

## **Informational Interviewing for Career Exploration**

Informational Interviews are a great way to gather information about a Career. It can be one of your most valuable strategies in gathering information and establishing contacts as you begin or continue to build plans for the future. Like all other components of career planning, informational interviewing requires planning and focus on your part. Work to make that the interview a benefit for you and your career.

### **Know What You Want to Accomplish**

The primary objectives of informational interviewing are to:

- Investigate a specific career field.
- Assist in narrowing options.
- Obtain advice on where you might fit in.
- Learn the jargon and important issues in the field.
- Broaden your network of contacts for future reference.
- Create a strategy for entering your field of interest.

### **Steps in the Informational Interview Process**

1. Start by selecting 1-5 careers you would like to explore.
2. Create a list of people to request interviews from. List people you know who have jobs in the career field you want to explore. Next your friends and colleagues if they know anyone you might be able to interview who have jobs in your chose field(s). Also, note anyone that you know that has a related career that you could ask for contacts to interview.
3. Request 20-30 minutes of time by phone or in person to interview the people on your list.
4. Develop a list of questions that you will ask in the interviews.
5. Conduct the interviews.
6. Send thank you notes.
7. Determine who you will follow up with regarding any present or future job openings.
8. Compile the information.
9. Analyze the information to see if you would like to pursue a career in the field you are investigating.

### **Tips for Conducting the Informational Interviews**

Before the interview:

- Learn as much as you can about the organization.
- Write down the questions that you wish to ask.
- If possible, learn something about the person with whom you will be interviewing.

- Dress professionally.
- Bring copies of your resume. (Distribute only upon request.)
- Arrive 10-15 minutes before your appointment.

During the interview:

- Restate your purpose and why you are talking with this particular person.
- Be prepared to initiate the conversation, since you are the interviewer.
- Adhere to the original time request of 20-30 minutes.
- Ask for referrals to other appropriate individuals in the field or in related organizations.
- Keep in mind that this is an information-gathering and advice-seeking interview, not an employment interview.
- Let the individual you are interviewing bring up the discussion of specific job vacancies.

After the interview:

- Send a thank-you note and keep the individual you have interviewed posted on your progress.
- Keep the door open for future contacts with this person.
- Evaluate your style of interviewing. What could you have done better? Use what you have learned when you conduct your next interview.
- Evaluate the information you received. How does it relate to your plans?

## **What to Ask**

Your questions will yield the most information if you use open-ended questions to engage your contact in conversation. Listed below are sample questions to help you prepare for your interview.

Questions about the Career Field:

- Types of positions most often found in the career field.
- General skills needed to perform responsibilities (e.g., organizing, supervising, writing).
- Specific skills needed to do the job (e.g., academic, experiential).
- Recommendations for training or education required to perform this kind of work.
- Negative aspects of field, for example, "What would you change if you could?" or "If you had it to do over again, how would you have done it differently?"

- Typical entry-level position in the field.
- The outlook for entry-level professionals.
- Alternative methods to gain entrance to the field (e.g., part-time, mid-career change, volunteer work or other kinds of training).
- The future of this field in terms of new and expanding opportunities.
- Other information that may be helpful (e.g., critique of resume, job-seeking tactics, names of other professionals in the field).

#### Questions About the Organization:

- Short- and long-term goals of the organization such as growth, new products or services, and expansion of facilities.
- Philosophy of the organization and types of training programs available.
- Descriptions of the various positions they have held between entry-level and present job.
- Description of the individual's present job (as defined in the job description as well as what is done beyond the job description).
- Description of typical career path from entry-level to top management.