

Workshop lets students in on workforce secrets



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“You’re stuck in an elevator with the person responsible for getting you into graduate school. You have two minutes to tell (him) why you’re the right person for the job. What do you say?”

This was the type of questions students were given at the second annual College Bound Opportunities After College Workshop this week at the Patty Turner Center in Deerfield.

Fifteen students met with professionals in various careers to conduct a mock job interview. The professionals gave constructive criticism to the students on their elevator pitches.

“The elevator pitch is the way you sell yourself in a short amount of time,” said Gabby Basok, a student at the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor.

CBO, started in 2006 as a non-profit organization centered in the 10 communities that make up Deerfield, Highland Park and Lake Forest high schools, aims to nurture and prepare high-achieving, low-income students for college and their careers. The event is one of many that the organization puts on throughout the year.

Each CBO student is paired with a coach who provides advice and encouragement throughout the youth’s time in the program. Students call and e-mail their coaches throughout the school year while they’re away from home. “The coaches are always there as a resource,” Basok said. “Whenever you need to talk to somebody they are available.”

The students who attended Monday's session have been members of CBO since their junior year of high school. Only college sophomores through seniors were invited to the event.

A variety of professionals were in attendance to represent the workforce. Individuals in medicine, marketing, finance and education all shared their expertise with students.

Students and professionals met one on one at a table while other students presented their elevator pitches. The students circulated every five minutes giving them an opportunity to interact with many different types of professionals looking at many different aspects of their presentation.

"You said 'um' at least eight times," professional Ron Suber said to a student. "The ums come from not breathing. This detracts from the message you have."

Suber is the head of global sales and marketing and senior partner at Merlin Securities. He also travels across the country giving lectures on the keys to finding employment.

After the pitches were given, he gave one of his speeches on "the secret" to what employers really seek in an employee.

He cited three questions they ask themselves:

Can the employee get new clients?

Can the employee keep existing clients and revenue?

Can the person gain more revenue from existing clients?

He also discussed the importance of the business-related social networking site LinkedIn. A particular success story was a recent college graduate got hired just by networking on the website.

"It's a very advanced tool to use," Suber said. "It will truly make a difference in your careers."

The students responded positively to the experience saying it will better prepare them as they finish college and launch their professions.

"It was an eye-opener into the business world," said Emily Cushing, a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. "Since the job market is so terrible now, it's terrifying for us in college. These secrets are very helpful."

The organization has grown to 85 students, with 60 students currently in college.

“Once they’re in college we want to prepare and link them with job opportunities,” College Bound Opportunities President Jim Hanig said. “They’re all doing really well. Many are doing better in college than in high school.”

Cushing, a four-year member of CBO, says she owes everything to the organization helping her with finances, skills and readiness in her college career thus far.

“CBO is the reason I’m in college,” she said.

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