

CAREER DEVELOPMENT: Job Shadowing

Job shadowing can help you learn more about a particular career and decide if it's right for you before you invest so much time and money in your education. Of course, you want to be sure to be prepared with some questions you can ask professionals so that you're sure to get the most out of the experience.

1. Start talking to people you know who may be able to introduce you to professionals who work in an area you want to explore further. Could be a parent, sibling, teacher, friend of the family, parent of a friend, relative. Ask for names and contact information of (3) people they think may be good for you to Job Shadow.
2. Contact these professionals and ask if you would be able to shadow them at their place of employment for 3-4 hours. Understand, some places are easier to have guests on site than others. Some places, like hospitals, offer specific dates they invite students on-site to tour and/or shadow professionals.
3. Arrange a date/time that works for you and the professional you'll shadow. Ask for directions on where you should check in at their work site.
4. Prepare for your Job Shadow experience.
 - Plan to dress appropriately.
 - Plan for travel to and from their worksite.
 - Prepare the questions you will ask them ahead of time.
 - Take paper/pen or easy electronics to take notes while you're there. Do not tape this experience electronically. Many sites have confidentiality concerns.
5. Be on time (10 minutes early) for your appointment.
6. Turn your cell phone on "silent" during the time you're visiting. Answer ONLY emergency call(s).
7. Thank the professional you've shadowed when you are done. This includes a written thank you afterward – email or mail.
8. Write personal reflections based on your experience. What did you learn? Would this be a potential occupation for you to pursue or research further? Was there something about this job/work site that helped you decide it may not be a good fit for you?

The following are just some of the questions you might want to ask your job shadow subject.

What do you like about your job?

This is a good one to start with. Ideally you want someone who really loves their job. That way you can see if you share the same passion.

What don't you like about it?

No one likes every aspect of their job. This question can help you determine if you can live with the negatives of the position or if you really should consider another line of work.

Can you describe a typical day at work?

It's always good to know what a typical day is like, from start to finish. Of course, not every day will be the same, but this will give you a general idea of the day-to-day details of the job and if it's something you can see yourself doing over a long period of time.

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What's the hardest part about your job?

This may be the most important question you ask. Before you choose any career, you need to know what challenges may lie ahead and whether or not it's something you'll be able to handle.

What's the biggest challenge you've faced at work?

Here you're asking for a specific instance when the person was tested or pushed to his or her limit. You may or may not have a similar experience if you choose to pursue this career, but you should still know what you might face if you do.

What are the advancement/growth opportunities?

When you're planning your career, you don't want to pick a line of work that will remain stagnant and lose your interest; you want to be sure your chosen vocation is one that will allow you to evolve over time. Find out what, if any, opportunities exist that will allow you to continually grow as a person and build a fulfilling career.

Do you see changes or shifts in this field of work that would require you to retrain? The world of work is constantly changing. Many occupations require continuous learning and updating of skills. Good to know what to expect.

Is there anything you wish you would've done to better prepare yourself?

This question can help you to avoid regret years down the road. Right now you've got so many resources around you to help you prepare properly for your career. Utilize this question to make sure you're taking advantage of everything at your disposal.

What skills are the most important in your job?

A lot of times you really don't know what skills are the most important in your chosen career until you're working in the field. Find out what these skills are now so that you can focus more time studying and mastering them while you're still in school.

What's something that most people don't know about this career?

No matter how much education you get on a particular career, there are just some things you won't find out until you're on the job. Learn as much as you can about the unknowns of your chosen career path now, so that you can be prepared for them when the time comes.

If you could do it all over, would you choose this career again?

Look, it's not easy choosing a career. Sometimes you think you know what you want to do with your life, but then after a few years you realize it's just not the right fit for you. Ask the person to be honest with you about how they really feel about their job. Depending on what they say, it could either change your mind about the career path or give you the encouragement you need to pursue it after all.