

CONDUCTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

The Informational (information gathering) interview

- Allows you to gain valuable information about a field of interest or a particular business in a comfortable, no pressure atmosphere.
- Provides you with an excellent opportunity to establish a network of contacts that could lead to future employment.

In order to conduct successful information-gathering interviews, you should follow the steps outlined below:

1. Analyze your skills and interests to clarify career goals.

2. Research the “World of Work”.

- Select occupations which fit your career interests and then research these fields. The career library in the Career Services Center (Centennial Hall 215) has information on hundreds of career fields and job titles.

3. Identify career professionals who are knowledgeable about your targeted job, career or organization.

- Use your resources to help you develop a list of people you can call for an informational interview. Keep in mind personal, family, school, and business contacts.

4. Set up an appointment.

- Call or write your contact person and tell them that you are interested in their career field and would like to meet with them to discuss opportunities in this field. Make sure they know that you are not asking for a job interview!!
- Be resourceful, sincere and show genuine interest in what your “target” person does. Explain that the meeting will be short (no longer than 30 minutes). People usually enjoy the opportunity to discuss their work. If they are too busy to meet with you during their office hours, explore the possibility of meeting over lunch or after work.
- If a person cannot meet with you, ask whether you can ask them a few quick questions over the telephone. Find out exactly how many minutes you can have.
- If they absolutely cannot talk with you, ask them for names of other people you might contact within the same career field.

5. Prepare for the interview.

- Thoroughly research the organization by studying annual reports, brochures, and other materials. Talk with people who are acquainted with the organization.
- Write a resume and bring it with you. You may want to have a Career Counselor review it first.
- Prepare and rehearse a list of questions to ask the person you will interview.
- Dress professionally.

6. During the interview.

- Remember, this is not a job interview! Your purpose is to acquire information. It is okay, at appropriate times, to indicate your strengths and interests but be subtle.
- Before you leave, ask your contact if they could refer you to others in the same career. By doing so you can establish a referral list and build a job search network.

7. Thank-you letter. Do not forget to write one! Your contact has given you valuable work time.

8. Follow-up.

- Keep a record of each organization you visit.
- Contact people on your referral list and interview them.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Present Job:

1. What do you do during a typical work day/week?
2. What skills are most essential for effectiveness in this job? What are the most important parts of the job?
3. What are the most difficult or challenging elements to the job?
4. What are the most rewarding aspects of the job? What do you enjoy least? Does the job have a high burn-out rate?

Preparation:

1. What kind of training or experience is required for entry into this career field?
2. How does one go about getting experience in this field before and/or after college graduation? How much do employers value internships? volunteer work? summer jobs? unrelated work experience?

Hiring Decisions:

1. If you were to hire someone to work with you today, which of the following factors would be most important in your hiring decision and why? Are these the only factors you look for on a resume or in an interview?
 - A. Specific major or degree level
 - B. Past work experience
 - C. Personality, personal attributes
 - D. Specific skills, talents
 - E. Applicant's knowledge of your organization, department, job, etc.

Supply/Demand:

1. What types of employers hire people for your line of work? Where are they located?
2. How do people find out about these jobs? What professional associations are there for this career field? Do you belong to any?
3. How does one advance in this field? What is the turnover rate like?
4. How much do salaries vary in your work by employer, geographic region or industry? What is the salary range for a person with my background?
5. Do many people in your line of work accept positions abroad? Is this considered a good career move?
6. What kind of non-salary benefits are common in this type of work (high job security, health benefits, sick leave, vacation time, profit sharing, retirement plans)?

Career Future:

1. How rapidly is your present career field growing? Is the growth greater in certain industries or geographic areas?
2. How would you describe or estimate future prospects? Where will the jobs be in five years or ten years?
3. If the work you do was suddenly eliminated, are there related career areas that you could pursue?
4. How far can a person go in your career area? What is the career track like? Do people in certain areas advance faster?

Life Style:

1. What obligations does your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary work week?
2. How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc?
3. Does your company offer flex or comp time? Day care? Is relocation necessary? Does the company help with relocation?

The Company:

1. What is the corporation culture like here?
2. Which firms do you feel are your biggest competitors? How are those companies different from this one?
3. Do you enjoy working for this company?

Advice to Me:

1. How well suited is my background for this type of work? What do I need to do to become competitive?
2. What kind of experiences, paid employment or otherwise, would you most strongly recommend.
3. If you were back in college and had to prepare all over again, what would you do differently?

Referral to Others:

1. Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to?
2. Can you name a few people who might be willing to see me? May I have permission to use your name when I tell them how I got your name?