

How to Be Awesome at Informational Interviews

Once you've begun your job search process, you may feel inclined to go online and start applying to every job that you find. We strongly urge you to avoid doing that. Instead, we encourage you to tap into your professional network and use informational interviews as a way to search for jobs.

An informational interview is not a job interview — it's more like a job interview in reverse.

Informational Interviews can help you achieve the following three goals:

1. They'll help you gather information about a field or a job.
2. They'll help you convey your expertise and competence to others in your network.
3. They'll help you build your network. As has been discussed previously, building your network is one of the most important parts of your job search.

Through the process of informational interviewing, you'll become more engaged with other members of your network. A lot of people dread networking, but when you do it right, it can be one of the most useful ways to find a new job.

Let's take a look at one of the situations you might find yourself in when conducting an informational interview: the coffee meeting.

Before Your Informational Interview

1. Do your research! Use sites like Crunchbase, LinkedIn, Google, and news sites to learn everything you can about the company you will be discussing during your interview.
2. The golden rule is to never ask a question that you can find the answer to online.
3. Research the person you'll be meeting with. Use sites like LinkedIn, social media platforms, and Google. Researching the person you're meeting with will show them that you're serious, smart, and committed to learning everything you can about the company.

During Your Informational Interview

Give a Great Pitch

The first thing you'll do at your informational interview is introduce yourself. Think about how you'd like to use the time allotted for your coffee meeting to learn more about the company and the role. How would you begin the conversation?

Let's imagine that you've started the conversation by asking "Can you tell me more about the role?"

- This introduction is a little too abrupt. Do not ask about the job right away, as it may make your interviewee feel a little unclear about where the conversation should go after they've answered your question.

Instead, **deliver a well-practiced pitch during your introduction that includes information about your background and why you've asked to meet them.** Starting the conversation off with a good pitch will make you seem confident and capable so it's important to work on your pitch before you interview.

For example, you could say something like:

"I've been looking forward to this conversation because I'm really interested in figuring out what kind of [your targeted job role] jobs are right for me. I know your work at X Company focuses on [research the company and their business operations/goals]. And I'd love to know more about that!"

When an interviewee hears an introduction like that, they'll have a good idea of where the conversation is going to go.

Pro tip: To practice your pitch in advance, use your phone to record yourself and listen back to it to identify areas that you can improve on.

Ask Great Questions

There are two types of questions you should be asking in an informational interview, and those should be questions that help you figure out:

A. Would I like this job?

B. Can I get this job? (Am I qualified, what is the interview process, etc.)

If your interviewee's answers lead you to the realization that the answer to the first question is no, then that is a really important thing to take note of.

You want to build questions in advance that help you answer these questions above.

Good vs. Bad Questions

1. The “Beyond” Technique

Bad Question: What do you look for in a [target job role]? (This doesn’t lead to any specific information, and you could find all this information on Google.)

Instead, ask: “Beyond a great Github and technical skills, where is the greatest opportunity for impact as a person interviewing for [target job] roles?” This question will help you to move the conversation beyond the obvious answers so that you can get more details.

2. Beginner, Intermediate, Boss Technique

Beginner: “What is your process when you are assigned a new project?”

- This question is simple and doesn’t demonstrate complex thinking.

Intermediate: “In order to better understand the problem you’re trying to solve, what are some of your research methods?”

- This shows that you know something about the field

Boss: “In general, there are several approaches to building and scaling a product. Do you use X or Y approach? Or do you use something else altogether?”

- This shows that you are well-versed in industry practices and that you have opinions about those practices. This will help your interviewee to see you less as a student and more as a colleague.

Tips for Preparing Your Questions

- Use critical thinking when coming up with questions
- Resist the urge to ask easy or canned questions
- Be specific — draw on research that you’ve done about the company, person, and field
- Think about asking questions that demonstrate what you know about the company, person, and field

Be Sure to Really Listen to Your Interviewee

You may start your conversation with introductory topics but is likely to work through a variety of topics. Look out for information you can act on and be sure to identify topics that are important to your interviewee.

After Your Informational Interview

Following up with your interviewee is the most important, and often most neglected, part of the informational interview process. Be sure to follow these steps:

1. **The same day as your interview, send a thank you email** that includes specific information you gained from the interview, as well as what you'll do with that information (like buy a book they suggested etc.)

For example: *"Thank you so much for your call yesterday. I found our time together really helpful and inspiring. I followed up by contacting the coach that you recommended, and found out that I can start the program I was considering next month. I also bought the book you suggested."*

2. **Do what you say you will do** in your follow up email. Don't stop at a thank you note! You've created an outline for your next steps in your follow up email, so do those next steps and then email them about your experience. (ie. I found the chapter about XYZ in the book you recommended extremely insightful.)
3. **Make introductions or recommendations.** You may feel like you can't add value to someone senior to you but that's not true. Your recommendations don't have to be industry related – you could recommend a Thai restaurant because you know they love Thai food, or send them a link to someone in the industry who is doing something similar to them.

Crafting a great follow up requires great listening during the informational interview. Remember, follow-ups are rare and can really make you stand out!

Conclusion

Taking the time to prepare, coming up with great questions, and making sure to follow up are all great ways to ensure a successful informational interview. If you have any questions about what we've covered in this article, be sure to reach out to your career coach for guidance. In the meantime, good luck with any informational interviews you have coming up!