

CAREER RESEARCH - INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is a simple technique for gaining information about a particular career field or company by interviewing someone who is working in the field or for the company you are targeting. It requires a considerable amount of time and practice, but your ability will improve (also confidence!) with the number of calls you make.

Too many job seekers have used informational interviewing as though it were a trick way to get a job. As a result, many business people are skeptical of the term. So don't use it that way; instead, state truthfully that you are doing a career study or are researching possible future careers. If you are very clear about this, the employer or professional is much more willing to talk with you and give you advice.

It is important to make a good impression to someone who may one day become a valuable professional contact, so dress professionally and be prepared! Spend time in the library's business reference section, checking on the organization and career field so that your questions are intelligent and well thought out; write out your questions and practice asking them before the interview. Bring your questions with you.

Ask your prospective interviewee for 15 minutes and keep the meeting within that limit unless you are clearly invited to stay longer. Although the term "informational interview" is over used, the technique remains vital and effective. Use it correctly -- the way a reporter collects facts and feelings for an article.

HOW TO GET INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS:

- STEP 1 Think about the career field that you are interested in and identify companies you want to target.
- STEP 2 Find out the name of the person you wish to interview. Do this by using your network; ask people you know, do a search on LinkedIn, use the company's website or do a Google search.
- STEP 3 When you find someone to interview, call and introduce yourself to that individual or the individual's assistant. Prepare a 1-minute introduction about yourself, your background, education and goals ahead of time. It helps to smile while talking on the phone.
- STEP 4 Explain your reason for calling. Keep it simple, but be persuasive.
- STEP 5 The assistant will probably want to talk to the manager/supervisor before giving you an answer, and may ask you to call back. If the answer sounds like a rejection, don't give up. Try again at a future time.
- STEP 6 If you are turned down, ask the assistant to suggest another person in the same position who would be willing to speak with you. Try to make the assistant an ally. If you get an interview, be sure to write him or her thank you note.

SAMPLE SCRIPT:

1. Good afternoon, my name is _____. I (was given your name by) (found your company through) (understand that you are an expert in) _____.
2. I'm currently conducting some information interviews as part of my career research in _____ and feel that by talking to people who are currently working in the field, I'll be able to find out what the jobs are actually like. I was wondering if you would have a few minutes to answer some questions about what it's like to work in the field of _____.

(over)

3. Would it be possible to arrange for some time to meet with you at your convenience or would you prefer that we chat over the phone? (If they say they are too busy, ask if you can call back at a more convenient time).
4. If they still decline, politely ask for names of people they are aware of who might know of professionals in _____, doing _____ kind of work.
5. Verify the address, date and time for the interview before you hang up. Map the address on the internet.
6. Always send a thank-you note after the interview.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE INTERVIEW

(Be selective; keep the list short if time is a problem)

- I'm fascinated by the field of _____ and would like to know how most people get into the field?
- What is a typical day like for you (also, describe any unusual hours, working conditions, hazards)?
- What do you think is the best educational preparation for a career in _____?
- What skills are required of a person in this field? What personal attributes are essential?
- Are there particular classes that might be important for me to consider taking before graduation?
- Which areas of the job do you find the most challenging? The most frustrating?
- What do you enjoy most?
- Do you think there is enough growth in this career field to justify my pursuing it? Are lay-offs a common occurrence?
- Which professional organizations or journals related to this field would you suggest I know about?
- What experiences have you had that you think have been invaluable to your learning the business?
- How did you arrive at your present position with the company?
- How do people find out about openings in this field?
- Considering what you know of my skills, education and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I know about before I make a final decision?
- If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- Could you recommend other people with whom I could talk to about this career field? May I use your name when contacting him/her?