

THE SITE VISIT/INTERVIEW: ONE STEP CLOSER

While on-campus screening interviews are important, on-site visits are where jobs are won or lost. After an on-campus interview, strong candidates are usually invited to visit the employer's facility. Work with the employer to schedule the on-site visit at a mutually convenient time. Sometimes employers will try to arrange site visits for several candidates to take place at the same time, so there may not be much flexibility... but you'll never know if the employer is flexible unless you ask.

- 1. An invitation to an on-site interview, often referred to as the “plant trip,” is NOT a guarantee of a job offer.** It is a chance to examine whether or not you will be a good match for the job and for the organization.
- 2. Notification of a plant trip may be by telephone or mail.** *(Take note of how the employees interact, and also assess the physical work environment.)* Respond promptly if you are sincerely interested in this employer. Decline politely if you are not. Never go on a plant trip for the sake of the trip. Document the name and phone number of the person coordinating your trip. Verify who will be handling trip expenses. Most medium- and large-size companies (as well as many smaller ones) will pay your expenses, but others will not. This is very important, because expenses are handled in various ways: 1) the employer may handle all expenses and travel arrangements; 2) you handle your expenses and arrangements (the employer may assist with this), and the employer will reimburse you later; 3) the employer may offer an on-site interview, but will not pay for your interview.
- 3. Know yourself and the type of job you are seeking with this employer.** Don't say, “I am willing to consider anything you have.”
- 4. Thoroughly research the potential employer.** Read annual reports, newspaper articles, trade journals, etc. Many companies have their own homepage, where you can read its mission statement, find out about its long-term goals, read recent press releases, and view corporate photos. Don't limit your research only to company-controlled information. The World Wide Web can be a valuable investigative tool. You may uncover key information that may influence—positively or negatively—your decision to pursue employment with a given organization.
- 5. Bring extra copies of your resume;** copies of any paperwork you may have forwarded to the employer; names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of your references; an updated college transcript; a copy of your best paper as a writing sample; a notebook; a black and/or blue pen for filling out forms and applications; and names and addresses of past employers.
- 6. Bring extra money and a change of clothes.** Also, have the names and phone numbers of those who may be meeting you in case your plans change unexpectedly. Anything can happen and you need to be ready for emergencies.

7. **Your role at the interview is to respond to questions, to ask your own questions and to observe.** Be ready to meet people who are not part of your formal agenda. Be courteous to everyone regardless of his or her position; you never know who might be watching you and your actions once you arrive in town.
8. **Don't forget your table manners.** Plant trips may include several meals or attendance at a reception the night before your "big day." When ordering food at a restaurant, follow the lead of the employer host. For example, don't order the three-pound lobster if everyone else is having a more moderately priced entree. If you have the "dining jitters," some authorities suggest ordering food that is easy to handle, such as a boneless fish fillet or chicken breast.
9. **Many employers have a set salary range for entry-level positions and others are more negotiable.** Though salary should not be brought up until an offer is extended, it is wise to know your worth in advance. Contact your campus career center to obtain more information on salaries. According to Jay Wheeler, manager of university relations and staffing for Halliburton, "Students have been working on perfecting their product for a number of years and should know what kind of product they've created and what the company is willing to buy."
10. **Soon after the site visit, record your impressions of your performance.** Review the business cards of those you met or write the information in your notebook before leaving the facility. You should have the names, titles, addresses and phone numbers of everyone who was involved in your interview so you can determine which individuals you may want to contact with additional questions or follow-up information. A thank you letter should be written to the person(s) who will be making the hiring decision. Stay in touch with the employer if you want to pursue a career with them.

A site visit is a two-way street. You are there to evaluate the employer and to determine if your expectations are met for job content, company culture and values, organizational structure, and lifestyles (both at work and leisure). Take note of how the employees interact, and also assess the physical work environment.

Just as any good salesperson would never leave a customer without attempting to close the sale, you should never leave an interview without some sort of closure. If you decide that the job is right for you, don't be afraid to tell the employer that you feel that there is a good fit and you are eager to join their team. The employer is interested in hiring people who want to be associated with them and they will never know of your interest if you don't voice your opinion. Keep in mind that although the employer has the final power to offer a job, your demeanor during the entire interviewing process—both on and off campus—also gives you a great deal of power.