YOUR GUIDE TO

JOB SHADOWING

Published by

The Vocatio Center for Life Calling and Career
at Union University

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What is job shadowing?

Job shadowing is an opportunity for you to connect with, or “shadow,” a business professional who has specific knowledge about an occupation or career in which you are interested. While you shadow, you will observe the responsibilities and tasks associated with your shadow professional’s career and have the opportunity to ask questions about the knowledge, skills, talents, and level of education required for the observed job. While the purpose of job shadowing is to let you gather career-related information and expand your networking contacts, it also allows you to build interviewing skills, become aware of trends in the field, and see workforce technologies in action.

A job shadowing experience may:

- Present up-to-date facts that can assist in your decision making about an occupation.
- Inform you about the skills required for certain jobs so you can match the job with your skills.
- Provide valuable networking contacts to utilize when conducting your actual job or internship search.
- Assist in developing communication skills and self-confidence in talking with professional people in a work environment that is more relaxed than an actual work environment since your immersion in that work environment is for the purpose of learning rather than production.
- Expose you to occupational “buzzwords” unique to the career field of your choice.
- Give you an edge in future interviews by providing inside knowledge not known by your competition.
- Develop basic skills similar to those used in a targeted job search.

How do I get started?

Determine a list of 2-3 faculty members, employers, UU alums, or organizations you feel has career related information you are seeking. Identify people who:

- Share a common interest in, enthusiasm for, or involvement in some activity that appeals to you.
- Work in a career setting you enjoy.
- Work in career areas that interest you and that aligns with your personal mission and values.
- Work in a specific job or in a specific organization which interests you.

If you are having trouble developing a list of potential job shadow sites, please contact the Vocatio Center at 731-661-5993 to go through some of your options.

How do I find a potential job shadow opportunity?

- Contact family, friends, or networking acquaintances to find contact information.
- Use the Internet and search organization websites for contact information.
- Use LinkedIn. LinkedIn is a professional networking website similar to Facebook. Develop a LinkedIn profile and search for individuals of interest.
- Check the yellow pages.
How do I contact a potential job shadow?
There are three ways to establish a job shadowing experience. You may want to use all three:

- **Referral** – Visit the Vocatio Center to be referred to potential job shadow sites.
- **Telephone** – Contact area business professionals & explain that you are a UU student seeking a job shadow visit.
- **Write a letter / e-mail** – If you have the name of a potential contact, you may wish to write a letter or e-mail before making the telephone call. Make sure your letter clearly states your purpose and desire to schedule a job-shadowing experience. Indicate that you will follow up by a telephone call in hopes of scheduling a specific date and time. Send a copy of your résumé along with the letter or email.

Helpful Tips to Follow

**Utilize the Vocatio Center for assistance in résumé development.**

**Send a copy of your résumé to your job shadow professional for review.**

**Know what you want to accomplish** – The primary objective of job shadowing is to investigate a specific career field so you can make an informed career decision.

**Identify your potential contacts** – When you know what you want to accomplish, ask yourself, “Who has the information I need?”

**Arrange for the job shadow experience** – You will want to discuss arrangements with your job shadow professional. Your experience could be arranged for any amount of time ranging from one half hour to a day or a week. Your job shadow will typically start with questions related to the job or specific career field.

**Do not wait until the last minute** - Some organizations such as hospitals and schools can require a relatively lengthy process to be approved for shadowing. Get familiar with the requirements and start early.

**Prepare for your job shadow experience** - Plan what you want to discuss with your job shadow professional. Research and come prepared with specific questions about the organization. Even though you are looking for information rather than a job, this same organization might, in the future, have an opening in which you would be interested.

**Day of job shadow** - Remember that this is a professional experience. Ask the person you are shadowing about dress expectations.

**Try to obtain additional contact names** – Before you conclude the job shadow experience, ask the professional if he or she can think of other individuals who might be helpful contacts for gaining additional job-shadowing and career-related information. By compiling the names of career-related contacts you will gradually build your professional network. Also, ask for a business card before you leave.

**Follow up** – Write the job shadow professional a thank you letter as soon as possible. Mention some items that you found particularly interesting or helpful. Some contacts may ask you to stay in touch so they can monitor your career path.
Suggested Questions About a Specific Career Field
1. What are the main responsibilities associated with work in your field?
2. Please describe a typical day, week, and month.
3. What interests and skills are needed for successful employment in this field?
4. What are the advantages of working in this field? Disadvantages?
5. What entry level salary range and benefits can I expect?
6. What education and experiences will I need to break into the field?
7. What type of work schedule does this field require?
8. Are jobs in this field limited to any particular geographic area(s)?
9. How do people find out about openings in your occupation?
10. What is the current outlook for new college graduates in this field?
11. Are you satisfied with the career field you have chosen?
12. What do you see happening to your profession in the next five to ten years?

Suggested Questions About a Specific Organization
1. Please tell me more about your organization and its purpose.
2. Is your organization growing, diminishing, or maintaining its size?
3. How does your organization compete or cooperate with other organizations within this field?
4. How do you think your job would be different if you worked in a larger/smaller organization?
5. How is your organization funded?
6. What is unique about your organization?
7. In the future, do you think your organization will need more employees in this field?

Suggested Questions About Personal Insights and Experiences
1. What field did you prepare for and expect to enter originally?
2. How did you get where you are in your field?
3. If you needed to leave your present job, to what other jobs could you apply your skills?
4. Would you advise someone to enter your career field?
5. What would you have done differently in your career?
6. What do you like most about your job?
7. What would you identify as the top two personal rewards from the work you do?

If you need to cancel due to an unexpected emergency
When you have finalized plans with your contact to make a Shadow visit, make this visit your top priority. This means you must plan ahead. Lack of transportation, having too much homework, being scheduled for a work shift, etc., are not valid reasons to cancel a Shadow appointment. Remember that professionals frequently go to a lot of effort to schedule a Shadow visit for a student, and you need to show professional courtesy and honor your commitment. The only good reasons to reschedule are for unforeseen emergencies, such as illness or a death in the family.
If an emergency comes up:

- Call your Shadow host immediately. Apologize for any inconvenience your cancellation may cause, and ask if it is possible to reschedule.
- Follow up with a note to the person regarding your cancellation/reschedule, thanking him or her again for the willingness to be flexible and allowing you to Shadow.

Example of Email/Letter to send to potential Job Shadow Professional:

September 1, 2016

Dear Mrs. Smith:

I was recently referred to you by Diane Thompson from News Talk Radio in Jackson, TN. She recommended you as an excellent source of information on the communications industry.

I am currently majoring in Communications at Union University. I am want to develop a job shadow opportunity with an employer in my field of interest. If your schedule permits, I would appreciate hearing your insights about the communications industry, as well as ask you questions on career-related information, become more aware of trends in the field, and see the communications workforce in action.

Thank you in advance for any insight and advice you would be willing to share. I look forward to contacting you early next week to set up a time for a job shadow opportunity. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Terrence Jones

Example of Thank You letter to send after Job Shadow visit:

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

Thank you for taking time out of your busy work schedule to provide me the job-shadowing experience on March 15, 2016.

I found the tour of the facility and the career-related information you shared to be extremely valuable. Being able to talk to other accountants helped me realize my career goals and the kind of company I would like to work for in the future. I specifically enjoyed attending a staff meeting to experience some of the everyday issues that can arise in an office setting. Thank you for answering all of my questions; the information was very educational and invaluable.

I thank you again for your generosity and patience in helping me explore my career path.

Sincerely,

Emily Sanchez

*Material adapted from University of Dubuque and St. Katherine’s University Career Services websites
http://www.dbq.edu/media/campuslife/vpofstudentlife/careerservices/jobshadowguidefinal.pdf
http://minerva.stkate.edu/careers.nsf/pages/shadow
## Job Shadow Log
For personal reference, it is beneficial to keep a record of your shadow experiences. Professional schools and future employers may ask you to explain your shadow experiences.

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