

Coffee Chat Guide

20 smart questions to ask included



Overview

Coffee chats build connections. But how do you benefit from one? How exactly do you turn a conversation into a referral? An interview? Or a job offer?

All of the above will be answered in this guide.

Here are the following sections:

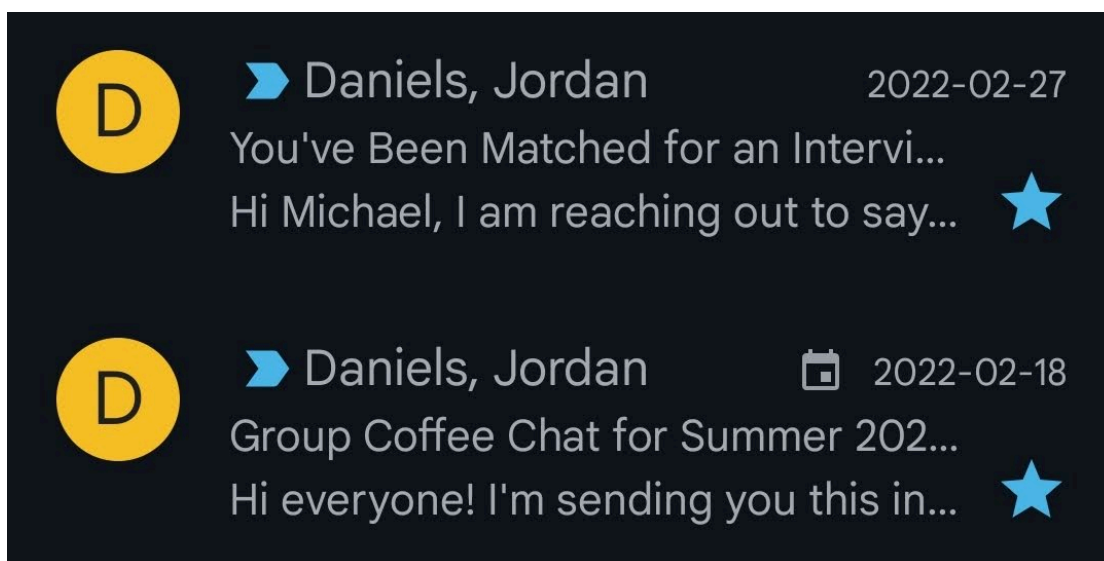
- How Coffee Chats Helped My Career
- How to Land a Coffee Chat
- How to Prepare for a Coffee Chat
- What to Say During a Coffee Chat
- Turning Coffee Chats into Job Offers

I hope you find value in this guide! It's something I wished I had when I started networking.

How Coffee Chats Helped My Career

In my 3rd year of university, I spent 6 months applying to 100+ internships. The result? Just one interview, which I blew.

But then I tried coffee-chatting recruiters, and this happened:



Within 2 weeks, I landed an interview offer with Scotiabank!

How did a single chat get me an interview in under 2 weeks?

Through the coffee chat, I built rapport with Jordan (the recruiter), and by the end of our 30 minutes, she told me something I'd never forget.

”

Nice chatting with you, Michael! Let me know what roles you apply to, and I'll personally look out for your application.

”

Imagine the relief I felt hearing those words!

For months, it was nothing but rejections. But after a 30-minute chat, I now had a recruiter vouching for my success - practically guaranteeing it.

Long story short, I applied for an internship at Scotiabank, passed the interview, and built my career to where it is today ([see my LinkedIn for details](#)).

No one would've seen my resume if I hadn't done that coffee chat.

But because I did, a recruiter recognized my name among the sea of candidates and gave me a 1-way ticket to the interviews.

Since then, I learned that jobs are won in the coffee chats, not job boards.



Michael Ly 

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coffee chats, not job
boards.**

How to Land a Coffee Chat

i If you don't ask, you don't get. Here's the 2-step formula to book meetings with people who can open doors for you.

Step 1: Find people to contact

These are the 4 types you'll want to message:

- ✓ Recruiters
- ✓ Hiring managers
- ✓ Industry professionals (1-5 years ahead of you)
- ✓ Past interns/employees in your target company

Step 2: Use the 3-email framework to book coffee chats

1 First Email: Show interest OR provide value

1. **Option A:** Show interest. (Ex: I loved your LinkedIn post on fintech! Would love to hear about your journey at RBC.)
2. **Option B:** Provide value. (Ex. I see that your company is looking for a finance intern so I created a stock-pitch deck for [stock name]!)
3. Write 1-3 sentences about your background. (Ex. My skills include [list skills] and I recently [name 1 achievements].)
4. Ask for a 15-30 minute chat. It's low commitment and easy to fulfill
5. End with a CTA (call-to-action). (Ex: How's your next 2 weeks looking?)


2 Follow-Up Email: Make it brief and suggest a new time

- 3-5 days later, follow up briefly. (Ex: Hey [Name], just checking in! I'd still love to connect if you're available next week.)

3 Final Follow-Up: Send one last nudge

- After 1-2 weeks, try a "no-pressure" email. (Ex: Totally understand if now isn't a good time. Would love to stay in touch regardless!)

How to Prepare for a Coffee Chat

 Don't go in blind. Do your research and use this 3-part framework to maximize value.

Research their background

- Spend 10 minutes reading their LinkedIn profile.
- Take note of their career journey, achievements, community involvement, and anything else you find interesting.
- Find something the two of you have in common, it could be going to the same school or even a shared hobby. We'll use this to establish familiarity later.


Have a clear goal

- Understand why you want to talk with them before you actually do.
- Do you want career advice, company insights, or educational resource recommendations?

Prepare 5 (or more) thoughtful questions

- Avoid generic ones like “What do you do?” Instead, ask: “What do you wish you knew before starting in [industry]?”
- Avoid yes or no questions like “Do you like your job?” Instead, ask what or why questions like: “What are the biggest challenges in your role?”
- The more, the better. I prepare up to 10 questions to be safe.

Need an idea of questions to ask?

 See page 7 for the list of [20 Smart Coffee Chat Questions](#)

What to Say During a Coffee Chat

 Treat them like friendly conversations, not job interviews. Here's the 30-minute breakdown.

First 5 minutes:

Start small, break the ice, and build rapport. Here are 3 strategies.

1. Mention how you found their contact: "I came across your LinkedIn post last month and loved what you wrote about [topic]."
2. Mention a common point of interest: "I see that we both attended [University/College], how was campus life for you?"
3. Ask about recent events: "How was your summer? Travel to anywhere fun?"

Next 20 minutes:

Ask the thoughtful questions you prepared. These 20 minutes will determine how well your chat goes.

A good rule of thumb is they should be doing more of the talking than you are.

 Remember to check page 7 for the list of [20 Smart Coffee Chat Questions!](#)

Last 5 minutes:

Knowing how to end a coffee chat is important! Don't let it get awkward.

Here are 2 of my favorite closing phrases:

- 1: "I still have some questions about [topic]. Would it be okay if I followed up in the next few weeks?"
- 2: "It was great meeting you. I have to run soon but before I go, could you answer this last question of mine?"

Turning Coffee Chats into Jobs Offers

 4 steps to convert your conversations into real benefits.

Most people get ghosted because they ask for referrals too soon. Instead, follow this 4-step approach.

Step 1: Be genuinely curious

In your 1st coffee chat, your only goal is to learn from the other person - that's it.

At the end, ask for a follow-up chat. Asking for anything else (like a referral) is too soon; you haven't formed enough of a connection with the person.

Step 2: Build the bridge, strengthen the bond

Treat the 2nd chat similar to the 1st one. You want to strengthen the relationship by asking more thoughtful questions.

Step 3: Repeat Step 2 (Optional)

Schedule additional chats with someone to build rapport. If your connection is strong enough by Step 2, go to Step 4.

Step 4: Make the request, but phrase it carefully

Ask for a referral or interview via email. The person should now feel comfortable enough to vouch for you. Remember to make your question sound open-ended!

For example, here's the phrase I used to get an interview for my full-time job.

If you don't mind me asking - do you think I would be a good candidate?

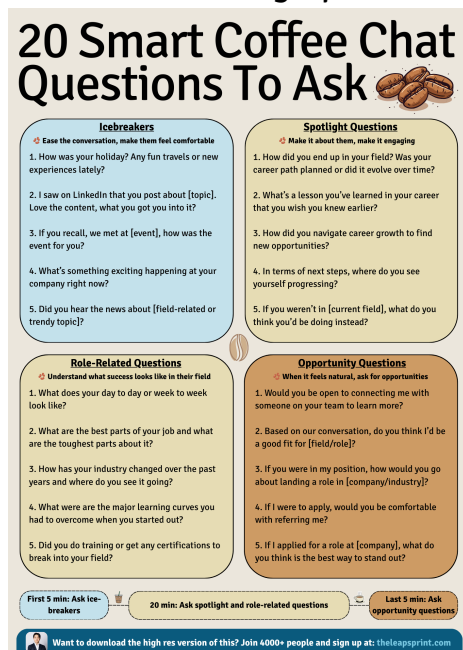
Best,

Michael Ly (he/him) | Project Coordinator |

Bonus Resources

20 Smart Coffee Chat Questions

Download the infographic on this [page](#).



20 Smart Coffee Chat Questions To Ask

Icebreakers
 ☺ Ease the conversation, make them feel comfortable

1. How was your holiday? Any fun travels or new experiences lately?
2. I saw on LinkedIn that you post about [topic]. Love the content, what got you into it?
3. If you recall, we met at [event], how was the event for you?
4. What's something exciting happening at your company right now?
5. Did you hear the news about [field-related or trendy topic]?

Spotlight Questions
 ☺ Make it about them, make it engaging

1. How did you end up in your field? Was your career path planned or did it evolve over time?
2. What's a lesson you've learned in your career that you wish you knew earlier?
3. How did you navigate career growth to find new opportunities?
4. In terms of next steps, where do you see yourself progressing?
5. If you weren't in [current field], what do you think you'd be doing instead?

Role-Related Questions
 ☺ Understand what success looks like in their field

1. What does your day to day or week to week look like?
2. What are the best parts of your job and what are the toughest parts about it?
3. How has your industry changed over the past years and where do you see it going?
4. What were the major learning curves you had to overcome when you started out?
5. Did you do training or get any certifications to break into your field?

Opportunity Questions
 ☺ When it feels natural, ask for opportunities

1. Would you be open to connecting me with someone on your team to learn more?
2. Based on our conversation, do you think I'd be a good fit for [field/role]?
3. If you were in my position, how would you go about landing a role in [company/industry]?
4. If I were to apply, would you be comfortable with referring me?
5. If I applied for a role at [company], what do you think is the best way to stand out?

First 5 min: Ask ice-breakers | 20 min: Ask spotlight and role-related questions | Last 5 min: Ask opportunity questions

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Coffee Chat Checklist

Download the coffee chat checklist on this [page](#).



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