

GUIDE TO THE SITE VISIT

(Second Interviews)

INTRODUCTION

The material in this handout applies to most employers, whether it's a company, hospital, social service agency, radio station, museum or other type of employer. Most organizations that recruit on college campuses include a company (site) visit as a major part of the hiring process. The company visit is generally a full day of interviewing and related activities, at the company site. After the company visit is completed and an evaluation conducted, an offer may be made. The company visit is given many names. It can also be referred to as a plant trip, second interview, site visit, or office visit. Just as the company visit has many names, it also has a variety of faces. There is no way to describe every aspect of what you can expect in a company visit because employers vary greatly in how they arrange them. The length of the trip, number of people involved, levels of people interviewed, types of tests conducted, and degree of informality can differ from one company to the next. As a result, this publication focuses upon information that is fairly consistent for most companies. We have tried to present information that will help you understand the nature of the company visit, how to prepare for it, and how to conduct yourself most effectively during the visit. We hope you find the information helpful.

THE PURPOSE OF THE COMPANY VISIT

The company visit serves two primary purposes:

1. Allow the company to get a more in-depth assessment of the candidate prior to making a job offer. The company visit is time-consuming and expensive for employers, so they screen a large number of applicants down to a few who are invited to visit. The company visit is generally the last step in the selection process before an offer is made.

The company is confident that the candidate who is invited to visit for a day has the technical skills and intelligence to do the job. The company visit becomes their opportunity to confirm that there is a good match between the candidate's goals and the career opportunity. They also attempt to see that there is good "chemistry" between the candidate and the company's culture.

2. Allow the candidate an opportunity to see the company and some of its people first hand in order to make a wiser decision if an offer is made.

The company visit provides the candidate with an opportunity to learn more about the position, the long-term career opportunities, the company's employees, the company itself, and the local community. The company will usually be doing as much "selling" as evaluating because this is the information the candidate will use in deciding whether to accept or decline an offer. The candidate, like the company, is trying to determine whether or not there is a good fit between the two.

PREPARING FOR THE VISIT

Considering the importance and purpose of the company visit, it is imperative that the candidate prepare for the day. Preparation for the company visit should not be taken lightly since the visit is the final step for most companies in deciding whether to make a job offer.

Candidates should attempt to learn as much about the company as possible. Items of preparation should include:

- . Notes taken after the initial interview
- . Annual report
- . Promotional material on the company/organization/agency
- . Industry and business publications containing information about the company/organization
- . Talking with former students who are now employed by the company/organization
- . Talking to people who have had direct dealings with the company or its products/services.

Candidates should prepare so that they can present themselves as being knowledgeable about the company, its products or services, and the career opportunity being discussed. The better prepared the candidate, the more probable it is that the company will recognize enthusiasm, drive, motivation, maturity, and thoroughness as assets possessed by the candidate.

The candidate should use the information obtained to develop insightful questions designed to show interest in the company and the position. These questions should demonstrate the candidate's thorough preparation for the visit, but should also provide the types of information that will support an informed decision to accept or decline an offer. In order for the candidate to prepare these insightful questions they should investigate the following company characteristics:

- . The business in which they operate
- . Their mission and long-range goals
- . Their business philosophy and management style
- . The community in which they are located

The questions should be well positioned during the interview process. Recent hires of the company might be asked about training, promotion, performance evaluation and community life. More experienced interviewers can be asked about corporate culture, long-term plans, company

history and other topics where experience enhances the value of a response. Good questions will cover a wide range of topics including:

- . Corporate goals and direction
- . Career enhancement
- . Market growth opportunities
- . Company's competitive environment
- . Research & development
- . Evaluation system
- . Career paths of recent hires
- . Commitment to training
- . Community lifestyle

Questions such as: "So what do you all do?" or "What are the benefits?" do not sit well with most interviewers. These questions show shallowness and a lack of concern for the key criteria which are being judged during the visit. The first type of question begs information that should have already been discovered, and the second reflects an over-emphasis on matters that will be explained in good time.

Candidates frequently overlook personal preparation. While knowledge, good insightful questions and a sharp business outlook will go a long way toward succeeding in the company visit, a lack of personal preparation can detract from a candidate's positive image.

What factors constitute good personal preparation? They include:

- . Leaving personal problems at home
- . Taking appropriate business dress (for the type company involved)
- . Having a well-groomed appearance (hair, face, skin, nails, etc.)

These are some areas of personal preparation often overlooked by the candidate, yet extremely important. Candidates often put themselves at a disadvantage by packing carelessly, neglecting to take grooming aids, leaving for the visit with pressures from school deadlines, etc. These all can contribute to a poor company visit.

An invitation to a company visit will usually come from a contact person at the company. This person becomes the candidate's source of information about all aspects of the trip. Any questions prior to the trip can be addressed to the contact person.

The majority of company visits are one full day in length. This generally necessitates an overnight stay in the city where the company is located. Travel will be either by flying or driving, depending upon the candidate's preference and distance away. Usually trips of more than 200 miles will justify flight. Where railroad connections are reliable, of course, trains may become a means of travel.

In cases where the candidate is flying in, it is a good idea to use a travel agent to handle the flight arrangements. The candidate need only give the agent desired travel dates and times. The agent will search for the best times, report to the candidate, then book the flight. This is done at no extra cost to the consumer.

Some companies are prepared to schedule all the arrangements for the company visit. They will reserve and pre-pay the hotel room and schedule and pre-pay the flights, but might offer these conveniences only when requested by the candidate. If the company is not pre-paying the flight, the candidate should have a method of payment for the travel agent.

The candidate should confirm his hotel reservations with the contact person and make sure he knows up front how payment will be handled. Arrangements for ground transportation should be discussed with the contact person so the candidate is prepared in advance to handle this part of the trip.

After receiving confirmation of his travel arrangements, the candidate should call or send a note to his contact in the company, confirming reservations and travel plans. It is important that the candidate contact the company regarding travel plans to avoid any last minute mix-ups or confusion.

Candidates who are married sometimes request that their spouse accompany them on the visit. Some employers may include spouses on the visit, although many others will offer a later visit for the spouse, after an offer has been made. The candidate can ask about the spouse also taking the trip later, if at all.

If a spouse is accompanying the candidate on the visit, any arrangements for the spouse need to be discussed with the company contact person. These include transportation, activities during the day, hotel reservations, etc. The candidate should get all directions ahead of time. If anything at all is unclear (dates, times, locations) he should call the company contact person prior to departure to clear things up. The candidate should leave knowing how to get from airport to hotel to interview site, and how he will get to the first meeting of the day.

ARRIVAL

It is usually a good idea for the candidate to plan to arrive in the city the night before the company visit. The wise candidate tries to avoid very late flights or the last flight into the city. This will help avoid the problems that can arise from airline delays, cancellations or related difficulties.

Once in town, the candidate goes to the hotel and checks in. Many hotels have courtesy vans from the airport. In other cases, the candidate may take a taxi. In any case, receipts for ground transportation expenditures should be kept for later reimbursement.

When checking into the hotel the candidate should ask for any messages (the company may have left information for her) and verify any pre-payment agreement. Most hotels will ask

to imprint a credit card for any charges not covered by the company. Some items the candidate should be aware of include the following.

- . Schedule a morning wake-up call with the front desk allowing plenty of time to get cleaned and dressed.
- . If the initial room is unsatisfactory for any reason, particularly a noisy location, don't hesitate to ask the hotel to change it.
- . Non-smoking rooms are often available for non-smokers.
- . Local calls are not free. They often cost anywhere from 25 cents to 75 cents per call.
- . Do not bill any long distance calls to the room. Call collect or use a credit card.
- . Review the bill upon checkout to ensure its accuracy.

EVENING BEFORE

Many companies arrange for an employee to meet the candidate for dinner on the evening of arrival. The dinner is designed as an opportunity for the candidate to relax and meet an employee while getting a casual flavor for the next day's schedule, the company, the city and any other pertinent topics.

The dinner companion might be a line manager, the candidate's key contact, a recent hire at the company, or alum of the candidate's school. The degree of informality and nature of conversation at dinner can vary but they are usually quite relaxed. Any dinner companion can serve as an evaluator so the candidate should always reflect maturity and professionalism.

To a degree, the candidate is being interviewed during this dinner. The dinner host may be evaluating the candidate's:

- . Social graces
- . Manner of speech
- . Contemporary ideas/views
- . Ability to converse
- . Ability to mix business/pleasure
- . Maturity

The candidate is advised to dress appropriately for a social dinner. She should eat moderately, avoid alcoholic beverages (beyond a glass of wine, a beer, or a single drink,) ask good, penetrating questions revolving around the particular topic of discussion, and relax. The dinner is generally very social in nature and the candidate should be herself, although it should be her professional self that comes through.

The candidate should leave a wake-up call for morning, use a travel alarm clock, and have a parent or friend call in the morning to make sure she wakes up with plenty of time to prepare. No mistake is worse than tardiness.

The candidate should check out of the hotel upon leaving for the company site. If this is forgotten it can result in the company being charged for an extra night. She should take any baggage with her as it may be out of the way to return to the hotel at the end of the day.

INTERVIEW DAY

The day of the interview is generally a very busy one. It is impossible to write exactly what to expect because different companies set up different types of schedules. Many companies will schedule three to five hour-long interviews with various levels of management in one-on-one settings. These interviews may, however, be shorter or longer, fewer or more numerous.

Some employers schedule group interviews with four to twelve candidates visiting at one time. The candidates engage in some group sessions, and at other times are involved in one-on-one interviews. The group visit is more difficult for the company to arrange but allows them the opportunity to see each candidate among his peers. It permits the candidate a chance to see some of those who might be a part of his training group. Most employers are well prepared for company visits by candidates. Many companies conduct formal interview training for their managers and these companies usually provide very good interview sessions with candidates.

Interviewers have scanned the resumes of their visitors and will be familiar with the backgrounds of the candidates. The interviewers attempt to assess the motivation and drive of the candidates - to see what makes them strive for success. Each interviewer knows what he is looking for in a candidate and will probe for strengths and weaknesses.

Candidates may be asked the same questions by three or four different people during the day, yet must give as good an answer to the fourth as to the first. This can be tiring, but may indicate an area of particular concern to the company. Some employers, however, may not be well-prepared. Candidates are sometimes called upon to carry the interview with their questions and observations.

In the one-on-one setting, candidates will speak with department managers and first line supervisors of the area in which the position is available. Additionally, the candidates may meet with a second or third level manager who has had experience in many different areas of the organization. Finally, the vice president of human resources or a director level manager may meet with the candidate to round out her exposure to the organization's personnel. If the candidate is interviewing at a plant-trip location it is probable that an employment manager or plant manager will conduct a tour of the plant at some time during the day. While this is usually a relaxed tour, the candidate should be aware that she is still being interviewed, even in this setting.

Companies will usually try to structure the itineraries to meet the candidate's schedule, and many will design the day so as to provide a friendly and relaxed atmosphere for the candidate. It is important to the company that the candidate feel as comfortable as possible about the visit so that she may accurately assess her feelings about the job, company, location, etc. A host/guest relationship is fostered to afford the optimal opportunity for proper selection techniques on the part of both the company and the candidate. Remember, the company is selling itself to the candidate as much as the reverse is taking place.

Anyone the candidate meets for even a few minutes is a potential evaluator. Considering this, the candidate must remain sharp and confident at all times. At no time can the successful candidate reflect a lack of professionalism and expect a positive response.

DEPARTURE

The last meeting of the day will often be with the contact person or personnel manager. This session is to answer any final candidate questions, explain follow-up procedures, discuss reimbursement and take care of any similar details.

After the visit the candidate will be directed back to the airport for the flight home. Most companies will structure the day to allow her to depart the facility between 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Candidates should be sure that all their questions have been answered prior to leaving. They need to understand both their and the company's responsibility regarding follow-up. These should be discussed during the last session of the day.

INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

As mentioned earlier, most day-long company visits are packed with interviews. Under the pressure of numerous back-to-back interviews it is easy for the candidate to grow weary and ignore some points which are important to his survival in the process.

The candidate will be speaking with a variety of managers at differing levels of the corporate hierarchy. It is important that the candidate be himself, maintain a positive attitude, and relax as much as possible.

The wise candidate takes the opportunity to ask a lot of questions and to get a feel for the company's operating environment. He relishes the opportunity to speak with as many workers as possible at the company location. This gives the candidate a better understanding of the people and environment in which he might eventually be employed. Candidates sometimes obtain valuable information in unexpected settings.

- . Waiting for an interviewer to come pick him up at a reception area
- . In the company cafeteria during lunch
- . Speaking with a secretary in a manager's office

Most interview questions are geared toward assessment of candidates' communication skills, aggressiveness, leadership capabilities, personal skills and desires as they relate to the position open and to long range career goals.

It is very important for candidates to understand that they are being probed during the company visit. Candidates must take a long range view when preparing their responses and assessing their qualifications prior to a visit.

In some instances, companies will assign each interviewer a specific quality or skill to probe during the interview. One interviewer will probe for leadership ability, another for analytical ability, still another for communication skills and so on. After the process is complete, all the interviewers will meet to discuss the candidate and a decision will be reached.

In other companies, each interviewer will determine independently the nature of her questions. This approach might appear less coordinated to the candidate. Again, the interviewers will share the impressions they have reached after the candidate's departure.

SALARY

This is a touchy topic and students are often caught off guard when the topic comes up in an interview. If questioned about salary expectations the candidate can respond in one of two ways:

- . Give a broad range: "I would hope with my background and qualifications to be making between \$30,000 and \$35,000." The range given should be realistic and based upon prior research of starting salaries in the industry and for the position being discussed.
- . Sidestep the question: "I'm sure that if you make me an offer it will be commensurate with my qualifications and the current salary structure for your industry."

The candidate should try to avoid giving an exact figure in response to this question. If pressed on the issue by the interviewer, one has to respond but it is best to give a range.

Candidates are often tempted to bring up the salary issue themselves. As a general rule, it is best not to mention salary until the company brings it up. Salary will usually not be a topic of conversation until an offer is made.

TESTING

Many companies test candidates prior to extending offers to visit the company or during the visit itself. This testing may consist of standard mathematical and verbal tests similar to the SAT or ACT, but much briefer. The candidate should be aware that this type of testing may be conducted and should understand that no preparation is possible. The candidate should, however, get plenty of rest the evening before a test to aid clear thinking.

Some companies administer personality tests. These tests involve numerous questions for which there are no right or wrong answers and candidates must answer them honestly or risk a result showing very unusual profiles. There is no benefit to trying to "psych out" a personality test. A newer form of testing instituted by many companies over the last few years involves drug testing. This encompasses testing for all controlled substances and takes the form of a urine specimen analyzed for appearance of a substance. Candidates should be aware of the possibility that this test may occur and should be advised that failure to submit to a drug test may end further employment consideration.

COMMUNITY

Candidates should also make an effort to learn about the company's surrounding territory. It is a good idea for the candidate to write to the local chamber of commerce requesting information on the area, or go to their web site. Additionally, an apartment guide or home guide is probably available through the chamber or the realty association for use in selecting a residence.

If an eventual job offer is made and accepted, the candidate will be relocating to that city. During the company visit day the candidate should question people, particularly those closest to his age, about housing, entertainment, cost of living, and other personal concerns.

EXPENSES AND FOLLOW-UP

Expense handling and reimbursement varies from company to company but nearly all will handle this part of the process with a sensitive eye toward the candidate's needs. If possible, both for the company interviewing and later business travel, it is a good idea for the candidate to secure a major credit card. This will provide the ability to pay expenses when the need arises and will help to avoid any potentially embarrassing situation.

If a major credit card is not an option, and cash flow is low, many companies are willing to pre-pay expenses. A candidate should never turn down a company visit because his funds are low! By talking to the contact person in the company he may find that they can help. Companies can assist students in ways such as:

- . Pre-pay airline tickets and have them waiting at the airport.
- . Pre-pay the hotel room.
- . Provide cash up front for use by the student in travel.
- . Arrange for ground transportation

Generally, most major expenses (travel and lodging) will either be pre-paid by the company or put on a credit card by the student and reimbursed by the company at a later date. Incidental expenses to be paid by the candidate and reimbursed later include:

- . Parking
- . Cab fares
- . Business phone calls
- . Meals enroute
- . Tips

Other incidental expenses fully borne by the candidate include:

- . Room service snacks
- . Newspapers
- . Personal phone calls

- . Gifts
- . In room movies
- . Other personal items

The candidate should always collect receipts for expenses. She should also have resources to pay hotel expenses, even when pre-payment has been agreed upon. Mistakes are sometimes made.

While not an overriding issue, it is important that the candidate use common sense and good judgment regarding expenses. Companies will see an expense report and receipts after a visit, and unusually high expenditures for ordinary items or unnecessary expenditures are generally frowned upon. Meals need not be at a fast-food restaurant, but should be reasonable and items such as expensive wine or appetizers should be avoided. The hotel's own restaurant (or comparable prices) is usually a good measure of how much to spend. The company wants the candidate to enjoy the visit but not to be extravagant.

AFTER THE VISIT

Following his visit the candidate should send a personal letter of thanks to all the people met and talked with that day. While this may not affect the probability of getting an offer, it is a common courtesy and will definitely be remembered if he ends up working there.

Additionally, a letter of thanks to the main contact person is mandatory. This letter should reaffirm interest in the position, highlight qualifications one last time or, if applicable, indicate no further interest in the position. This short letter should reflect the candidate's aggressiveness, highlight his understanding of etiquette and show his continued interest. The letter provides the candidate one last opportunity to stand out above his competition and position himself for potential hiring.

Many companies will get back to candidates within two weeks for the actual visit with an offer or a rejection. This is an average. Some companies offer jobs on the spot while others take up to a month to respond. It is, therefore, a good idea for candidates to find out how long they can expect to wait to hear from the company regarding an employment decision. The candidate should feel free to contact the company to check on delays if the estimated decision date passes with no response.

Finally, candidates are advised never to be afraid to turn down a job offer if, after careful consideration, they consider it not to be right for their future. After all, long-term career satisfaction is the goal of the whole process.

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Written by: Mr. Ralph Miranda
Dr. Robert Greenberg
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

