

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviewing is exactly what it sounds like: **interviewing** people who will provide you with pertinent **information** about your prospective career. Here are some tips:

Start with your objective

Informational interviews are formal business meetings with knowledgeable professionals, designed to get information directly from industry insiders. Therefore, it can be a critical component of any successful job search program. This should not be information that you can easily acquire from some simple research on your own, but rather, a search for a deeper level of understanding and a unique perspective on things from those who are directly involved on a day-to-day basis.

Typical types of information that can be gathered are:

- industry insights
- job market information
- job search tips
- resume advice
- networking contacts

Informational interviews are NOT job interviews, and should not be used to get a job.

- Don't force things - spend the time, energy, and effort that is truly required, and you may see tangible results relatively quickly. After all, you are asking busy professionals to volunteer time out of their hectic day to help someone they might not even really know. The good news is that 95% of the time, you will find people very willing to help in any way they can. Your job is to make it as easy as possible for them to help you.

DO'S AND DON'TS:

- Don't walk in and ask directly, "do you, or does anyone you know, have a job for me?" (This immediately putting people on the defensive, and will also likely make them feel badly that they can't give you the job you want.
- Do appreciate people that although someone may not be in a position to offer you a job directly, they can provide you with their opinions, knowledge, insider tips and advice - and it's all free, so they are likely to give you lots of it!
- Do your research first; it's not good to ask questions such as "what is it you do?" Show in a subtle manner that you have spent some time finding out about their world. This is definitely a situation in which the more you put in, the more you will receive.
- Don't ask for direction on where your career path should be headed; only you can determine what your best path should ultimately be.



Informational interviews can be used effectively in a variety of situations:

- career transition situations (for those employed or unemployed)
- new graduates
- individuals re-entering the workforce
- individuals looking for their next job

Why should I conduct informational interviews?

- Provides a great source of research information
- Much less stressful environment than job interviews
- Provides good interview practice
- Often leads indirectly to job interviews and subsequent job offers

But what are downsides of them?

- Takes time to do effectively
- Takes patience and perseverance

How do you start?

- 1) Use the contacts you already have - use your network - to identify the most suitable people to contact. It is much better to use the friends of your professional contacts, who will be more willing to spend some time with you, either in person (ideally), or over the phone. If they don't know you directly, they are much more likely to help you because of their relationship with your mutual friend.
- 2) Call or e-mail them directly, and mention your mutual friend/contact by name (ONLY if your friend has given you permission to use his or her name). You may have to be persistent and flexible in your timing (hint: breakfast meetings are a good way to circumvent the "I'm fully booked for the next year" scenarios). A sample script for this call/e-mail would be:

"Hi Bill, my name is _____, and I was speaking recently to Jane Janes about some career issues I'm looking into. She suggested that I give you a call, since she felt that you might be able to provide some great insights into my particular situation. Jane mentioned that you're a very busy person, but I was wondering if you could spare 20 minutes to give me some quick advice. Would it be possible to set something up in the next week or so?"

- Be prepared for objections, and also be prepared to ask what you need to know right there and then.
- It is always better to meet in person if you can. Senior members of industry and professional associations can also be great resources when looking for contacts to interview.
- Treat the interview in a very professional way, and remember that you called the meeting; therefore you are setting the agenda.
- Know what your objectives are for the meeting and work to those objectives.

For the interview itself, follow the same rules you would for any other interview: dress well; show up on time; act courteously and professionally; come prepared; respect the time allotted; and follow up with a 'Thank You' note.

Try to provide regular updates every four to six weeks or so to let your interviewees know how you're doing, and also to keep you in their thoughts when potential opportunities arise.

Now that I have scheduled an informational interview, what kind of questions should I ask?

Try these...

1. Why did you get into this industry/job/profession?
2. How did you get into this industry/job/profession?
3. Could you give me the highlights of your career so far? I'm particularly interested in the decision-making thought process when you made changes in your career path.
4. What would you recommend in terms of a possible path for someone such as myself to get into this industry/job/profession?
5. I have been thinking of getting some more education [describe what you are planning]. Do you think this would be beneficial for my planned career change? Can you recommend some alternative educational institutions?
6. If you could do things over again, what would you do differently?
7. What do you feel are the most important strengths for someone to possess in order to be successful in this industry/job/profession?
8. Could you provide me with your general opinions of my resume?
9. Could you describe a typical work day?
10. What are average salary levels in this industry/job/profession?
11. In your opinion, what is the best thing about this industry/job/profession?
12. In your opinion, what is the worst thing about this industry/job/profession?
13. If you weren't in this particular industry/job/profession, what would your second choice be?
14. Would you recommend this industry/job/profession to your friends or your children?
15. How is this industry/job/profession adapting to the recent changes in technology/economics/competitive pressures?
16. What do you see as the major opportunities for this industry/job/profession?
17. What do you see as the major threats to this industry/job/profession?
18. Do you think that I have the required skill set to succeed in this industry/job/profession? If not, what should I be focusing on?
19. When people leave this industry/job/profession, what are the usual reasons they provide for leaving?
20. How do you see this industry/job/profession changing over the next five years?

And finally, THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION TO ASK: Do you think there's someone else I should be talking to about this industry/job/profession? This will continue to develop your network and provide more interviewees. Good luck!!!!

