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Title: Informational Interviewing is Key to Your Job Search

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OVERVIEW

Informational interviews are a great way to learn about a career ﬁeld of interest to you and to build your network. In an informational interview, you will connect with a professional in one ﬁeld of career interest and ask them questions to learn about career paths, industries, and/or organizations.  These interviews can happen over coﬀee, at an oﬃce, on the phone or virtually. As you develop and strengthen your relationships over time, these relationships may help you discover unadvertised opportunities.

GOALS

Contacting people you know or want to meet to gather information about career paths, industries, or organizations

Building authentic relationships with individuals to help you make informed decisions about your career exploration and internship or job search

Asking individuals who you initially connect with for additional relevant contacts in order to expand your network

Remember: Not everyone will respond to your request or network, but the ones who do will likely be happy to help you by providing advice or by sharing other contacts. Over time, you may also be able to ask your contacts for referrals for specific internship or job opportunities.

BEFORE

Since the primary purpose of informational interviewing is to gather information, you should never approach this activity as “getting a job” but rather as a career research.  Prepare to briefly introduce yourself, ask well-researched questions and start to build a relationship with a new contact.

Reach out to POTENTIAL CONTACTS

Create a list of potential contacts using an organized way of tracking communications, such as an excel spreadsheet.

Approach contacts either in person, via email, or phone to arrange  informational interviews.

Your initial outreach should be brief and contain the following information:

How you found them (alumni network, referral, online research, etc.)

Your school, area of study, and expected year of graduation

Your current status (career exploration, industry research, job search, etc.)

What you are asking them for (information about their organization, industry tips, job search techniques, etc.).

How you would like to interact — in-person, via phone or virtually.

PrepARE For the meeting

Research the industry and organization before your informational interview.

Search the contact online and check their proﬁle on LinkedIn to learn about their position.

Be prepared to talk about yourself with a brief introduction that shares your educational information, key involvements/experiences and career interests.

Before the meeting, devise a list of 8–10 questions that are strategic and not too personal and prioritize them, you might only get to a few. You should ask questions that cannot be answered online and which show your interest.

Dress appropriately for the industry

Have an updated copy of your resume ready in case it comes up in conversation.

DURING

Know the Basics

Thank your contact for meeting with you and respect the timeframe you agreed upon for the meeting (e.g. 15 — 30 minutes).

Share your brief introduction with your contact.

Ask your most important, prepared questions.

Feel free to ask for feedback on your resume.

Ask your contact if they can recommend other individuals with whom to speak before ending the interview.  Later, if you connect with these people, be sure to let the original contact know.

Ask your contact if there’s anything you can do for them.

Navigate Unexpected Obstacles

While networking is an accepted American business practice, you may feel awkward at first. These recommendations can help you deal with unexpected obstacles and situations you may encounter while networking:

You feel uncomfortable: Practice with a friend or career counselor to build your skills and ease. Many of the people you contact will be excited to share information about themselves and the industry and might have helpful suggestions.

Silences: Create and refer to your list of open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a yes/no response.

Inappropriate behavior: If you receive a rude response, inappropriate comment or behavior or if you feel uncomfortable for whatever reason, thank the contact and leave or end the conversation early.

Lengthy answers: If you’re benefiting from the information, let them continue. If the information is not helpful, refocus the interview (after letting the person finish their point) by stating that you don’t want to take too much of their time and then ask another open-ended question from your list.

You ask for a job and the conversation seems to end: Networking is best used to develop relationships, not to identify job prospects. Use networking meetings to gain information, develop further contacts, and seek advice.

You become the interviewee: If in the middle of the informational interview an actual job is presented to you, you may choose to be interviewed formally on the spot. In this case, it is appropriate to ask more questions about the jbo, such as what skills or experiences are relevant, before answering interivew questions. If you are uncomfortable, ask whether you can return to be interviewed as you would like time to prepare.

Poor record-keeping: Keep  a record of your calls, conversations, and meetings. You may find that a spreadsheet or journal may be helpful for tracking.

AFTER

Send a personalized thank you note

Send a networking thank you note after every interaction.

Maintain the relationship by initiating contact every few months to report progress or to share information in which they might be interested in such as an article or upcoming event.