

Informational Interviews

Purpose of the Informational Interview

Informational interviewing is simply talking with someone who is presently working in a career that interests you. The goal is to gather information that you need in order to make a career decision. The art of informational interviewing is developed with practice.

An Informational Interview may help you:

1. explore careers and clarify your career goal
2. identify your strengths and weakness
3. build confidence for job interviews
4. expand your employment network
5. discover potential employment opportunities.

In essence, this is an exchange of information, an opportunity for you to ask:

- Who are you?
- What are your employment needs?
- What do I need to do to be job ready and marketable?

STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO ARRANGING THE INTERVIEW

I. BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:

1. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH:

The primary OBJECTIVES of Informational Interviewing are:

- Investigate a specific career field
- Uncover areas that are unknown to you
- Gain insight into future trends
- Obtain information that will help you narrow your options
- Obtain advice on where you might fit in
- Broaden your network of contacts.

2. IDENTIFY PEOPLE TO INTERVIEW

- From a referral source (friends, friends of friends, family, acquaintances)
- Directories at the library or through the Internet
- Call the business and ask for the appropriate department
- Business journals and newspaper articles
- Professional associations
- College and Technical school departments

3. RESEARCH

If you do some work before the interview, you will have a much better chance of conducting a successful interview and getting useful information. You will also make a better impression on the interviewer, which can be useful when you ask for additional contacts.

- Learn as much as you can about the organization
- Do your homework through research-look at company literature, annual reports and employee handbooks
- Utilize the resources of the library, Internet, and business magazines and newspaper articles to research the company and your ideas
- Learn about the career in general. Information about growth, the type of work and general benefits is available at Job Service, the library and through the Internet in the Occupational Outlook Handbook and the Guide to Occupational Exploration
- Prepare questions that display your research
- Write down your questions
- Develop priorities for the interview
- Check on directions and how long it takes to get there-and allow plenty of time.

Even though this is NOT a job interview, you should prepare, dress and act as though it were.

4. DEVELOP QUESTIONS

Have a few key questions and ask for additional perspectives. Customize your questions for each interview. Does your contact have a specialty area or work with a unique group of customers? Don't ask for information that is readily available through company literature or other resources. Be sure to prioritize your questions, so the important ones will be answered.

See the attached "Questions for the Informational Interview".

5. REQUEST AN APPOINTMENT

- Obtain the person's name
- State why you are contacting this particular person
- Three methods of contact include:
 - REFERRAL-when someone suggests a name for you to contact. In this case mention the referral source, with their permission, in your telephone call or letter. " Ann Jones suggested I contact you about....." Or, mention a newspaper or journal article you read with their name and business.

- WRITE A BRIEF LETTER-requesting an informational interview. This method allows you to explain your concept, with the request for an informational interview. Then follow up with a phone call a few days later to schedule the interview. This method allows the person to read and think about your goals.

See "*Sample Letter Requesting an Informational Interview*".

- COLD CALL- Write down your thoughts or key points and telephone requesting an appointment
- Specify the amount of time (20-30 minutes max) you are requesting and be sure to keep to your schedule
- Explain your purpose
- Emphasize you are not looking for a job
- Maintain the initiative, follow up with phone calls as needed
- Be prepared for refusals.

II. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

- Arrive on time
- Restate your purpose and why you are speaking with this particular person
- Have an agenda with a few key open-ended questions
- Listen carefully, be open to additional ideas and information
- Try to get answers to your most important questions
- Briefly describe your qualifications
- Take notes
- Ask about alternative ways to prepare yourself for entering the career
- Observe the job setting and atmosphere
- Don't ask for a job
- Do ask for a referral for additional contacts
- Ask for feedback on your approach to the interview.

III. FOLLOW-UP

- Write to thank people who have spent time with you and then periodically update them on your progress
- Evaluate your own style of interviewing. What should I change for the next interview?
- Keep track of your contacts and their suggestions in a file
- Evaluate the information you received. How does it fit in with your plans?
- Try incorporating suggestions into your next informational interview for additional feedback!

Sample Informational Interview Questions

Below are many questions to help you gather information about three areas; The Person you are Interviewing, The Occupational Field and The Organization. A good approach would be to choose a few from each category.

The Person you are Interviewing:

- How long have you worked in this field? How has your career progressed?
- What skills do you use in your job?
- What challenges do you face? Daily? Long term?
- What gives you the most satisfaction in this job?
- What are the frustrations that you experience?
- What does it take to be successful in your job?

The Occupational Field:

- What type of preparation, credentialing and training must one have to enter this field?
- Is there growth in the field? What is the job market?
- What are the current needs in the field?
- What can I do, if I enter the field, to make myself marketable and competitive?
- What are the future directions in the field? What changes are expected?
- What kind of skills and what type of commitments are necessary to be successful in this field?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working in this field?
- What are the characteristics of people who enter this field and are successful?
- What type of experiences would be helpful for someone entering this field?
- What are the typical entry-level salary and benefits?
- What recommendations would you have for an entry-level person considering this field?
- Would you describe a typical entry-level position?

The Organization:

- Where does the organization's funding (or businesses revenue) come from? (applies to non-profit agencies)
- How frequent are staff meeting?
- Would you describe the management style or organizational structure?

- Are there opportunities for growth? Is there a professional development program? Are people promoted from within?
- What is the style of supervision in the organization?
- What kind of hours do people work? Are the hours standard or flexible?
- Do people work on teams?

Also, make the following observations while you are there:

- What is the general atmosphere of the organization? Do people seem happy to be there?
- What is the physical environment? Good lighting, ventilation, workspace allocation, equipment, privacy and security?
- What is the dress code for the organization?
- If possible, observe how co-workers interact with each other.

REFERENCES

- Hakim, C. When you lose your job. (Berrett Kohler) 1998.
- Alea, P. & Mullins, P. The best work of your life. (Berkley Publishing Group) 1998.
- Bissonnette, Denise. Beyond traditional job development. (Milt Wright and Associates, Inc) 1994.

SAMPLE LETTER FROM AN EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANT
REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Letter head

Xxxxxxxx
Xxxxxxxx
Xxxxxxxx

Today's Date

Dear XXXXXXXX:

XXXXXXX suggested I contact you as you have expertise in the area of xxxxxx. I am writing to introduce (*ERI/Your Firm Inc.*) and explain how and why we partner with businesses.

(ERI/Your Firm) offers career exploration to individuals with physical disability seeking employment. Among other tools, we utilize the informational interview with professionals such as yourself. Through this exchange, we gather information to guide the career search. In addition, my client hopes to receive feedback on his/her current skills and to determine what he/she needs to do to be job ready and marketable.

Currently, I am working with an individual who has an employment objective of xxxxx. I am hoping through our interview to better assess his ideal entry position, and to more fully understand the needs of the xxxxx business. Please understand, I am not requesting a job interview, rather your professional insight and direction.

I will follow up with a telephone call to you on xxxxxx to schedule this brief interview. I hope we will be able to meet for 20-30 minutes to discuss these issues. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. I look forward to speaking to you.

Sincerely,

Employment Consultant
Your Firm, Inc.

SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Xxxxxxxx
Xxxxxxxx
Xxxxxxxx

Today's Date

Dear Xxxxx,

Xxxxxxxx suggested I contact you as you have expertise in the area of xxxxxx. I am exploring the xxxx career field with an Employment Consultant.

This process involves research through interviews with professionals such as yourself. Through this exchange I would like to gather information to assist in my career planning. In addition, I hope to receive feedback on my current skills to help me determine what I need to do to become job ready and marketable. Please understand that I am not requesting a job interview, rather your professional insight and direction.

I will follow up with a telephone call to you on xxx to schedule this brief interview. I hope we will be able to meet for 20-30 minutes to discuss these issues. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. I look forward to speaking to you.

Sincerely,

Xxxxxxxx
Xxxxxxxx