

# Job Shadowing

## *Career Exploration Series*

Job Shadowing is a good way to find out more about careers with a minimal time commitment. Just like any kind of company/career research, job-shadowing can occur at various stages of one's career development:

- Trying to determine a career path.
- After your career is launched but you've decided to explore new career directions
- When you know what career path to follow but want to learn more about specific companies by getting your foot inside. You can even narrow your search to the department level by shadowing people in different departments of the same company to see which team you'd rather work with.

The first step in the job shadowing process is to find a professional with whom you would like to shadow and contact them in a professional manner. You can utilize online services, such as MU Connect and LinkedIn for alumni. Please see the sample job shadowing request below.

### Sample Job Shadowing Request

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Name, Title  
Company  
Address

Dear Ms.or Mr. LAST NAME:

I am currently a [year in school] at Marquette University and I am considering [field] as a future career path. A family friend, [Name and Company], suggested that you might be willing to let me spend a day observing you so I can learn more about [field].

I would be extremely grateful if you allowed me to quietly observe you for a half- or full-day as you go about your usual schedule. If possible, it would be helpful if we also had a short interview toward the end of the shadowing so I could ask you any questions I might have about [field] after observing your activities and actions.

Thank you for considering my request. I will call you the week of [date] to see about scheduling the job shadowing. If you need to reach me before that time, please feel free to contact me via phone [number] or via email [address].

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Name

### THE DAY OF YOUR JOB SHADOWING EXPERIENCE

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- **Dress** as you would for a job interview with the company or at least at the level of dress others in the company wear.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions, but don't bombard the professional with so many questions that he or she can't get any work done. Take a notepad or even a small tape-recorder to record observations and answers to your questions.
- If your professional attends a meeting on your shadow day, by all means ask if you can sit in. You can learn a lot about a company's culture by how it conducts its meetings.

- While your aim is to observe a typical work day, be open to **unexpected opportunities** such as attending a trade show or meeting of a professional organization with your professional.
- Be open to meeting as many people as possible during the experience. If you'd especially like to meet people in certain job functions, be sure to ask if your professional will introduce you.
- **Observe everything!** Note what technology is used in the job. Identify the must-have tools without which your professional can't function. Observe the surroundings in your professional's cubicle or office and determine how much of the environment reflects the professional's personality and how much is related to the job function or company. A stark workplace may indicate that the company frowns on personal touches. Notice how people dress and how casual or formal the atmosphere is. Determine whether workers seem bubbly and happy, stressed and harried, or sullen and morose. Note whether people stay late or rush out at quitting time.
- Notice the **communication channels** in the workplace. Is most communication done by e-mail? Do co-workers frequently communicate with your professional by dropping by his or her workspace? Is communication primarily phone oriented? What's the level of formality in your professional's phone conversations? Is there a lot of gossip around the workplace?
- For truly nitty-gritty research, consider asking to see such documents as the company's organizational chart, a job description of your professional's position, samples of your professional's work products, and a sample performance review form to get an idea of how workers are evaluated.
- Be aware of the professional's and the organization's needs as you're shadowing, and do your best not to interfere with the normal workflow.
- If you have good rapport with the person you're shadowing, consider asking for a **resume critique and advice on interviewing** at the company, as well as thoughts on coursework, internships, and work experience that will enable you to break into a job at that company.
- Remember that the professional you're shadowing is now a valuable member of your **network**. Ask for a business card when you leave, and ask if the professional knows others in similar jobs that you might shadow. Also ask if you can stay in touch.

## WHAT TO ASK DURING THE JOB SHADOWING EXPERIENCE

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### Questions about the Professional and the Role

- What is your job like?
  - A typical day?
  - What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
  - What kinds of problems do you deal with?
  - What kinds of decisions do you make?
  - What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
  - How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
- What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What are the various jobs in this field or organization?
- Why did you decide to work for this company?

- What are the advancement opportunities?
- What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
- What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?

#### Questions about the Company

- Why do customers choose this company?
- Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?
- What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
- How does the company make use of technology for internal communication and outside marketing? (Use of e-mail, Internet, intranets, World Wide Web page, video conferencing, etc.)
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
- How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
- Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it?
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold?
- Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
- What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?
- If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
- If your work were suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?
- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- What obligations does your employer place have on you outside of the ordinary work week? What social obligations go along with a job in your occupation?
- Are there organizations you are expected to join?
- Are there other things you are expected to do outside work hours?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?

#### Questions about the Career Path

- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
- What is the best way to enter this occupation?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- What are the educational requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? An MBA? Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
- Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
- What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?
- How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
- How do you think my university's reputation is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- How do you think graduation from a private (or public) university is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?

- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions? What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
- Who is the department head or supervisor for this job? Where do you and your supervisor fit into the organizational structure?
- Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills? What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here? Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?

### General Questions

- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job? Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?
- How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
- If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate: Would you mind taking a look at my resume?

### AFTER THE JOB SHADOWING EXPERIENCE

Be sure to write a thank-you note to the person you shadowed. Again, he or she made a significant time and energy investment in you, and it's just common courtesy to say thanks.

One of the most creative uses of the job-shadow experience comes from the world of **informational interviewing**. The scenario goes like this: At the early stages of job-hunting when you're trying to determine which companies to target, you do some job-shadowing at several companies. Then six months later or so, as you're applying to your target companies -- including some where you job-shadowed -- mention some of your observations about the companies in your cover letters. Job-seekers who demonstrate company knowledge almost always have an edge, and this technique can be especially effective if your observations and questions have uncovered an employer need that you can fill. Explain in your cover letter how you can solve a problem you observed or meet a need you saw, and you will have a huge advantage toward getting an interview with the company. Be sure to put a positive spin on the problem or need you observed; if you bash the company while trying to show why you should be hired, your efforts will have the opposite effect.

Provided by: [http://www.quintcareers.com/job\\_shadowing.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/job_shadowing.html)

#### Use internet social networks to make connections with people:

##### We're tweeting!

- Follow the Career Services Center on **Twitter** ([twitter.com/MU\\_CSC](https://twitter.com/MU_CSC)) to stay up to date on the latest job search articles, highlights and Career Services Center happenings.

##### We're blogging!

- Be sure to visit the Career Services Center's new blog, **Career Chatter** ([marquettecsc.blogspot.com](http://marquettecsc.blogspot.com)), regularly to get all the latest information and advice from our office. It's the Career Services Center... UNPLUGGED

##### We're on Facebook!

- Become a fan of the MU Career Services Center on **Facebook** ([www.facebook.com/mucsc](https://www.facebook.com/mucsc)). It can't hurt...right?

##### We're LinkedIn!

- Network with professionals in our MUCSC Group on **LinkedIn**. If you don't already have an account - here is one good excuse to get one! To find us just search in groups for MUCSC and join.