profit... large or small... government agencies... community or charitable organizations...the list is endless.

When contacting someone you would like to shadow, be prepared to suggest the parameters of the session, such as the purpose and the number of hours, especially if the employer is not familiar with

the concept. It is advisable to first set up an informational interview to meet and talk to the professional, after which you might ask for an opportunity to be his or her shadow on the job.

Tips for a Successful Shadowing Session

Be realistic about what you can expect to achieve with the session. Don't go into the job shadowing experience expecting it to develop into a job offer. Job shadowing for a few hours is just a chance to observe and get a feeling for an occupation. Don't depend on the shadowing experience to settle all of your career questions. It is most effective when used along with informational interviews, reading about careers, and other types of research and experiences.

Prior to your visit. Prepare by determining the information needed to make or confirm a career decision. Write out questions and do not be afraid to refer to them. Be prepared to talk about your background and college experiences and to describe your areas of interest.

On the day of your visit. Dress and conduct yourself in a professional manner. During the session, engulf yourself in the entire workplace environment. Observe the physical conditions of the job and the specific work responsibilities of the professional you are shadowing. Take written notes and jot down impressions for review later, but don't get so absorbed in your writing that you miss the "feel" of the workplace. Use brief phrases to describe the workplace, style, types of tasks, and other things you observe.

At the end of the session. Verbally thank your host or hostess for the time spent with you, and follow-up with a thank-you note within two days of your visit. These

steps make a good impression and nurture your developing network of people in the field.

After the visit. Take time to think about what you learned and about your positive and negative impressions. Finish writing down your thoughts about your visit. Do you have the skills or can you acquire the skills that will make you successful in this job? Do you think this job fits your personality, interests, and values?

The same type of position may differ tremendously from one work environment to another. At this point, you might want to consider shadowing other individuals so you can have additional information to compare and evaluate.

For Additional Information

Refer to the Career Services publication, [The Information Interview](#), for another way to obtain career information and advice.

Career Services Center
Clarion University
114 Egbert
Clarion, PA 16214
Phone: 814-393-2323
Fax: 814-393-2054
Web: www.clarion.edu/career

Sample Letter Requesting a Job Shadowing Experience

100 Ralston Hall
Clarion University
Clarion, PA 16214
January 22, 2006

Mr. Charles Smith
Managing Partner
XYZ Company
100 Grant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15200

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am a sophomore majoring in accounting at Clarion University. I recently discussed career options with my advisor, Dr. John Adams of the Accountancy Department. One of my interest areas is auditing. Dr. Adams recommended you as a professional who is very knowledgeable about the field and who may be willing to provide a job shadowing experience.

I am interested in spending a few hours with you at your work site and observing firsthand the typical responsibilities of an auditor. This opportunity will give me a better understanding of the field and the knowledge and skills that are needed for it.

If time permits, I would also like to spend a few minutes asking you about the accounting industry and your career path. I would appreciate any insight or advice that you may have so I can plan the remainder of my college experience.

Thank for considering my request. I will contact you within two weeks to inquire about the possibility of scheduling a job shadowing experience. If you wish to contact me before then, I can be reached by calling 814-393-1212 or e-mailing s_jabrown@clarion.edu.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Brown

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