Informational interview 1:

Philip Poon
Data Scientist @comScore

Philip has been working as data scientist at comScore for more than 3 years. I sent him an email asking if he can share experience while working as data scientist.
He happily agreed to it. We met at Starbucks for a casual chat. Philip came to data science from math background. He faced a lot of challenges with python and R coding.
Summary from this meeting:
1) Mater at least on programming language either python or R
2) Concepts behind the algorithms is more important that actual math. With the use of sophisticated python libraries, you can move on to machine learning part
3) In machine learning hyperparameter tuning and identifying model limitations are more important

Informational Interview 2:

Harish Vasudevasarma
Data Scientist @Microsoft

I reached out to Harish on LinkedIn and he readily agreed to share his knowledge.
Important take away from this meeting:
1) Understanding the data and cleaning the data is more important than ML itself. Practice data wrangling and manipulation
2) Data visualization tells you more about data, learn to interpret different type of graphs
3) Stick to basic data visualization charts e.g. Bar, histogram, pie chart, box plot
4) Participate in Kaggle competitions

Informational Interview 3:
Ashwin Samant
Data Scientist @Priceline

I reached out to Ashwin on LinkedIn and he promptly agreed to share his experience. He has been working as data scientist for more than 5 years.
Summary:
1) Build your portfolio on GitHub, start writing blogs and articles, answers stack overflow questions
2) Writing correct and fast python code is important. Once you have some working code you can tweak and tune it.
3) Keep making notes of difficulties you face while developing something. Ultimately that becomes the story.