Informational Interviews

Networking is the # 1 way to find a job; informational interviewing is the # 1 way to network.

Benefits of Informational Interviews:

1. Discover the "realties" of a particular career field and what it is really like to work in a given industry. Find out about career paths you did not know existed.
2. Determine a fit between your personality, interests, skills, and values in relation to a specific occupation. Recognize your strengths and weaknesses.
3. Expand your network of contacts and gain referrals to other contacts for future networking opportunities. In addition, develop confidence in interviewing and meet people in your field in a low risk, non-threatening situation.
4. Gain job searching advice and insight into the hidden job market.

Before the Interview

- Identify a professional to contact in a career field of interest to you*.
- Do background homework before contacting the employer: identify specifically why you want to contact this person.
- Contact the professional via phone and/or e-mail (if calling, try to speak directly to the person; if e-mailing, plan to follow up via telephone). Request the opportunity to meet with them for no more than 20 minutes, at a time and date that is convenient for them.
- Call to confirm the appointment, obtain directions and get parking information.
- Dress appropriately. Put together a nice notebook with paper and pens and copies of an updated resume to take with you. Prepare a list of approximately 10 questions to ask the interviewee.

During the actual interview…

- Arrive at least fifteen minutes early. Be courteous to everyone that you meet.
- Shake hands, introduce yourself and relax. Maintain good posture and eye contact.
- Do NOT "machine gun" your questions (just because time is limited). The information in the interview is important, but rapport is even more important.
- Do NOT write down every word the person says during the interview (focus on connecting with them!).
- Ask for referrals and permission to use them as references when contacting others.
- Be conscious of time and do not spend more than 30 minutes unless the professional initiates extra time.

Immediately after the interview…

- Take time to write down all the useful information from the interview.
- Assess the interview: Did you get the information you needed? How do you feel about this occupation? Did you get an objective opinion? Keep records of everyone you meet (take business cards or names and addresses for contact information).
- Send a thank-you note via e-mail or postal mail. Follow-up with future notes or phone calls to let them know their help has been of service and how you are doing in your career exploration. This will further remind them of you and encourage them to let you know of future opportunities.
- Remember you should not base your decisions on one interview. Quickly make an appointment with another professional.

***How to Locate Contacts for Informational Interviews:**

- Increase your network through people you know formally and informally. Consider the following: parents/ siblings, extended family, friends, professors, advisors, mentors, colleagues, supervisors, neighbors, career counselors etc.
- Search on LinkedIn.com (professional networking sites): research companies that you would like to work for and expand your list of contacts.
- Use organizational directories and trade journals to find out the names of businesses and/or organizations in your field of interest.

Do's and Don'ts:

- DO talk about your skills: know what your strengths are, be articulate. (She/he cannot help you effectively if you do not explain what you can do).
- DO take down notes immediately after the interview, recording everything you learned.
- DON'T confuse it with a job interview: be honest about your motive and stick to the agenda of just getting career information, not fishing for a job opening.
- DON'T go unprepared and DON'T ask questions that you could have researched.
- DON'T think the other person owes you something, or that you are entitled to more contacts.

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POSSIBLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you get started in this field? What was your educational background? What are your major responsibilities?
2. What is the most rewarding aspect of your job, least rewarding?
3. What might you change?
4. Would you choose this career again?
5. What is a "typical" day like for you?
6. What obligations does your work put on you outside of the actual job?
7. What are some lifestyle considerations for this career field?
8. What are some common entry-level positions in the field of _____?
9. What kind of salary range and benefits could an entry-level position expect to receive?
10. What kind of an individual (skills and personality) would be best suited for these entry-level positions? What are the most important factors used when hiring?
11. What is the best educational preparation for a career in this field? Which classes and experiences would be most helpful to obtain while still in college?
12. What have you found to be a major weakness of new hires in this field?
13. How high is the turnover? How does one move from position to position or other areas of the organizations? What are typical policies about promotions from within? How are employees evaluated?
14. What is the typical career path from entry-level to top management?
15. How do people usually find out about full-time openings in this field?
16. What is the future outlook for this career field? What are the areas of potential growth and decline? How do you see jobs changing in the future?
17. Which professional journals and organizations would be most helpful in evaluating the field?
18. Can you recommend other types of organizations in this field that I might investigate or contact? Can you recommend any specific person for me to talk with and may I have permission to use your name?

JOB SHADOWING

After you conduct an informational interview, ask if you can observe the workplace and learn more by shadowing. Job shadowing is another way to expand your network and learn about a career. Shadowing a person while he or she works means to observe what the person does while he works, without asking questions. Most employers will cooperate with a shadowing request; however, some occupations are bound by confidentiality restrictions (e.g., psychologists, lawyers, or a company with trade secrets) and may be unable to grant this request.

Job shadowing is one of the most important components in career and job searching. It can teach us about different careers, and may lead to internships, work experiences, and even job opportunities. Conducting job shadowing and continuously expanding your network shows responsibility, interest, and drive.

What you should say when you call or e-mail requesting an informational interview:

- Provide a brief description of yourself for the professional.
- State how you found out about this person.
- Identify what you hope to get out of a meeting with this person.
- It is important not to ask them to call: YOU must take the initiative

Sample phone script for first contact:

Hello, my name is…… I was given you name (or found your name) by……. I am a (class year) at Barry University and am interested in arranging an informational interview. I am interested in learning more about the field of…….. (or your position as…….). Is this a good time for me to try to set up a meeting with you or someone on your staff? (if not), when would be a good time for me to try to call you back? I would like to meet with you for about a half hour at your convenience. Would you be available to speak to me (during the week of…….)?

Sample e-mail for first contact:

Dear Claudia Sanchez,

My name is Joanna Jones and I am a senior at Barry University. I was provided with your contact information by John Moriarty, my career counselor in the Career Development Center. I was wondering if it is possible to set up a 20 minute informational interview to ask you some questions about your experience in the Tax Department at RSM McGladrey and any advice that you may have for an Accounting major seeking for an internship in the tax industry. I am available to meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday after 10 am. You may contact me via e-mail or by phone at (305)-000-0000. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Regards,
Joanna Jones