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## The Secret to Successful Job Shadowing



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# The Secret to Successful Job Shadowing

by *Joanne Wood*

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The concept of job shadowing has been around for ages and is a great way to explore what it would be like to work in a specific industry.

From 15-year-old learners to 40 year olds in search of a career change, job shadowing can be useful career decision-making tool – provided it's done right!

## 10 Strategies to get the most out of your next job shadowing experience:

### 1. Use your contacts

**Networking is one of the most effective ways of securing a job** - and the same applies to job shadowing! Ask friends, lecturers, colleagues, relatives – anyone you can think of who may know someone working in the industry in which you're interested. But, if you're still not getting anywhere, call the HR Department of the company you're interested in or a company in the field you want to explore; be specific and tell them the position you'd like to shadow so they can connect you to the relevant person or department. You may be transferred several times, or even need to try a few companies, but you'll eventually find someone willing to help.

### 2. Be professional

**Remember, the person you're approaching to shadow is a professional whose time is valuable.** Ultimately, you are asking them to invest their time in you. Show you're taking the opportunity seriously by providing them with a CV and motivation letter explaining what you hope to gain from the experience – and ways in which you'll be positively contribute to the working environment.

### 3. Send a reminder

**Phone the person you're planning to shadow three days before you're due to start.** This will ensure they are expecting you and are prepared for your arrival.

### 4. Dress appropriately

**Find out the company's dress code by researching their website or phoning their HR department.** If in doubt, always go for a more rather than less formal look.

### 5. Take notes

**You're likely to be exposed to many new things during your job shadow experience.** Note down your reflections and key lessons so you have something concrete to refer back to afterwards.

## 6. Conduct an Informational Interview

**“When you are considering entering a certain career path, it makes sense to talk to people in that field,** yet most people never do. They trust their professors, textbooks or romantic notions about professions gleaned from TV or movies. When you really think about it, you miss out on an incredible opportunity if you fail to research your career field by talking to people in it,” states Quintcareers.com.

Conducting an informational interview means having a structured conversation with a professional in your field of interest, using prepared questions. Your job shadow experience is the perfect opportunity to ask key questions such as: ‘What are the key skills required for this job?’ and ‘What is the earning potential within this field?’.

Let the professional know upfront that you’d like to conduct an informational interview so they can factor this in their time with you – especially professionals dealing with customers, who cannot be interrupted on the job.

## 7. Take the good with the bad

**Not enjoying your job shadow experience can be as valuable as loving it.** Many people regret doing years of study in a field they later discover does not live up to their expectations. This is a great way of learning about the challenges and shortcomings of a career - before investing time and money into pursuing it!

## 8. Explore every angle

**Try to shadow several different “individuals in a particular career,** in different work environments, so you can compare and contrast your experiences and learnings,” recommends careervision.org. This will take extra effort to arrange but will give you greater insight into the different positions and what they entail in a given industry. Also, try and spend more than just a morning or day with your chosen professional – the full spectrum of a particular job does not always unravel in one day.

## 9. Say thanks

**Wrap up the experience by sending a thank you note detailing what you’ve learnt.** You never know when you’ll be interacting with the person again in the future, particularly if you do decide to pursue the career in question.

## 10. Reflect!

**Even if you discover the career is not for you, you may have gained valuable insight about yourself** and how you function within a given working environment. Ask yourself questions such as ‘What did I learn about myself?’, ‘Are there any related careers that I might be interested in?’ and ‘In light of my experience, what should my next action be in terms of my career research?’.

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