Shadowing tips

Some practical advice from a Crossing Thresholds alumni

Some things to think about:

• Use the course as a hook - it’s a fantastic excuse to shadow
• Force yourself to get over any embarrassment and don’t focus on obstacles! The ‘why will they want me hanging around’ factor isn’t helpful or true. People LIKE being shadowed. For a start it flatters their egos, but they can also take the opportunity to reflect on how they got to where they are and their own style.
• They are likely to say yes, and what would be lost if they didn’t?

Picking someone to shadow

Firstly, have a think about what you want to get out of it. I can’t entirely claim this methodology, but my boss suggested there are three main types of job shadowing:

1. The profile-raiser
   Do this if:
   • You feel a bit ‘under the radar’
   • You’ve had (irritating) comments like ‘needs to have more impact/visibility’
   • Candidates might be people in your own organisation, or people in senior positions outside.

2. The experience-gainer
   Do this if:
   • You want to pick up some specific tips on leadership or a particular work area (someone in our group, for example, is focusing on HR leaders)
   • You want to gain some specific experience e.g. following someone to a key meeting to see how to influence/negotiate

3. The tactical manoeuvre
   Do this if:
   • You want a job somewhere or with someone in particular
   • You need to widen your network to create more opportunities

If you’re greedy like me (and have fabulously kind managers), you can do all three...

Ask people to help you identify suitable candidates - there will be a lot not on your radar. I spoke to:
• My boss and my Director
How to pitch yourself

It’s worth giving a bit of thought to how you pitch yourself to the person you want to shadow. Firstly, use contacts or ring private office/the PA etc. to find out who the best person to contact is.

Things you might want to cover in your (short!!) pitch email:

- You’re on the (prestigious!) Crossing Thresholds, which develops female talent in the SCS feeder grades
- Briefly, why you want to shadow them (flattery works here!). What have you seen of them, why are you impressed by them?
- What are you hoping to get out of it?
- Small bio pic: keep it very snappy (I did 2-3 sentences tops); make yourself sound like an interesting/relevant person to have around for the day.
- How long you want to shadow them for and the timescale (in the next six months, say). Don’t be apologetic about taking up their time etc.

And be prepared to follow up - realistically, you’re not top of the priority list, but that doesn’t mean they don’t want to do it.

I asked for 15 minutes at the end of each for a one-to-one, where I could ask some of my key questions if I didn’t get the opportunity during the day.

Making the most of it

Do a bit of prep - ask if there are any background papers for meetings. Read around the current big issues. Google a bit!

Have some killer questions in your pocket for a one-to-one.

Be prepared to introduce yourself and explain what you’re doing there!

Be prepared at the end of meetings to answer ‘how did you think that went?’ type questions.

Don’t be afraid to sell yourself a bit - use the opportunity to enhance your reputation.

Feedback afterwards to course mates/peer groups and colleagues (another profile raiser!).

**Good luck, and enjoy it!**