

Guidelines for Hosting a School Tour

You may have been asked by a local school or training facility to host a tour. Congratulations! This means that you are recognized as an industry leader and people recognize your business approach as something worth observing and modeling. You have the opportunity to share your knowledge and experience with students and teachers, and to develop connections with future employees.

Here are some things to consider as you plan your tour:

Preparing your Company Internally

- Schedule the tour during a time when machines will be on, things will be happening, so that there will be something for the students to see. Having a group of students in-house may temporarily affect your employees and productivity, so you might want to avoid scheduling a tour in the middle of a big project or a tight deadline.
- Notify your employees in advance of the tour so they can prepare. Make sure the facility is “clean,” not just for presentation, but for safety! For example, remove any boards, carts, wires, debris, etc. blocking any walkways. Look through the facility with a safety hat on to see how it will appear to an outsider and those not used to navigating your plant floor.
- Give your employees ownership in the event by asking them to help with the tour. Identify one person per “area” to talk about that part of the process.
- You’re in the driver’s seat. Decide when, how often, how long, a.m. or p.m. If you can be flexible, that’s great too as schools may have some determining factors as well.
- Prepare engaging questions for the students – they love to show off their knowledge.

The Tour Plan

- Plan on about 1 ½ hours for the tour. Begin with an introductory presentation that will be of interest to the students. They want to know about careers, pay scales, what their life style will be like, what the hours are like and if they are flexible. Do mention your market specialization, such as commercial, residential, hospitality, institutional, etc., who your primary customer is, and tell them about any high-profile clients you can mention such as Google, Apple, TV or movie stars. Students will enjoy knowing they are working on projects for these types of clients.

Keep company history brief, rather, talk about exciting facts that would intrigue the students. Tell them about the processes and any “high-tech” equipment they will be seeing on the tour.

After the tour, there can be a wrap-up with time for questions. Don't underestimate youth. Ask probing questions—you may get some new ideas you can implement!

- Map or plan out the tour route for the students, especially if there are staggered groups and/or if they will be seeing multiple buildings on the same campus. Make it an efficient route, ideally paralleling your production process so they see the product from “raw to finished.” Have the students stop at each station to talk with employees who do that part of the process.
- Designate one person to moderate or oversee the tour as a whole, as well as identify those who will speak at each station.
- Determine if a microphone will be needed at any point during the tour. An inaudible tour would cause students to lose interest quickly. If headphones are available, utilize them.

Logistics

- How many people can you accommodate? Most classes consist of 20-30 students, but the teacher might have multiple classes. You can cap the tour, or offer the tour in shifts.
- Identify how many can go in each group. A group of 20 can be unwieldy, so break it up into groups of ten. Stagger the groups so that they start the tour in 5-10 minute intervals, depending on how long it takes to discuss each section. Have a plan as to where each group will start or what to do if they have to wait to start at the same section. If the groups can start at different locations within the facility without it affecting the way you explain the production process, this will help to ensure that everyone finishes around the same time.
- If there are multiple staggered groups, do you have enough people to serve as tour guides?
- Discuss the travel plans with the teacher. Will they be arriving by bus? If so, is there enough space in your parking lot for a bus? Where can the bus wait while the tour is taking place?
- Consider having the students participate in an activity while there. For example, use scrap material to create something similar to what you produce that they can take home, or create a problem for them to solve that is related to your production process. Hands-on learning will reinforce what they see on the tour and help them understand the experience better.
- Do you have any information flyers or give-aways for the students such as safety glasses?
- Can they take pictures during the tour? Tell them either way.
- Optional: Host an easy lunch (i.e. bagged sandwiches) or refreshments. Check with the teacher.

Safety

- How will safety precautions be taken into account? Will students need goggles, helmets or earplugs? Anti-static or other protective clothing?
- Make sure you are protected from liability; prepare a waiver that the teacher can distribute and have students sign prior to the event. If they are under 18, their parent must sign. If they don't bring the waiver on the day of the event, they won't be able to enter the facility. No exceptions. Speak with an HR representative or legal advisor on such a waiver, or ask the school if they already have one.
- Are there any ADA special needs that must be taken into consideration – wheelchairs, hearing-impaired students? If your facility is not equipped, be sure the teacher knows this so they can prepare the attendees accordingly.

A picture is worth a thousand words. Showing students what the industry is about gives them tangible ideas of how they might have a successful career in the industry. You can play a pro-active role in developing tomorrow's workforce through outreach to schools.



Prepared by the Education Department of the Association of Woodworking & Furnishings Suppliers (AWFS).

AWFS, 2400 E. Katella Avenue, Suite 340, Anaheim, CA 92806 (800) 946-2937

This and related documents can be found at: www.AWFS.org/education/industry/