

Tips for Speakers | Talking with 9th Graders

Speaker's Goal:

- Spark students' interests in careers and education beyond high school
- Share your personal education and career journey
- Help connect your job skills to what students are learning in class
- Inspire students to want to work for your company in the future!

Orienting Yourself to Speak To 9th Graders

Think back to when you were in 9th grade. Remember what was important to you and the things you cared about most. Many of those same things are important today to middle and high school students, except now, many have instant access to information through technology and social media.

Speaker Qualities Important to 9th Graders

- Someone who is real and comfortable presenting their true self.
- Someone who can connect on a personal level and is willing to share stories about setbacks or failures in their education and/or career journey and how they learned from those setbacks or failures.
- Someone who is knowledgeable about what they do.
- Someone they can relate to.

Presenting to 9th Graders

- Be sure to speak to them like an adult. Student don't want presenters to "talk down" to them.
- Be aware of industry or company jargon – be sure to either define it or use more "plain speaking" terminology. If you're going to use acronyms, make sure to define them.
- When possible, relate your message to them, to their families, friends, or communities.
- Remember telling stories is a powerful way to engage and maintain listeners' attention. As you describe your education or career path, recount it in a "story-telling" way.
- If there is a moment where you are unsure on how to answer a question from a student, or you don't know the answer, don't forget to get help from your team. Remember, it is ok if you do not know the answer, and let the students know that you don't know, but that you will get back to them on that.
- Remember you are in essence making a "pitch" about your company to students. You want to convince these students to work at your company one day. Think about the enthusiasm you would deliver in the same case to a prospective job candidate you want to work at your firm.

Connecting School to Your Career and Education

- Help students see how the skills they are learning relate to more advanced skills they need in education beyond high school or on the job. For example, you could say “I use my writing skills every day in [describe how you use those skills]. Or, learning how to craft a good argument or thesis in middle or high school, helped me develop the skills to present a business plan or make the case for funding for my project.”

Caution

- Be sure to demonstrate respect for all jobs – not just jobs that require four year degrees. Avoid comments like, “You wouldn’t want to end up working at McDonalds’ or in a low wage job.” Remember, many of the students have relatives or friends working in these jobs, and they’re just as valuable to them as being a CEO.
- Similarly, four-year degrees are not the only way to make a good living. We want students to understand there are multiple education pathways, like those of two year degrees or apprenticeship training that can lead to jobs that pay good family wages.
- A student may ask you how much you earn. Feel free to give them a typical salary range for a person in your position.