

Information Interviewing

Information interviewing is a strategy to use when exploring career fields and building a network in a career field that interests you. Information interviewing means meeting with people to ask for information, not a job. It is the job seeker's equivalent of market research. It is essential in learning about a field and job functions which fit your talents, and in evaluating organizations that could be a good match for you. Information interviewing is also a networking method that allows you to discover the "hidden job market", the jobs not publicly advertised. Statistics show that no more than 20% of employment occurs through formal mechanisms such as classified ads, employment agencies or mass mailing of resumes. The majority of jobs are found informally, mainly through friends, relatives and through making direct contact with people in industries or organizations that interest you.

Benefits of Information Interviewing:

1. Gain first-hand, current information from professionals in the fields you are considering.
2. Build your confidence and poise for later job interviews
3. Expand your knowledge of the job market in the field(s) you want to explore
4. Find out about job/career paths you did not know existed and the skills they require
5. Clarify what jobs are really like before you commit yourself
6. Shorten your job search time, find quality jobs, and target positions that best fit your particular mix of interests and skills
7. Learn about salary ranges, typical career paths, how specific organizations find new people, and which companies are hiring
8. Build support for your job search by expanding the number of people who can help you and provide you with "non-advertised" job leads

Steps to successful information interviewing and networking

Develop your contact list

Begin by making a list of 100 people you know. Categories for your list could include:

- People you already know: friends, neighbors, relatives, church members, sports team members, professors, doctors, classmates, social acquaintances, friends of friends or relatives, etc.
- Members of professional organizations. Join the Northland College Alumni Network on LinkedIn. Use the yellow pages of the phone book to find people in your field of interest.

1. Ask for the Interview

You can do this by phone, email or by letter. Information meetings are far more effective when conducted in person rather than over the phone or by email. Phone meetings are necessary in long distance job searches, or when asking for a referral to someone more appropriate. However, people normally share referrals to their network only when they know you and have confidence in your abilities. The use of the name of a mutual friend or contact can help break the ice when setting up the appointment. If the contact is a Northland College alumnus, be sure to mention you acquired his/her name from the Career Center's alumni database.

Explain who you are and the purpose of the interview. **Be sure to explain that the**

meeting is only for gathering information. You are not contacting them for a job. Ask if you could have a few minutes of their time (20 minutes) to discuss their career, their organization, and questions you have about their career field. Let the person know you are organized and will value any time they can spend with you. An information interview is less stressful than most people realize. Most individuals like being considered an expert in the field, helping others, and talking about an area which interests them.

2. **Prepare for the Interview in advance**

Research the company and industry beforehand. Don't waste valuable time asking questions that can be found in books, on the company web site or in an annual report. Prepare questions in advance to make sure the interview meets your objectives. Be prepared to talk about why you are interested in their field of work and your strengths and skills. Take a resume with you. Only bring it out if the interviewer expresses interest in you for a position or wishes to pass your resume on. On more than one occasion, information interviews have resulted in invitations for job interviews.

3. **Conduct an effective meeting**

Keep to the time limits you requested, unless the interviewer clearly wants to extend the meeting time. Remember that it is your role to ask questions to learn what you need to know. It is also important to describe your background and interests in a clear, concise way. Dress professionally. Once you have developed rapport, ask for referrals. If you have presented yourself professionally, your contact will feel more confident in referring you to colleagues for similar information meetings.

4. **Follow Up**

Be sure to write a note of thanks promptly after the meeting. It does not need to be more than a few sentences in length. Thoughtful people tend to be remembered. It also demonstrates your professionalism.

5. **Create a Tracking System**

Keep track of your contacts (including job title, email, phone and street address) in an organized manner on a log sheet or in a notebook. Ask for his/her business card. Save this information in a safe place! You may want to re-contact these people later. It is a good idea to write them when you find a job. Your network will be valuable throughout your career life. Don't lose this valuable contact information and stay in touch with these people.

INFORMATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Sample Questions about the Individual/Job Function

- How did you get into this line of work?
- What is a typical day like for you?
- What do you enjoy most/least about your current work?
- What skills are needed to be successful in your position?
- What are your toughest problems and decisions?

- How did your education prepare you for your position?
- What do you wish you had known when you first started out in this field?
- What qualifications does one need to gain an entry-level position in your career field?
- What types of advancement opportunities are available in this career field?
- What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?

Sample Questions about the Organization

- Why did you choose this organization? What do you like/dislike about it?
- What is the employment outlook for your organization at this time?
- What are the characteristics or skills of successful people in this organization?
- How are goals set and measured? How is success
- What are other opportunities in the organization should I look into? Who should I talk to?
- Is it possible to balance career and personal life reasonably well here?
- What kind of training is provided for new staff?

Sample Questions about the Field

- What changes do you see occurring in this field over the next few years?
- Are there conferences or seminars that might be useful for newcomers to attend?
- Do you belong to any professional associations that you recommend I join as a student?
- Are there articles, journals or books that you recommend I read related to this field?
- What other organizations hire (health educators)?
- What are good ways to learn more about prospective employers?

Sample Questions about Your Marketability

- How would employers view my background and experiences?
- Is my resume appropriate for the jobs I have outlined?
- How could I improve my marketability in this field?

Always Ask

- Could you provide me with the names of two or three other people, whom you know, who would be willing to provide me with additional information about this type of work?
- May I use your name if I contact them?