

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Know What You Want To Accomplish

Informational Interviewing – This is one of the easiest, most effective, and, unfortunately, most underused ways to learn about a career. What is an informational interview? It is asking someone about what they do. Think of it as relationship building. Make sure it is understood by yourself and the professional that this is not a job interview or a request for a job!

The knowledge gained from an informational interview can help you determine which courses and qualifications are necessary for specific career paths, the types of job or companies best suited for you, etc. Informational interviewing can also aid your job search.

- Discover jobs that are not publicly advertised
- Expand your knowledge of the job market in the field you want to explore
- Learn about how to make yourself a more qualified candidate
- Build support for your job search

The primary objectives of informational interviewing are to:

1. Investigate a specific career field.
2. Uncover career options you never knew existed.
3. Assist in narrowing (or expanding) options.
4. Obtain advice on where your skills might be applied.
5. Learn about important issues in a career field.
6. Broaden your own network of contacts for future reference.

Be Prepared For the Interview

Before meeting someone for an informational interview, you should:

1. Learn as much as you can about the organization.
2. Have your questions written down.
3. Learn about the career field in general.
4. Be yourself and relax. You are the interviewer, and this is not a job interview.
5. Keep your purpose in mind.

Use the Information You Obtain

It is important to keep in mind that you are investigating a career and trying to establish a network at the same time. Therefore, all the protocol of a professional job search, as well as the curiosity of a diligent job seeker, should be followed.

1. Ask for the names of others you can contact for further information.
2. Keep the door open for further contact by asking if you could call again if you have any questions.
3. Take notes during the interview if this will help you later in your evaluation of the career.
4. Send a typed thank you letter within two days of the interview.

SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

There are a number of ways to schedule an informational interview, limited only by your creativity and initiative. However, it is important to remember most business people prefer appointments. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to telephone a person to schedule an appointment or request an informational interview by letter or email. The following letter is provided as a guide for requesting an informational interview and can be adapted into an email as well. You will notice it: 1. names the person to whom you are writing, 2. tells the person why you are writing, 3. states you are not asking for a job interview, and 4. keeps the initiative with you.

123 Occupational Lane
Job City, IN 54321
April 1, 20XX

Mr. James Smith
Director of Marketing
ABC Corporation
Anywhere, USA

Dear Mr. Smith:

In conducting some career exploration research, your name came to my attention as someone who could provide me with valuable advice and information, especially because of your experience in the field of marketing.

I am currently attending school full time at the University of Notre Dame and am giving serious consideration to a future career in public relations. I am not seeking an employment interview, rather I would like to talk with you about public relations as a possible career in order to obtain your valuable advice and perspectives about the field.

Realizing the demands on your time, I will telephone you next week to see if we can arrange a brief meeting at your convenience.

I appreciate your interest as I explore a variety of career opportunities.

Sincerely,

(Your Signature)

(Your typed name)

SAMPLE CONVERSATION requesting an appointment:

You: Mr. Jones, this is Mary Smith. I am a sophomore English major at The university of Notre Dame. I received your name from my neighbor, John Doe. I was wondering if we could set up a time that I could speak with you for 15 – 20 minutes to learn a about working in the magazine industry. I'm not looking for a job or anything, at least not right now, but would just like to learn from you to help me as I continue my education.

Professional: Hello Ms. Smith. I would be more than happy to do so, but right now isn't a good time though. Could we set something up for next week?

You: Certainly, you tell me when you are available and I'll give you a call back.

Professional: I am open on Tuesday from 3:00 – 5:00 or Wednesday from 11:00 – 12:30. Would any of those times work for you.

You: Yes, 4:00 pm on Tuesday would be great. Let me confirm, are you on Eastern Standard time?

Professional: No I am on Central time.

You: Okay then that would be 3:00 pm your time and 4:00 pm my time. I will call you then Next Tuesday, June 20, 2007 at 3:00 pm CST at 307-222-1111, correct?

Professional: Yes, that is correct.

You: thank you so much for your time. I will look forward to speaking with you next week.

Sample Questions For An Informational Interview

1. What are the most interesting aspects of your job?
2. What do you do in a typical day?
3. How did you enter this job/career?
4. What part of your work do you consider dull or repetitious?
5. How would you recommend someone break into this field?
6. What educational background is required?
7. What kind of experience would help in this career?

8. Are there specific courses a student might take that would be particularly beneficial in this field?
9. What are the disadvantages and advantages to this career?
10. Is a great deal of travel connected with this job?
11. What types of training do companies give to people entering this field?
12. What technologies are integrated into this career?
13. What recommendations would you have for an entry level person considering this career?
14. What special advice would you give to a young person entering this field?
15. How do you see the jobs in the field changing over the next ten years? What can I do to prepare myself for such changes?
16. As a female or male, would I have any special challenges in a career in this field?
17. How can I learn more about this career/job?
18. What professional organizations are active and responsive in this career field?
19. Who would you recommend I contact for more information about this career?
20. Do you have any career literature that contains job descriptions and job specifications for positions in this field?

Sample Letter of Thanks After An Informational Interview

Thank you letters should convey the following:

- Appreciation for their time, referrals, and information
- Compliments regarding their knowledge, expertise, helpfulness, and/or company of business
- Information about your follow-up or use of the information and/or referral or how their information or the meeting assisted you
- Keeping the contact door open with them – keep them apprised of your progress

Your return address

Date

Name, Title

Company

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear (Ms. or Mr.) _____:

Thank you for taking time to meet with me last Thursday to discuss a career in psychotherapy. I was impressed by your comprehensive knowledge of the different aspects of this field. Additionally, your advice and information will help me select classes and experiences that will enhance acceptance into a graduate program.

I appreciate the referral to Mr. Joseph Bandit, Director of Mental Health Services, and have already called his office to arrange a time to meet briefly with him. I will let you know how our discussion goes.

I would like to stay in touch with you and keep you posted on my career research. Thank you again for your time and valuable assistance.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your typed name

DEVELOPING A CONTACT NETWORK

