

Organizing a Career Day

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This document contains notes based on the experiences of past Career Day events. While all of these steps may not be currently planned for your Career Day, they are an example of items that have been successful in the past and which you may want to consider.

1. Scheduling the day and time with your administration

Early in the school year, speak with your principal about your plans and schedule the day and time of Career Day. Put the date on the school's master calendar and on the school website. Be sure you have at least 4-5 months to plan as there are many logistics involved. The first year we had Career Day in elementary school, we involved only the 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders, but the following year we had to add the lower grades in a modified Career Day as they wanted to be part of this exciting activity too. We had four sessions of 35 minutes each, with a refreshment break for students and speakers between sessions two and three. The refreshment break was a good networking time for our speakers and they enjoyed it. At our middle school we only involved our 425 eighth graders. You may prefer to start small so as not to get overwhelmed and discouraged by the time involved in the planning. Also, remember you cannot do this alone; you need a committee to help you.

2. Speaking to the staff

Tell them what you are planning and give each teacher and staff member a flyer with the date and time so they can keep this handy. It is very important that teachers know the date early in the year so they do not make plans for a field trip or other special projects on that day. Recruit help and form a committee, making sure to also involve elective teachers, auxiliary staff, office staff, and parents.

3. Meeting with your committee

Decide who will help with speaker contacts, publicity, scheduling, and hospitality. One important thing to remember is that all staff members are very busy and may not be able to devote as much time to this committee as you would like. Don't forget to start small the first year unless you have a large committee with lots of planning time. After our first Career Day in elementary, our principal listed the Career Day Committee as a committee that teachers could sign up for at the start of the year, as all were required to be involved in one or more committees. This really helped when planning the Career Day the second year

4. Involving the Parent Teacher Organization

Tell them about your plans and ask if they would sponsor a hospitality room for the speakers. Involve them in your planning as there are many other ways they can help. They also can provide you with names of community members who could be speakers.

5. How teachers can help promote Career Day

Ask teachers to share with the students what they wanted to be when they were young, if/how their wishes changed, and how they wound up in the teaching profession. If teachers have time they could ask students to share what careers interest them and have them share stories of how they got interested in that occupation, and how old they were when they decided what they were 'going to be'. Encourage students to talk to their parents and grandparents about their current job and ask them what they wanted to be when they were young. Hopefully, teachers can set aside class time so students can share their findings. Perhaps the art teacher can have students make up booklets of careers, flyers and posters, and the computer teacher can use a career interest inventory with the students, if their lesson plan schedule permits.

6. Starting publicity

Make up posters advertising the date for Career Day and put them up in locations around the school. If you have a small budget, order posters of various professions and post them around school or in a specified location where all students can see them. Ask the school librarian if she can set aside a section in the library for books or software on careers. If her budget permits, maybe she can order some more materials. Closer to the date, put the date of Career Day on the school marquee.

7. Classroom activities

Set up meetings with the grade level teachers involved and brainstorm ways they can promote Career Day through their lessons, if possible. In the school where Career Day was only for eighth graders, our entire eighth grade teaching team got involved, with our administration's support, and each core subject teacher, and even electives teachers, incorporated career activities into their lessons throughout the year. This may or may not be possible in your school. We started talking about Career Day the year before and one of the grants I received was to pay a group of teachers a small stipend to meet in the summer and start planning how to integrate career awareness with the academics in the following year when we would have Career Day and Job Site Visits for students.

8. Surveying students

There are several ways to do this: You can ask teachers to have students write down four career choices and start making up a speakers' resource list from there. Or, you and your committee could make up a list of careers and have students mark their choices and also add more choices. Be sure they understand that this is not the signup list yet; you are merely trying to come up with a list of professions they would be interested in learning more about during Career Day so you can find the speakers. Remember to include careers in the professional and vocational fields as well. Brainstorm with your committee other possible ways to survey students.

9. Finding speakers

We typed up the list of professions, put a list in the mailbox of all staff members, and asked them to write down names of people they knew in the listed professions, along with their addresses and phone numbers. They could be relatives, friends, neighbors, or people they knew of in the community. In one school, we had the mayor and even the

governor as speakers because someone in our school community knew them. We also gave a list to the PTO officers and asked for their help finding speakers too. Recruit speakers also through an article in the school newsletter and city newspaper. If you have a neighborhood association in the area, publicize Career Day through their website or newsletter too. I also went to the local Chamber of Commerce and obtained a list of businesses in our city. The Chamber was more than happy to share their information. If you have a university, community, or vocational college in your area, that is a great source for speakers too.

10. Contacting speakers

Once you have surveyed students and have a list of possible speakers, type up a formal letter on school stationery, mail it, and follow it up with a phone call in a week. If some have responded already, you may want to modify your letter to start off by thanking them for volunteering to be speakers. Some speakers may not be able to give you a firm commitment right away, so set a date for them to respond. Give them the option to respond by mail, email, or phone call. In your letter, be sure to include the date and times of Career Day, allowing the speakers to sign up for either two, three, or four sessions, and tell them how long your sessions will be. You will also need to tell them the information you want them to address with students such as how they got their first job, who inspired them in their career, the education required, and what they do in their profession. Also, tell them to leave a little time at the end for student questions. Encourage them to bring items that represent their career. For instance, a veterinarian brought a dog, a doctor brought a stethoscope and other items, and a journalist brought samples of her work. In one school, our focus that year was Character Education, so I asked the speakers to address how character traits (I gave them a list of the ones we were emphasizing) are important in a job. I also asked them to list any audio-visual equipment they might need for their presentation, or tell me if they were bringing their own. In addition, I asked them to write a biographical paragraph or two about themselves and send it to me as we were to compile the biographies into a handout for speakers and teachers. Be sure to tell them the address of your school and directions to it.

11. Number of students per session

This will depend on how many speakers you have and how much physical space you have. You will need to determine how many rooms you have for speakers before you book too many or too few speakers. I found that a good number per session is 10-12 students. The small group allows speakers more time to answer students' questions.

12. Student signups and scheduling sessions

Ask the teachers to pass out a career interest sign up sheet and tell the students to rank their choices 1-5. Once we had the student input, our committee got to work tabulating and spent many, many hours doing this because we did not have the hyperTechnologies software the first year. Using hyperSuite[®] Career Day event scheduler from hyperTechnologies, LLC. allows you to focus on the event instead of focusing on lining your kids up with the right speakers. It also will match the students' top choices with the available speakers and create reports to keep track of your sessions and students.

hyperSuite[®] is fully internet-based, providing many benefits. If you spend all your time hand-scheduling and trying to meet your scheduling deadlines, it will leave your committee stressed and exhausted before the big day.

13. Sending reminders to speakers

The week before, and again two days before, contact the speakers either through phone call or email and tell them how excited your committee is that they will be part of your Career Day. Provide your committee chair's cell phone number in case a speaker cannot attend and needs to cancel at the last minute. It is better that you know the day before, if possible. We always had at least one speaker who had to cancel the morning of the event, so be ready to make arrangements to change the students' schedules. If you are using hyperSuite[®], it will be easy to make changes.

14. Speaker biographies

This is a very time-consuming task, but it is well worth it. Using the information the speakers had sent me, we typed up a short biography for each and compiled them into a booklet. If you are doing Career Day in middle school or high school you could possibly use students to do the typing, if they have time. As each speaker signed in on the day of Career Day, they got a biographies booklet, and it proved very popular. It was also a good networking tool when the speakers got together in the hospitality room during the break. Teachers also appreciated knowing more about the speakers and used some of the information to introduce the speaker.

15. Preparing students for Career Day

We asked the teachers to please discuss good etiquette with the students. Each student got a little sheet with 10 good etiquette points, such as being respectful, raising their hand before asking a question, and not talking when the speaker is talking. On the back of that little sheet was a list of good questions to ask the speakers. Many speakers commented on how polite and well-prepared our students were.

16. How to dress on Career Day

We asked students to dress nicely, or to dress up like their chosen career. We used the theme, "Dress for Success."

17. Publicity for Career Day

Contact your local newspaper, even the TV station, as well as the school district communications office and ask if they would send someone to take pictures or film the event, and write a story. Also, have someone on staff take pictures and video of the event. If your school has a marquee, put "Welcome Career Day Speakers" on it.

18. List of sessions and room assignments

The day before Career Day, provide teachers with a list of the sessions and the room assignments (hyperSuite[®] does this for you). Each session has to have one adult present. Some teachers were able to stay in their own classroom with the speaker; some were not.

We were able to use our elective class teachers to help also at the time when they would normally have the 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders in their classes.

19. Signs outside rooms

The day before the event, post a sign outside each room being used for a presentation. List the name of the speaker, the profession he/she is representing, and the room number. You could ask the art teacher if students could make up the posters and include artwork about the profession represented on the posters. The computer teacher could perhaps ask students to make the posters on the computer.

20. Parking for speakers

Our school had very limited parking in front of the school, so we asked teachers to please not park in the front area on Career Day to reserve the spots for the speakers. Be sure you provide convenient parking and that the entrance to the school is well marked. Be sure your registration table is in the hallway by the front door and visible to the speakers as they come in the building.

21. Speaker registration

Our committee and volunteer parents were in the main hallway in the school as the speakers arrived at school. Each speaker was given a name tag, a speakers' biography booklet, a school map with their presentation room highlighted, and a personalized schedule for each speaker. They were then escorted to the room where he/she would be presenting. It is fun if you can have students escort the speakers to their assigned room. In our school we used the Student Council members. The speakers stayed in the same room for all presentations and the students moved around. The fifth grade students commented that by changing classes they got an idea of what it would feel like 'traveling to classes' in middle school, and they loved it.

22. Have technology staff help

Be sure to involve your technology staff and have them available to trouble shoot during the presentations in case any equipment or computers malfunction.

23. Hospitality

It is very important that speakers feel welcome at your school. You need to provide refreshments and snacks or a continental breakfast if Career Day is early in the morning. Our parent organization was very helpful and set up the hospitality room for us and provided the food at one school; our administration provided the funds for the food and refreshments at another school.

24. Day of Career Day

We started the event off with a short 15 minute assembly for the grade level students involved. At one school, our district superintendent was the guest speaker. He told the students about his education, how he wound up in his chosen career, and then he took questions from the students. They had handy their 'cheat sheet' of questions to ask speakers and did an excellent job of interviewing our superintendent. He was very

honored to be invited and very glad we were addressing career awareness. Within a half hour after he had left campus, he emailed a very gracious note of thank you and congratulations for setting up the event.

25. Career Day schedule

We had four speaker sessions of 35 minutes each, with a 20 minute refreshment break for speakers and students between session two and three. The speakers went to the hospitality room; the students stayed in their 2nd session room. Your time allotted for Career Day will depend on your school schedule and the time your Administration allows.

26. Thank you letters from students

Ask teachers to have students write thank you letters to the speakers. Collect the letters and either mail or deliver them to the speakers. Many students added artwork which made their thank you even more special. Some speakers told me later that they proudly posted the letters and artwork in their office.

27. Feedback forms from teachers

We gave the teachers the information we told the speakers to cover with the students. We also asked teachers to rate the speakers on a form we provided where they could provide other valuable feedback like what the students' reactions were to the speaker and whether it was an age-appropriate presentation.

28. Thank you letters and certificates of appreciation to speakers

You can choose to put a certificate in the packet the speakers receive at registration or include it with the packet of thank you letters from the students. It is very important that each speaker receive a thank you letter from your committee and a certificate of appreciation. If your budget permits, you could make up a small gift basket for each speaker.

29. Thank you to teachers and staff

A successful Career Day is the result of your committee and many staff members and teachers working together. If you can, the morning after the Career Day, provide coffee and pastries in the teachers' lounge as a thank you. If you have a generous budget, perhaps you could provide box lunches as an extra special thank you.

30. Debriefing with committee

The next school day after Career Day, meet with your committee to get input on how they thought the day went, what went right, what they would change, or what they did not like about it. Go over the teacher feedback forms also, as well as any other comments you received. Take good notes at this meeting as they will help you when planning next year's Career Day. Good luck!

31. Planning next year's Career Day

Meet with your committee over the summer so you can get a head start in planning.