

How-to Tips

10 Steps For A Successful Informational Interview

March 27, 2019 | David



An Informational Interview is a casual conversation with a professional who can provide you with valuable insights and advice. A successful informational interview ~~doesn't just happen. It takes a lot of preparation and strategy~~, well before the informational interview.

A successful informational interview and a solid first impression may eventually land you an opportunity and extend your network. However, keep in mind that the main purpose of an informational interview is to gain information. The main purpose is not to ask about job openings; you should not make demands or ask for favours. Focus on presenting yourself professionally to establish a great first impression, and an opportunity will come when the time is right.

Here are 10 steps for ensuring a successful and effective informational interview:

1. Dress To Impress

Yes, the conversation will be casual and light. However, you are still advised to dress appropriately. Your dress code will reflect how much respect you have for the professional. You should dress a minimum of business casual even if the conversation will be held through video conference.

2. Establish Your Goals

The first step in preparing for your informational interview is to figure out what exactly you want to achieve. What are your goals for the informational interview? What do you hope to learn and takeaway from the conversation? Do you want to have a better understanding of the specific industry or company? Are you looking for advice on how to achieve your career goals? List out your goals and bring them with you to the informational interview. This will help you stay focus and on track during the informational interview.

3. Research The Professional

Prior to an informational interview, it is essential that you spend some time to research about the professional you would be chatting with and his/her company. Informational interviews are usually quite short in nature. By doing thorough research beforehand, you could save both you and the professional some valuable time that could be used to discuss something else you would not be able to google. Going into an informational interview with adequate research also shows that you are genuinely interested and eager. This will provide a positive first impression and

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the opportunity to learn more about your future career path, and help you excel in the future.

4. Prepare a Self-Introduction

Prepare a short, concise and straight to the point self introduction that explains who you are, your background, what you are looking for, and what you are thinking about. This introduction should not be longer than three minutes. Instead of spending half the time talking about yourself, you should keep the introduction brief and spend most of your time listening to what the professional has to say.

5. Brainstorm Questions

Create a list of lead questions that you would like to get answered. These questions should reflect back on the goals that you established earlier. You do not have to follow these questions entirely throughout the informational interview. These lead questions are there to guide you towards getting the answers that you are looking for, and you may want to make minor adjustments depending on the conversation. This is a great opportunity for you to gain insights into the reality of the job/industry. Do not be hesitant to ask about the realistic side of things.

Lead questions to get you started (from Daniel Porot's "Pie Method") include:

- How do you get into this line of work?
- What do you enjoy about it?
- What's not so great about it?
- What's changing in the sector?
- What kind of people do well in the industry?

You could also utilize this chance to ask for feedback about yourself, the company and the industry.

Questions for feedback include:

- What do you see as my strength/weakness?
- What are some advice that you wish someone would have told you before you entered the industry?
- What do you love about your company?
- What kinds of skills are important in the industry?
- What are some things I could do/learn in preparation for joining the industry?

If you received negative feedback, do not panic. Instead, ask yourself why and what you could do to improve and change that. Keep in mind that one person's opinion does not necessarily reflect what other people think.

6. Map Out a Timeline

Sketch a tentative timeline of how the informational interview will go. The professional's time is valuable, and you do not want to delay their schedule. Essentially, plan out how much time you will spend introducing yourself and getting answers to each question. This will help you get an idea of the flow of the interview. Bring this timeline with you to the interview to clock yourself.

7. Practice

Practice may not make perfect, but will certainly increase your chances of success. Remember, you only have one chance to establish your first impression, and first impression matters. You want to present yourself in the best way possible. Start by practicing informational interview with your friends and family. Learn to be flexible and strategically ask questions to get the results that you want. You can never practice too much.

8. Get Ready to Take Notes

Think about how you would take notes during the interview. Organize the space on your page, and practice taking notes. Really think about how you could prepare and arrange your page beforehand to help you during your interview. You will be losing a lot of valuable time if you keep asking the professional to repeat what they said, or have them wait for you to finish writing down their responses. This could also help you review the results after the interview instead of scrambling to figure out what

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you love you are reading about the interview, instead of scrutinizing every word you wrote down on paper.

After the Session

9. Send a Simple Thank You Note

Show your appreciation by sending a simple thank you note. Show them that you valued the experience. This could make you memorable, and lead to further discussions and opportunities in the future.

10. Review Your Notes

Sit down and spend time going over your notes. Think about what you learned from this interview and how this experience can help you move forward. Keep your notes organized so you can come back anytime in the future to review them.

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