

*Learning is not compulsory, but neither is survival.* W. Edwards Deming

## CLASSROOM SPEAKING GUIDE

Do you want to make a difference in education? Why not share your experience with young people? The more stories you and others have to tell about your work, the less students and teachers have to guess about how their studies fit with industry. In the 1980s more than 70% of men worked by the time they were seventeen.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the long-term career or academic choices of young women and men may be, letting them know early the demands of industry is a fun way to help build a healthy community and a ready workforce.

### **Who?**

Any person with relevant industry experience and an interest in communicating with young people can speak to students.

### **What?**

The goal is to give students credible reasons to care about what they are learning with answers to the timeless question, “When am I ever gonna use this?”

### **When?**

Speaking engagements happen during traditional school hours. The amount of time a speaker invests is entirely up to him or her.

### **Where?**

Elementary, middle and high schools in the twelve county Greater Austin area are always looking for speakers. Matches are made based on time and interest.

### **Why?**

It’s fun. It’s the right thing to do. It’s your future workforce. Without contact between industry and education, both are left in the dark. You just might learn something in the process!

## KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL CLASSROOM SPEAKING

**Pause.** Before you begin, take a moment to collect your thoughts. This will give you a much better sense of control. Agree with the class at the beginning how you want to handle questions. Monitor yourself while speaking to make sure you are being clear and moving at the right pace. Turn off your cell phone and pager and try to relax.

**Introduce yourself.** In two minutes or less tell the class who you are, what you do and something about yourself. What did you like and dislike about school at their age? Is there anything about your family you would like to share? How about hobbies or how you spend free time?

**Grab their attention.** Ask the students a question or tell them something that will peak their interest. This could be about you personally or a juicy piece of trivia related to your industry.

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<sup>1</sup> “Transition from School to Work: Black, Hispanic and White Men in the 1980’s” by Avner Ahituv, Marta Tienda, and V. Joseph Hotz in *Back to Shared Prosperity: The Growing Inequality of Wealth and Income in America*, Ray Marshall editor. M.E. Sharp, Armonk, N.Y. 2000. pp. 250-258.

**Depict your industry.** Bring your field to life by describing what your industry produces, which companies are key players, the job and earning opportunities, education and training requirements, your own company's services and clients and the particular role you play.

**Tell a story.** Talk to the students about a challenging opportunity or project you completed. What actions did you take? What judgment calls were made? How did you involve other people? What skills or technology were required? What challenges did you overcome? What did you learn?

**Keep it interactive.** Use demos or hands-on activities whenever possible. When telling a story, have the students tell *you* what they would have done. Set up the scenario and ask questions like, "What would you do first?" and "What would you do next?" The question, "Why?" is your best friend.

**Nail one key concept.** In most cases speakers will have just under an hour. The point is not to cover every detail, but to highlight key elements. Have a phone conversation with the teacher to find out what skills or understanding (s)he is working to develop in the students. The more your story highlights those key concepts or skills, the greater the impact you will have.

**Engage your audience.** Know your presentation well enough that you are not bound by detailed notes and are free to interact with the audience. The focus is the kids. Try to talk to everyone in the room and avoid calling on the same one or two quick hands.

**Be honest.** Share your mistakes or lessons learned with students and how you corrected them or changed what you were doing.

**Look to the teacher for support and classroom discipline.** Agree with the teacher in advance that (s)he will be in the room the whole time. You should have an attentive audience that way, and the educator will handle any disruptions should they occur.

**Leave time for questions.** Students will have a lot questions for you. Please leave time at the end for these inquiries.

**Enjoy yourself.** If you are open and know your story, the experience will be positive.

**Debrief.** At the end have the students and teacher fill out an evaluation forms. Check with the teacher afterwards. How did (s)he think it went? Let the teacher and students know what you thought of them. And please tell us what we can do to better support you or improve the effort.

*I see my role as supporting the teacher. I lend credibility to the 'why' of what is taught. There is a certain look in the eyes of a student that says they just realized why something is important. The opportunity to see that look is what makes visiting a classroom worthwhile.*

*Drew Bixby, Black Diamond Technology*