

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING



Informational interviewing is simply talking with someone who is presently working in a career that interests you. One of the best ways to find someone to interview is to ask friends, family, teachers, alumni and counselors if they know people working in the fields that you would like to explore; this is called the Referral Method.

The advantage of informational interviewing is that it really works. Some of the reasons it works are:

- People enjoy discussing their jobs and their career fields.
- People are flattered that you are seeking their advice.
- People are empathetic about career transitions because most have experienced the indecision and frustration that go along with making a career decision.
- People like to help others because it makes them feel good about themselves.

INTERVIEWING ETIQUETTE

Remember that people often have very busy work schedules, so don't take it personally if they can not spend time with you. Once you have set up some interview times, and have an idea as to why you want to see these people, it's time to get prepared.

1) **DRESS FOR THE JOB YOU WANT, OR BETTER**

For men, wear a suit and a tie. Even though a lot of organizations have relaxed their dress codes, wearing a suit will make a better impression. For women, a business suit (skirt or pants) is recommended.

2) **BE ON TIME**

Be on time or a few minutes early (10 minutes at the most). Find a rest room and check your appearance one last time.

3) **WAIT QUIETLY AND PATIENTLY**

Review your resume and questions that you want to ask during the interview, or take something to read along with you in your portfolio.

4) **PRACTICE**

Practice your handshake and greeting before going to an interview.

5) **VERIFY**

Verify the correct spelling of the individual's name, and title, along with the phone numbers of any contacts you might receive.

6) **TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE**

You should be prepared with questions to ask. (See the next page for suggested questions.)

Informational Interview Questions

The following is a list of questions that you may want to ask in an informational interview.

1. Personal background:

- a. How did you decide to go into this field?
- b. Tell me how you got started in this field.
- c. How long have you held this kind of job?
- d. How long have you worked for this organization?

2. Nature of work:

- a. What are your major responsibilities?
- b. What are the major intrinsic rewards of your position?
- c. What are the most frequent recurring challenges?

3. Working conditions:

- a. What hours do individuals in this job usually work? Is there much flexibility in those?
- b. Does this job require primarily independent activity or is there lots of teamwork involved?
- c. Who evaluates your performance? How is this done?

4. Preparation required:

- a. What kind of academic background is required for the position?
- b. Can experience be substituted for formal educational credentials?
- c. Are there specific courses that are particularly valuable?
- d. What kind of on-the-job training is provided?

5. Salary/Benefits:

- a. What is a typical entry-level salary in this field?
- b. What potential earnings can someone in this field anticipate?
- c. Are there other benefits? If so, what are they?

6. Entry into the field:

- a. What is the current job market outlook for jobs like yours?
- b. Do you anticipate any change for better or worse during the next few years?
- c. How does one get his/her first job? How are these jobs advertised and filled?
- d. Would previous experience as an intern or volunteer make a candidate more marketable?
- e. What kinds of skills should a job seeker highlight in resumes and interviews?
- f. What kinds of organizations have positions like yours to fill?
- g. What advice would you give a student?

7. Opportunity for advancement:

- a. What is a typical career path for individuals in your position?
- b. To what position in your organization could you realistically aspire?
- c. Are there also lateral moves that can be made into other areas of the organization?

8. Related occupations:

- a. If you were to change jobs at this point, what related positions might be available to you?
- b. What kind of skills would you emphasize when making such a change?

9. Additional information:

- a. Discuss the major advantages and disadvantages of the occupation.
- b. What are the future directions of this field?
- c. Do you know other people in the field that I could talk to?

FOLLOW-UP

Good follow up is also important. Here are some suggestions for action after you have conducted an informational interview:

- 1) Send a thank you letter.
- 2) Call later on to say how you are progressing.
- 3) Keep the door open for future contacts with the person who you interviewed.
- 4) Evaluate your style of interviewing.
- 5) Evaluate the information you received.

DEBRIEFING

When you leave an informational interview, or even complete a telephone conversation, your impressions at that moment are the most valuable ones for learning. Take “debriefing” notes as soon as possible, and ask yourself questions like the following:

- 1) What impressed me the most?
- 2) What made me uncomfortable? How could I change this?
- 3) How did this person become successful?
- 4) What advice did s/he give me about my career research?
- 5) Where did they suggest I look for more information?
- 6) What problems do there seem to be in this industry that I can and would like to help solve?
- 7) What else could I have asked?
- 8) How did the conversation change my opinion about the jobs I have considered?
- 9) How does this information compare or contrast with information that I received from other interviews?