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INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviewing is more structured than networking, because it is a scheduled, one-on-one appointment with a person in your field of interest who can give you insight into the occupation and industry.

During an Informational Interview you can:

- Explore careers, learn what a field is really like, and clarify your career goals
- Find out the skills and training are needed and identify your professional strengths and weaknesses
- Expand your professional network and discover employment opportunities that are not advertised

STEPS TO FOLLOW TO CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

1. **Develop a list of your network and start here.** These can be the first people you reach out to. You can interview them or they can provide you with new people to contact.
2. **Identify the occupation or industry you wish to learn about.** Assess your interests, abilities, values, and skills, and to identify the best fields to research.
3. **Prepare for the interview.** Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Research the industry and company and decide what you would like to learn. Prepare your resume, business card, and a list of questions to ask.
4. **Identify people to interview.** Start with who you know. Then research contacts using professional organizations membership databases, yellow pages, and company directories. You can also contact the company directly and request contacts in various departments.
5. **Prepare a target speech.** 30-second commercial. Be brief. Say who you are, what you do, and why you are there.
6. **Arrange the interview.** Contact the person by telephone or by a letter followed by a call. Ask for 15-30 minutes of their time. Ask for an in-person meeting, but settle for a phone call if necessary.
7. **Don't ask for a job.** Instead, ask for advice. People are much more open and willing to give you time if you tell them you want to ask them a few questions about the industry, the company, or their career.
8. **Confirm your appointment.** Call or email your contact the day before.
9. **Conduct the interview.** Dress professionally. Be on time, polite and come prepared with questions. Respect their time.
10. **Build rapport.** Show interest and ask questions. It's okay to show some personality, but be professional. People are more likely to refer you if they feel they "know" you. They don't want to put their reputation on the line for a "stranger."
11. **Before leaving.** Ask the person to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you. Ask for their business card. Ask them to look at your resume. Exchange business cards. Thank them and also send a mailed or emailed thank you note.
12. **Keep a networking log.** Make sure to document information regarding the meeting, including: how the contact was referred to you, the date you met, a few key points that were discussed, suggestions they made, names of referrals, the date you sent a thank you note, and the date you made follow-up contact.
13. **Maintain your network.** Send a periodic email or phone call every month or two. Keep it brief. Provide an update about

your job search or new job. Ask how things are going or ask about a project they mentioned. Don't overdo it. If you are making contact too frequently your contact may feel overwhelmed. This could jeopardize your relationship.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

When the contact comes out to meet you, introduce yourself. Thank your contact for his or her willingness to meet with you, and reemphasize that you are there to learn and gather information about his or her career field.

Below are some typical informational interview questions. Select a dozen or so you feel will be useful to you. You may not ask all of the questions on your list. Sometimes questions will pop into your head spontaneously.

No matter what questions you ask, respect their time by sticking to the allotted time. Keep it conversational and friendly so you don't come off sounding like you're there for a job interview, but also focus on your contact's job and career field

- What is your job like? A typical day? Week? What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
- What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job? How much variety is there from day to day?
- How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
- How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- How did you prepare for this work?
- What were the keys to your career advancement?
- Why did you decide to work for this company? What do you like most about this company?
- How does your company differ from its competitors? Why do customers choose this company?
- Does the company encourage and pay for employee graduate degrees? Other professional development?
- What are the greatest pressures, problems, or frustrations in the workplace?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
- Are there busy and slow times or is the work fairly constant?
- What do you find most satisfying? Most dissatisfying? Most challenging? Is this typical in this field?
- What is a usual work week like? Do you have work obligations or expectations outside of the ordinary work hours?
- What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions? What are some related occupations?
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation? How rapidly is the field growing?
- What are the major qualifications or skills to be successful in this occupation?
- How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?
- How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
- What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? An MBA?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
- With the information you have regarding my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a decision?
- How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job? Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more?
- Do you have any special words of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
- What are the important "key words" or "buzz words" to include in a resume or cover letter when job hunting in the field?

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

- Did I leave out any important questions that would be helpful in learning about the job or occupation?
- **[If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate]** Would you mind taking a look at my resume?
- Can you suggest other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?

QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS OR CAREER CHANGERS

- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain the necessary experience required for this type of position?
- What courses were the most valuable to you in your work?
- What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?
- What kinds of courses are most valuable in order to gain skills necessary for success in this occupation?
- What educational program is recommended as preparation?