Informational Interviews

Informational interviewing is one of the most effective ways to gain knowledge about career fields and how that field fits with your personality and interests. Informational Interviewing is simply the process of talking with professionals who are working in fields that you are considering for yourself. In the book, *What Color is Your Parachute?*, Richard Bolles describes a survey of successful job hunters. This survey revealed that those who were the most successful had spent time talking to people in various businesses and organizations before they began actively seeking job interviews. Make sure that you get input from more than one person for each career of interest.

You can use an informational interview to:

- Gain direct information about career fields
- Learn about new fields you may not have been aware of before
- Define career goals more clearly
- Find out what employers are looking for and how to market your skills most effectively
- Confirm career decisions
- Obtain information about specific organizations
- Improve job interviewing skills
- Create a network of people who can help in the job search

Guidelines for Conducting an Informational Interview

1. Make an appointment with a Career Counselor at 977-2828 to set goals and increase self-understanding prior to conducting the interview.
2. Be sure that you have located what is available in print about a particular career field, organization, or business before you begin interviewing others for information.
3. Generate a list of questions before making that initial telephone call. This will prepare you for the interview.
4. Develop a 30-second script about yourself and why you are contacting the individual. Rehearse it several times to feel comfortable with the process.
5. When making the telephone call, confirm the person’s job title by asking him/her. State specifically that you are interested in learning more about a particular job, career field, industry, or business. Ask for 20 or 30 minutes at a convenient time. Be sure to keep the meeting within that time frame.
6. If possible, try to meet the person at the worksite so that you can get an idea of the working environment and culture associated with the job.
7. Dress appropriately for the location and arrive a few minutes early.
8. Write down the information you received, the name of the person with whom you spoke, and the date of the interview for your records. Later, you can compare information received from different sources.
9. Send a thank-you letter after the informational interview.
Sample Questions for the Informational Interview

- What is a typical work day like?
- How and why did you choose this career?
- What are the most and least rewarding aspects of your job?
- What are the most important skills and abilities required?
- What do you wish you knew (but didn’t) when you first contemplated this career?
- Do you foresee any significant changes in the future?
- What is your educational and professional background?
- What high school or college courses are most applicable for your career?
- What type of education/training is needed for this job?
- What would you suggest I do to make myself more marketable in this field?
- What are some related career paths?
- Would you do anything differently if you could start over?
- What type of advancement opportunities does this organization offer?
- What is the salary range for someone entering this field?
- What type of person do you look for when you need a new employee?
- Where can I find more information and or whom do you suggest I talk to for further information?

Getting Started

Here is a list of some places to look when searching for a contact:

1. Professional organizations and associations
2. Libraries
3. Chambers of Commerce
4. Public Relations Offices
5. Human Resources Departments
6. Places of Worship
7. Family and Friends
8. Professors
9. Telephone Directories
10. Alumni Associations
11. Fraternities and Sororities

Think of informational interviewing as a way to practice speaking with others when a job is not at stake. Also, keep in mind that most people like to talk about themselves and about their career. Not everyone, however, will want to speak with you. Accept this, and move on to your next prospect.

If you feel that gathering information is too much trouble, remember that the most successful job hunters have identified what they wanted to do based upon adequate information before they began the job search. Informational interviewing will help you clarify your career goals and identify the particular organizations, industries, and positions which are most suited to your specific skills, abilities, personality, and values.