I don’t want to admit it, but sometimes I want to quit my job.

It happens most often after a Career Cab, a program we started at Poudre High School, Fort Collins, Colo., about five years ago. Career Cabs are field experiences for students where they get a chance to see different careers in our community through behind-the-scenes encounters with professionals. We designed these small-scale field trips based on our own experience in Colorado State University’s career development institute class. This weeklong summer course is largely field-based and had us exploring long-term care facilities with certified nursing assistants and checking out the bottling process at some of Fort Collins’ finest microbreweries.

As we got these firsthand looks into various careers, I realized it was exactly what had been missing from my adolescent career development experience. My lens for careers was as wide as my adult world, most of whom were educators or civil servants. However, I hadn’t ever talked to anyone about their work, let alone sprayed a fire hose or been inside a Wal-Mart distribution center.

Hoping to give students those up-close-and-personal experiences, we created our Career Cab program. We partnered with a nearby high school to coordinate the trips, originally a monthly opportunity. We trained as small-vehicle permit operators and became licensed to drive small buses and bring 14 students on each trip from each school. We typically plan to visit two sites on each Career Cab trip, ideally linked between a career opportunity and a postsecondary education gateway. For example, we’ve visited a salon – and had a student get a haircut – and then visited a local beauty school.

As students board the bus for these trips, which are open to freshmen through seniors, I frame their experience in the context of my own. I have a degree in interior design. Although I loved the program and excelled in it, my internship experience was miserable, largely because it wasn’t until then that I realized interior designers spend a lot of their time in front of a computer doing detailed CAD work. I had never actually met any interior designers or asked them what they like or don’t like about their job or what they wish they would have done in high school to help them succeed in their current career.

These are the types of questions we encourage on Career Cab trips, and students ask them. Over four years, 87 percent of students have reported a significant increase in interest in the career they saw and just over 10 percent a significant decrease in interest. This seems valuable as it points to students truly gaining a lens for potential career fields, for better or for worse.

Poudre now has full-school pathways for all freshmen, and each school counselor is assigned to a pathway and facilitating Career Cabs.

This year, we hope close to 400 students will get these real-world experiences. I will get them there, but I cannot always guarantee a ride home. Some of the stuff we see is just too cool, and I might be asking for an application.

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