

# Informational Interviews

The Informational Interview is a low-key, informal experience that can be your most valuable tool when making decisions about your career. You can accomplish several things when you meet with an employer for an informational interview:

- Practice interviewing
- Make networking connections
- Obtain information about career fields
- Gain insight into the hidden job market
- Make personal contacts with management-level personnel

Remember: the informational interview is all about getting information.

## **DO NOT ASK FOR A JOB DURING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW!**

- 1) **Your first step is to identify an occupation** you would like to investigate. What is there you might like to do for a living? You can find out about occupations online or in the Career Center. What are the qualifications? What are the duties? What does it pay?
- 2) **Next, identify an employer in the local area** who hires people working in that occupation with whom you would like to talk. You can check with school faculty and Career Services staff, other people working in that field, the chamber of commerce or online. After you select an employer to approach about an informational interview, find out as much as you can about the employer before setting up the interview; the employer's website can be an excellent source of information. Be sure your source of information is accurate.
- 3) **Now, approach the employer to schedule the interview.** Your first contact should be by telephone or e-mail. Try to schedule your interview with a manager or supervisor who has the authority to hire. Identify yourself and explain you are researching careers in their field. Always remember to be flexible in your scheduling – employers have prior commitments. As a general rule, spend only 15-20 minutes in an informational interview.

Although there are many techniques to requesting an informational interview, the following is a good approach:

*"Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am conducting research in your field and would appreciate the chance to meet and talk with you for about 15-20 minutes to find out more about your field of expertise."*

Emphasize that you are simply trying to get firsthand information about the person's field and working in it, and whatever they can share would be appreciated.

- 4) **Prepare answers to the questions that the employer may ask you.** To help get your foot in the door, it will be helpful for you to have short, concise answers to the following questions:
  - *Why are you interested in this type of work?*
  - *Why do you feel you would be good at this type of work?*
  - *What interests you about this employer?*
  - *How would you sum up your work history?*
  - *What do you want from this interview, and how will you use the information?*

- 5) **Prepare questions to ask the person**, and ask only those questions which are most important to you. Find out a bit about the field so you can ask questions that pertain to the field. You will convey your motivation and interest to the employer by showing you did some research and you put some thought into your questions. Some possible questions:
- *Why did you choose this field?*
  - *What do you like best about your job?*
  - *What kinds of problems do you deal with in your job?*
  - *What is a typical day like? What decisions do you make?*
  - *What qualifications and education are needed to work in this field?*
  - *What are the qualities necessary for success in this field?*
  - *What are the opportunities to advance in your field?*
  - *What is the best way to enter this field?*
  - *What things did you do before entering this field? Which were most helpful?*
  - *How do you see this field changing over the next several years?*
  - *What are your company's major products and services?*
  - *What does your company value?*
  - *What type of people does your company look for when hiring?*
  - *What is your company's hiring procedure?*
- 6) When you go to the informational interview, **remember to dress appropriately** – wear good clothes and be well-groomed to make a good impression. If you want them to think of you when they have an opening, you want them thinking good things.
- 7) **Be prepared to take notes.** You don't need to write down everything the person says, but there may be names, phone numbers and other information you will want to remember.
- 8) **The day before the interview, call to confirm that it is still on.** Know the location of the interview and how to get there, and be sure to arrive 10 minutes early.
- 9) **Treat the receptionist and all other employees well.** Again, you want to make a good impression with as many people at the company or organization as you can.
- 10) **Take a copy of your resume.** However, don't present it to the employer unless they ask to see it.
- 11) **Ask for your contact's business card**, and give them one of yours if you have one.
- 12) **Ask for referrals.** People in the same kind of business usually know their competition. Ask if they would give you the names of others in their field you may be able to talk to, and whether you may say that they referred you to them.
- 13) **Follow up with a thank-you note.** Be sure to send a thank-you card or letter within 24 hours of the interview. This is a good way to keep in touch and to remind people of who you are. Include your address and phone number under your signature.

**CONGRATULATIONS!** You've had a successful informational interview.

By building trust with someone in your field of interest, you have begun to develop a network of potential employers. Although you are not asking for a job, these individuals are now aware of your interest – and establishing a network of contacts in a field increases your chance of gaining employment.