



NEWS RELEASE

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Groundhog Day Launches Job Shadow 2009

Mentoring boosts student career exploration

Shadows will be out and about this week as students and businesses kick off Job Shadow 2009. Once celebrated as Groundhog Job Shadow Day, this event now launches a yearlong initiative to expose students to the “real world” of careers.

“Students of all ages, particularly those in middle school and high school, need early career exploration opportunities,” said Tom Quinn, assistant commissioner of career education for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). “Job shadowing is an excellent way for students to learn what it takes to succeed in careers that interest them.”

Job Shadow 2009 is sponsored by the National Job Shadow Coalition, which includes America’s Promise, Junior Achievement, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor. More than 1 million students and 100,000 businesses across the nation will participate in Job Shadow 2009, according to the coalition’s Web site at www.JobShadow.org.

Getting students enthused about their futures is a powerful motivator for success in school, Quinn said.

“Students gain new appreciation for their education when they see skills and lessons applied in the workplace,” he said.

“Career development is not an event but a lifetime process and should be an integral part of the instructional programs in our schools,” added Dr. Bragg Stanley, director of guidance and placement at DESE. “Age-appropriate experiences such as job shadowing help students become successful managers of their own educational and career plans.”

Junior Achievement, a not-for-profit that promotes work readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy among students, administers job shadow programs from its St. Louis, Kansas City and Springfield offices.

“Job shadowing offers just the kind of experience Junior Achievement wants to give students,” said Meredith Knopp, senior vice president of Junior Achievement of Mississippi Valley in the St. Louis area. “It lets students see how their natural strengths and interests can translate to a career. It also exposes them to the importance of ‘soft skills,’ such as good communication skills and teamwork.”

Many job shadowing programs are conducted through schools with local chambers of commerce. Job shadow experiences can also be arranged by parents, school counselors, school programs, classes or community organizations.

In Eureka, Rockwood School District partners with four local chambers of commerce and many other St. Louis businesses to offer juniors a job shadow experience. The program benefits both students and businesses, said Kim Litzau, the district's Partners in Education supervisor.

"Businesses, both large and small, want to be more involved in the educational process," she said. "Spending time with students helps them to recruit employees and also gives them insight into the curriculum we have at Rockwood."

Students, meanwhile, get to explore an option without making a commitment, Litzau said, adding it's a lot better for students to realize a career is not for them in high school than in college after they are invested in a major.

"Probably the most important measure of success that we have seen is an increase in the number of students signing up for the program every year," Litzau said. "We have anecdotal evidence of students getting summer jobs, and coming back after college for careers. Many partners are also willing to write letters of reference and to serve as mentors for the students."

The Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Junior Achievement – Ozarks District and the Southwest Area Human Resources Association, is another job shadow supporter.

"Through job shadowing, the Springfield Chamber is helping to develop the future workforce by helping students learn more about the opportunities in the Springfield area and what it takes to achieve their goals," said Kristen Westerman, the chamber's manager of workforce and business development. "Area businesses are always looking for ways to help students become interested in new career prospects, especially those industries that are suffering from lack of new people, and the job shadow program gives them that chance."

Schools and businesses that want to offer Job Shadow 2009 events in their communities can find resources on the National Job Shadow Coalition site, www.JobShadow.org, as well as on the site of coalition member Junior Achievement, www.JA.org.

"Groundhog Job Shadow Day is a good reminder of the value of job shadow experiences," Quinn said, "but any time is a good time for students to job shadow."

To learn more about education and career planning, visit the DESE-sponsored site www.MissouriConnections.org.

Tips for a Successful Job Shadow

Creating a successful job shadowing experience requires some planning. Meredith Knopp from Junior Achievement of Mississippi Valley helped create these lists of tips for students and employers.

Tips for Students

1. **Dress appropriately.** Professional dress shows you are taking the opportunity seriously.
2. **Make a good first impression.** When meeting people, be sure to make eye contact and offer a firm handshake. Practice with friends and family members beforehand to gain confidence.
3. **Be respectful and polite.** The person you shadow has the potential to be a valuable mentor. Do your best to impress them. Remember your manners, and do not chew gum or bring a cell phone.
4. **Come prepared with questions.** For example, what education is required for your position? What do you most like about your job? How many different departments are within your company, and how do they all work together to achieve the company mission? What is the salary range that someone in this position can make? Asking questions will show you are interested and you will get more out of the experience.
5. **Express your appreciation.** Thank your mentor for allowing you to shadow him or her when you meet, when you leave for the day and later with a handwritten thank you note. Again, you never know how the connections you make may end up helping you in the future.

Tips for Employers

1. **Have a plan.** Mentors need to prepare talking points. Students will be interested in the history of the business, its mission, its various departments, job opportunities and what is required for advancement, as well as the background of their particular mentors, including their career histories and education paths. Mentors also need to know what they will show students and, when fitting, even prepare tasks for the students to complete.
2. **Create an informal interaction time.** Providing lunch is a good way to let the mentors and students get to know each other on a more personal level. This social time also helps students build confidence and important interpersonal skills.
3. **Make it fun!** Keep the focus on the kids, and be flexible enough to work with their interests. Remember, a successful job shadow will get students excited about exploring their career options. Make it an upbeat, positive experience.

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More information is available at http://dese.mo.gov/divcareered/missouri_connections_news_room.htm.

The Missouri Connections Public Outreach Partnership workgroup represents a collaboration of state agencies concerned with education and workforce development who are helping inform and build awareness among the public, particularly students and potential students, of targeted careers, educational and industry trends, and workforce development priorities. Workgroup members represent the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Department of Higher Education; Department of Economic Development, Division of Workforce Development and Missouri Economic Research & Information Center; Missouri Center for Career Education; and Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Freelance writer is Anita Neal Harrison.