

GUIDE TO CONDUCTING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Solely focusing your search efforts online limits your opportunities. One, you're competing against thousands of other applicants applying for the same jobs. Two, your resume is one of thousands of similar resumes. Three, you're missing the hidden job market that houses many fantastic job openings for those willing to look.

An informational interview is an effective strategy for tapping into the hidden job market, building a strong network of tech industry individuals and mentors that can help your candidacy stand apart from the rest. This article will cover the following topics regarding informational interview:

Informational Interviews - Purpose

Finding People to Meet With

Making the Connection

Conducting the Interview

Ending, follow up and staying in touch after the interview

Informational Interviews - Purpose

The goal of an informational interview is just that - to meet with someone in the tech industry and gain information about their role, background or company. *It is not a job interview.* You are asking people for their time and insight, not a job offer. Most people are very willing to discuss their professional development and offer advice to someone breaking into the field. With the right approach, an informational interview can establish professional connections in the tech industry and reveal a lead about immediate or future job openings.

Finding People to Meet With

1. Start with the personal network you already have - friends, family, instructors, and classmates. If you're currently working and feel comfortable doing so, let coworkers know about your interest in the tech profession. You never know who knows someone until you inform them of your professional focus.
2. Reach out to a second level of potential contacts - people you don't know directly but with whom you share a commonality. Talk to fellow university alumni, previous coworkers or supervisors, perhaps members of a community group or

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organization at which you volunteer. They may work at a particular company that interests you or know people in the field.

3. Research companies and organizations of interest. Remember not all tech jobs are found at tech companies. Nonprofits, education, health care and business all have IT needs. Is there a way to combine your tech skills with a personal interest or focus?
4. Use resources where you're sure to find like minded tech individuals. Examples include:
 - Hackathons
 - LinkedIn
 - Meetup
 - StackedOverflow
 - Professional Technology Associations (target regional/local chapters) such as:
 - [Association of Information Technology Professionals](#)
 - [IEEE Computer Society](#)
 - [CompTIA](#)
 - [Women in Technology International](#)
 - [World Organization of Webmasters](#)

Making The Connection

Once you identify a person to contact, send a clear, concise email, introducing yourself and stating your purpose for requesting a meeting. *Do not say you are looking for job openings.* Rather, explain to the person how you found their contact information and what about their professional background you find interesting. Ask if they would be willing to meet briefly to discuss their experience in (the company, role or industry).

Make the request simple. Suggest a meeting at their office or a mutually convenient place. Give the person the option of suggesting dates and times. The Networking/Information Interview Request sample email found in the Pre-Interview Email Templates Guide¹ can assist you in creating your written request.

¹ Pre-Interview Email Templates Guide:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5IPwZ4yfMEranQ5cHM1bUFzRm8/view>

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Networking/Information Interview Request
Dear (Name),
My name is (your name) and I received your contact information from (source: referring person's name, company website, LinkedIn, etc.).
My reason for reaching out to you is (explain why you want to meet with this person: You admire their career path, want to learn more about their company, would like feedback on breaking into the industry at the entry-level, etc.).
I understand your schedule is very busy, so the opportunity to have a 20 to 30 minute conversation in your office or over coffee is very much appreciated. Any insight you could share would be helpful.
Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing from you.
Sincerely, , (Your First and Last Name)

Conducting The Interview

While an informational interview is not a job interview, there are some similarities.

- *Dress professionally:* Make a positive first impression by dressing professional (business casual at the least), presenting a smile, maintaining eye contact and showing enthusiasm during the meeting.
- *Research:* Take time to conduct research on the company or person's professional background.
- *Bring copies of your resume:* If the person does request a copy of your resume you want to have one on hand to supply immediately.
- *Ask questions:* This person is giving you their time, so make it worth their while. Prepare a list of questions that keep the interview on target such as the ones listed below. You likely won't ask all of them: Be aware of the person's time and allow the opportunity for conversation to take place.

About the job

- ☐ What tasks do you spend much of your day completing?
- ☐ What do you like about your job?
- ☐ What do you find challenging or frustrating?
- ☐ What characteristics should a person in this job or this company possess?
- ☐ What advice would you give to a new professional entering the field?

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- ☐ My research shows that an issue facing this profession is (fill in blank). What is your opinion about this?

About the person

- ☐ What is your educational background?
- ☐ What is your previous work experience?
- ☐ What made you decide to pursue a career in (web development, coding, etc.)?
- ☐ What resources do you use for professional development (associations, trade journals, specific websites, etc.)?

About additional contacts

- ☐ Can you suggest others I can contact? Can I say that you referred me?
- ☐ What resources would you recommend for finding more contacts?
- ☐ Is there any other information you would like to share with me?
- ☐ Can I contact you in the future if I have additional questions?

Ending, following up and staying in touch after the interview

Conclude the interview with a firm handshake and thanking the person for their time. Ask for a business card. As soon as possible after the interview, take time to review what you learned. Send a brief thank you email to the person *within 24 to 48 hours*, stating you enjoyed the conversation and reference a particular topic or idea that you found particularly interesting or helpful.

Don't see this meeting as a one-and-done conversation. Reach out to contacts the person suggested and utilize resources they mentioned. As your networking and job search progresses, keep the person up to date on your progress, sending a brief email each month.

Your first informational interview may not lead to a job offer. Neither might your second. But don't overlook their value. You never know what information and possible lead awaits you at your next informational interview. Additionally, the first person you spoke with - who didn't know of any job openings at the time - may learn of an opportunity a few weeks after your initial meeting. If you made a positive impression, you're likely to be contacted.

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When you accept a job offer, share the good news with your contacts. Thank them for their assistance in your job search. Stay in touch with occasional emails and lunch or coffee invites. Remember, with informational interviews you aren't just looking for jobs. You are building a network of professionals with whom you'll maintain close connections with in the future.