GETTING THE MOST OUT OF JOB SHADOWING

Job shadowing is a critical but often overlooked element of career development that provides you with the unique opportunity to learn about the careers that interest you firsthand from professionals who do them every day.

Shadowing opportunities, which may exist at half-day, full-day and longer lengths, are a great way to build your network and gain an insider’s perspective of the jobs that interest you most.

JOB SHADOWING: THE BASICS

There is a lot you can learn about potential career paths from exploring information on the internet, consulting Career Services and seeking out secondhand information about industries and jobs that interest you. But sometimes you’ll need to go straight to the source, getting on-the-ground career information from professionals actually doing the work that interests you. Job shadowing facilitates this process.

What is Job Shadowing?

“Job shadowing” means taking your chosen career for a test drive by “shadowing” or conducting a site visit with a professional in your field. By shadowing a professional while s/he is actually on the job, you get the chance to observe firsthand the work site, the nature of the work in which you’re interested and the attitudes of the workers you meet.

Why Should I Participate in Job Shadowing?

Seek out job shadowing opportunities to:

• Get a real-life view of a career’s day-to-day duties and activities, industry and work space
• Meet professionals in your field and develop your network
• Get the “feel” of the working environment and discover the array of jobs in a given organization or industry
• And more!

Job shadowing can help you answer questions such as:

• What does this profession look like on a daily basis?
• Does someone in this profession spend most of his/her time with coworkers, clients or alone?
• What hours does someone in this profession work?
• What types of activities and skills does someone in this profession use? Is the workload particularly heavy or stressful?
• In what workplaces could you perform this position?
• Do professionals in this field seem to enjoy their work?

FINDING JOB SHADOWING OPPORTUNITIES

In order to shadow, you must seek out professional contacts with whom you might meet. Follow the steps below to get ready for job shadowing and to reach out to professionals in your field successfully.

Before You Begin

Before you shadow, follow these steps to set yourself up for success:

1. Get assistance. Contact your Career Services college liaison to let him/her know that you’re interested in shadowing. Find a list of liaisons at www.careerservices.txstate.edu/about/collegeliaisons.

   Your liaison can coach you through the shadowing solicitation process as well as the experience itself.

2. Draft your resume. Ideally, you should have a sense of your professional goals and background before you begin shadowing. Drafting a resume and having it critiqued by a liaison or career counselor can help you solidify your past experiences and future goals.

   Additionally, because shadowing brings you into direct contact with working professionals, having a professional resume and well-crafted professional pitch is highly recommended.

3. Research. Scour local businesses’ staff pages, the Jobs4Cats mentoring database (found on the Career Contact Search tab on your Jobs4Cats homepage) and LinkedIn to find professionals working in your field. Your Career Services college liaison can also point you toward major-specific resources.

   Your friends, professors, parents and parents’ friends--otherwise known as your personal network--are also great resources when seeking professionals with whom to job shadow.
CONTACTING AND SHADOWING PROFESSIONALS

Now it’s time to make it happen. Solicit job shadowing opportunities—and see the experience through to the end—by following the steps below.

Step 1. Make Contact

Reach out to targeted professionals via email (save phone calls for follow-ups) or through a member of your own network. In a polite, succinct and grammatically correct note, let your contact know who you are (include your name, major and a brief description of your career goals), how you got their information and that you’re looking to shadow. Your note might look something like this:

Ms. Johnson,

Hello! My name is Maria Rodriguez, and I’m currently a sophomore English major at Texas State University. I recently found you through a LinkedIn search for professionals working in the publishing industry, and I was very interested to see that you’ve not only edited poetry manuscripts at a small press but also obtained experience in the field of educational publishing

I’m very interested in learning more about the publishing industry as a whole, and I was wondering if we could meet to discuss your experience—or if I could visit your workplace to job shadow some time. I understand that you’re busy, and I appreciate your consideration of my request.

Please let me know if we can connect. Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Maria

Once your contact responds, determine logistics including time/date, location, duration, format, etc. for your visit to the worksite.

Step 2. Experience Your Career

On the day of your shadowing experience, arrive 5-10 minutes early in professional dress.

In advance of your shadowing experience, draft questions to ask your host. Sample questions include:

- What do you like/dislike about your job?
- How many hours a week do you work?
- Where are the career prospects in this field?
- What skills would be valuable in this career?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute the most to success in this field/job?

When visiting the worksite, be polite, professional and friendly with everyone you meet. Be ready for anything—some shadowing opportunities will be more like extended informational interviews, and others will allow you to get your hands dirty working on actual projects and tasks.

When your shadow is done, shake your host’s hand and thank him/her genuinely for the experience.

Step 3. Follow Up

Send a thank you email or card after your shadowing experience. Share something you learned or a particularly memorable moment from your experience. Thank your host for his/her time, and ask any follow-up questions you may have.

Use the information you’ve gained to help guide you on your career path, and add your host to your professional network by keeping in touch—by connecting on LinkedIn, sending an email every few months (interesting industry articles or new career-related questions are a great reason to reach out) or asking them for other contacts within the field.

By following up in a professional manner, you have the potential to gain professional contacts who will serve as career mentors, helping shape your career direction, references or referrals to their own or other employers within your industry or connections to other professionals or opportunities for further job shadowing/internship/informational interviewing opportunities.

GETTING STARTED

Executed correctly, job shadowing can help you gain valuable insight into your industry and grow your professional network, shaping your career direction and setting you up for job search success.

Get started by determining what position/industry you’d like to shadow, then contact your Career Services college liaison to assist you with the process. If you’re having trouble determining your industry or career of choice, you may need to conduct further career exploration before you pursue job shadowing experiences. Set up an appointment with a career counselor by calling 512.245.2645. Or, find your college liaison at www.careerservices.txstate.edu/about/collegeliaisons.