



## Networking Through Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is a form of networking that serves three purposes, sometimes simultaneously. First, informational interviews are useful for gathering information from experts in the fields you are considering for your next career move. Second, informational interviews can be used to place yourself in front of decision-makers, including people who have the authority to decide whether you are a potential fit for their organization. Third, if you conduct your informational interviews successfully the people who you meet will become advocates for your job search and may be able to put you in touch with others who can help you achieve your career goals.

The steps in informational interviewing are:

- *Research:* Identify people in organizations in the field, or related to the field where you want to work. Sometimes it's a good idea to get referrals from friends or family members. Some alumni may make themselves available for informational meetings. The Office of Career Management can also facilitate the identification of target companies via our subscription to the Career Search database. The internet and reference books may also be sources of information for people who you'll want to meet.
- *Contact:* The telephone, email or written correspondence are all acceptable ways of contacting people you wish to interview. There are pros and cons to each depending on your personal communications preferences. A consultative meeting with a career professional at the Office of Career Management can help you decide which method is right for you, under which circumstances. Whenever contacting a potential interviewee, it's important to cover the following:
  - ◆ How you learned of your contact, or who referred you
  - ◆ The reason for requesting the meeting (usually to obtain information about the industry in which your contact is working)
  - ◆ Your status (e.g., student, fellow professional, member of a professional organization)
  - ◆ Why the meeting will be helpful (e.g., because the expertise of your contact will help you make a more informed career decision)
  - ◆ How long the meeting will be (don't ask for more than 30 minutes)
  - ◆ When "cold calling" or contacting someone with whom your connection is remote, you can promise that the reason for the meeting is not to seek immediate employment with their organization. Therefore, it is usually not necessary to send your resume in advance.

- ◆ How you plan to follow-up and schedule a meeting.
- *Follow-up:* When using email or correspondence, follow-up with a phone call to schedule the meeting a day or two after your communication reaches your prospective interviewee. During that call, you may need to re-iterate some of the points you made in your initial communication.
- *Conducting the interview:* You will be expected to run the meeting you have requested. Dress as you would for a job interview, and come prepared with at least 5-7 questions to ask. Examples include:
  - ◆ How did you get started in this field?
  - ◆ What do you like most about your job?
  - ◆ What are the current strategic objectives for your organization?
  - ◆ What skills help you the most in doing your work?
  - ◆ What is the outlook for your major sources of revenue or funding?
  - ◆ Is your organization affected by any pending legislation?
  - ◆ How has the current economy affected your organization?
- *Closing the interview:* Some meetings will be longer than others. As a rule of thumb, after 30 – 40 minutes consider initiating the close of the meeting. Now that you have established a rapport with your interviewee, it may be a good time to ask them to take a look at your resume. For example, you could say:

*“Thank you for the time you’ve taken...your insight has been very helpful. As I mentioned, I’m not here to ask you for employment, but because I am considering a career in your field, I was hoping you might give some advice on my resume. Is this the kind of resume that might be successful in obtaining interviews with an organization like yours?”*

Many interviewees will offer to keep your resume, or you can offer them the chance to keep it. You never know if it will be passed along to someone else in the organization. After you have received some feedback on your resume, it can be helpful to ask for a referral to someone else with whom you can have a similar meeting. This will keep your network of contacts growing. For example, you could say:

*“This meeting will really go a long way toward helping me assess my career goals. Is there someone else in your organization, or someone else in your field, who you could suggest I contact for a similar meeting?”*

**After gathering information, having your resume reviewed (and perhaps kept) and gaining a referral for a similar networking opportunity, you have accomplished your major goals for the meeting.**

## **The Power of Building a Network**

Informational interviewing is a powerful tool in building a network of supporters who can open the door to future employment. Your efforts may pay off quickly, or may take some time. You eventually may find a job by more traditional means. But you never know when a meeting will pay off in an important lead for your job search. And by keeping in touch with your new contacts and letting them know where you eventually find employment, you will cement your relationship with them.

## **Taking Control**

In addition to the benefits of building a network and potentially gaining employment, informational interviewing can have a positive psychological impact on the stress of job searching. Instead of sending resumes into cyberspace and waiting for the telephone to ring, you will be spending some of your job search time initiating actions that have positive results, even in the form of learning and information. You are now taking control of your job search, rather than being controlled by the whims of resume reviewers and automated resume screening tools.

## **Striking a Balance**

As important as networking is, it always makes sense to pursue opportunities for positions that are posted on job boards and other listing resources. It is important to limit your applications to those jobs for which you have at least several of the most important qualifications and skills. Each job seeker will strike his or her own balance of time between networking activity and sending resumes for posted jobs, but as a rule of thumb plan to spend at least two to three hours networking for every hour you spend responding to job postings. The exception may be if you are a “perfect fit” for a number of posted positions that are of great interest to you. A consultation with a career professional at the Office of Career Management can help you find the balance that works best for you and your schedule.