INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GAMEPLAN

"Be open to living your life by design and design it"

Informational interviews are a highly effective vehicle for students and those in transition, including veterans, to successfully land an internship or job. This little-known strategy is essential to networking and empowering yourself with greater control to gain clarity about career pursuits and create opportunities to secure your desired outcome. As such, informational interviews are the key to the Jobseeker Empowerment Technique.

It is a great way to get your foot in the door, distinguish yourself from others and to network. Not many students or professionals take advantage of informational interviews. They simply don't know how easy they are to obtain and how beneficial they prove to be.

Unlike job interviews, this is low risk, low pressure and great practice for real interviews. In short, you ask relevant questions about the person and their job to help decide if it's what you want to do, with whom you want to work and the employer worthy of your commitment. More to the point, you make connections. You cultivate mentors. Ask them to introduce you to others of benefit. The rest comes down to preparation, technique and follow through.

Imagine being the person you contact. You receive a brief note from a college student, recent graduate or transitioning veteran who is taking the initiative to learn more about you and your business. Wouldn't you spare 15 minutes at your convenience to chat over a free cup of coffee? Of course, you would — and those you contact will too.

Even those seeking a lateral career move can simply reach out to another human being for guidance. If, for whatever reason, any desired contacts either fail to respond, decline to accept or – at worst – take offense, then that has more to do with them than you. So, there's no need to take anything personally. Just be respectful and accepting. It's more than likely that these individuals would not be worthy to share your time. Keep at it.

Just to reiterate, an informational interview is not a "to-hire" interview, you are simply learning about a career path, a current job description and to network. Although it is not "to-hire," informational interviews can lead to a job offer or interview with that company or another in the interviewer's network.

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INFORMATION INTERVIEW PLANNING CHECKLIST

Below for your convenience is this planning checklist. You can also rely on our exclusive tip sheets and guides that provide everything to prepare and follow through to achieve success. With that in mind, you'll also want to look for opportunities to return the favor. The wider you can pave a two-way street, the better you can create your own lane.

Setting up the interview

- ☐ Identify several companies that interest you
- ☐ Send a letter, best if by mail [hand-written or typed] to the person you wish to emulate
- ☐ Ask for 15-20 minutes of their time for an informational interview, and if they will share their career path and insights [anyone worth working for will give you their time to help]

Preparation

- ☐ Good questions & general intent
- ☐ You are there to learn about the interviewer and gain as much information from them as possible [i.e. their job responsibilities and career path], not to openly seek a job

During

Background on yourself first

- ☐ Major / Job history
- ☐ Interests
- ☐ Trying to figure out where to start your career or make a lateral transition
- ☐ Where you want to go from here (grad school, work, combination) or starting level in new career
- ☐ Wrapping up the interview

Find out about them

- ☐ Responsibilities
- ☐ Title & how long they have been at their position
- ☐ Where were they before their current job
- ☐ Why did they choose the career path they did
- ☐ What do they find most rewarding / most challenging about their position

Wrapping up the interview

- ☐ Ask if they have any colleagues that they think would be good for you to talk with
- ☐ Give them your resume

After the interview

- ☐ Write a hand-written thank you note and send it out ASAP
- ☐ Reference something in the thank you note so that they will remember exactly who you are

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SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Career and Personal Background Questions

- What was your college major?
- Why and how did you choose this career field?
- What has been your career path?
- What are the toughest problems you have to deal with?
- What is the most rewarding part of your job?
- If you were to leave this kind of work, what would drive you away?
- If things develop as you like, what does the future hold for your career?
- If you were a college graduate again, and had the opportunity to do it all over again, what would you do differently knowing what you know now?

On-the-Job

- What do you do on a typical day in this position?
- What training, education and licenses are required for this work?
- What kinds of prior experience is absolutely essential?
- Does your work become more interesting as you stay longer?
- What entry-level opportunities offer the most ability to learn a great deal?
- What is the typical salary range for these positions?
- What obligations does your job position place on you, outside the regular work week?
- If you were to hire someone to work with you today, which of the following would be most important to your hiring decision and why: Educational credentials? Past work experience? Personality/personal attributes? Specific skills/talents?
- What is the average length of time that employees stay with the organization?
- What type of formal or on-the-job training does the organization provide?
- How does the organization compare/differ with its competitors?

Career Preparation

- What types of internships or employment would you recommend if I wanted to pursue [field] as a career?
- What personal qualities or abilities are pertinent to be successful in this job?
- What opportunities for advancement are available in this field?
- What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
- How do people find out about these jobs?
- How do you see this field changing in the future?
- Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
- Which professional publications and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- With the information you have about my education, skills and experience, what other fields would you suggest I research further before making a final decision?
- What do you think of my background/résumé? Do you see any problem areas or weaknesses?
- Who do you know that may also be willing to speak with me as well? May I use your name?

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7 Ways to Ask for Informational Interviews on LinkedIn

Getting Started

1. Target: Identify your targets based on people who have jobs or careers that interest you or with whom you'd like to work. Be sure to consider family members, friends, college alumni, professors and former supervisors.

2. Connect: Go to the person's LinkedIn profile and click, "Connect." In the pop-up box, choose "Add a note" vs. "Send now." This will allow you to customize your message, rather than sending the default message that says, "I'd like to add you to my professional network."

3. Customize: Personalize your message. This is critically important. This is most reliably done from a non-mobile device. However, if working on a mobile device, make sure that you are using the most updated operating system. Also, please note that invitations sent from the "People You May Know" feature in the mobile app cannot be personalized. Avoid doing this.

NOTE: If the profile of someone you'd like to contact does not display a "Connect" button, but rather requires InMail or their email address, one option is to view the Groups to which they belong and join one. If this work-around doesn't work, consider upgrading to have InMail credits.

Crafting the Right Message

LinkedIn "Connect" messages are limited to **300 characters**. The key is to be friendly, polite and professional while establishing a connection and quickly stating your request.

Key components of the message:

• **Greeting**: Keep it simple. Use the person's name. First names are the norm on LinkedIn, unless your relationship to the person dictates something else, such as professor who you only know as "Dr. Smith."

• **Introduction**: If you've met or were referred, clearly state how you know or know of this person. Don't assume that they remember you, especially if you only met once or a long time ago. Only use someone else's name as the referrer with their permission.

• **Personalize**: Be sure to fully read their profile. Identify and refer to something about them that caught your attention, such as in their experience or a phrase they used. Be specific. If they have a stellar career or published an impactful article, tell them so.

• **Introduction**: If you haven't met nor were referred to them, that's ok. Just be direct and personable.

• **Ask for what you want:** Be accommodating. Offer to meet the person where and when it's convenient for them. Extend an invitation for coffee or offer to come to their workplace. Consider that it's also in their best interest to meet you.

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SAMPLE MESSAGES

Someone who you found in a search
Hi, [name]: Your profile appeared in my search of local smart home designers. I am a U.S. veteran studying software engineering and would like to know more about this industry. It would be great to connect and hear about your experience in the field. You would be a big help! Sincerely, [name]

Someone you've read about/seen
Hello, [name]: I am a U.S. veteran, studying aerospace engineering at XYZ University. I really enjoyed reading your article/blog/post on trends in aviation in XYZ magazine/website. I am currently interviewing experts to hear their insights on the skills today's engineers need to succeed. Would you be willing to help? Thank you. [name]

A friend of a friend
Hi, [name]: Caleb Johnson *from XYZ Company suggested that I contact you.* Caleb *and I went through basic training together. Today, I am studying data analytics and eager to learn how big data is impacting the healthcare industry. I'm interested to hear your thoughts on this, perhaps over coffee? [name]*

A fellow group member
Hi, [name]: I'm part of the Blue Racing *group on LinkedIn and have been following your feed. As a U.S. veteran and aspiring automotive designer, I admire your career path and would like your input on first steps for recent grads. Can we chat over coffee sometime for 15-20 minutes? I'll buy! [name]*

Someone you just met
Hi, [name]: It was very nice meeting you at today's luncheon. I enjoyed your presentation on cyber security and, as a U.S. veteran and student of computer analytics, am interested in exploring this as a career option. May I ask you a few questions at your convenience? [name]

Fellow alumni
Hi, [name]: I see you graduated from Temple University — Go Owls! *I'm currently there studying chemistry and am interested in a career in forensic science. I would appreciate the opportunity to ask you a few questions about your experience with* Chicago PD*. Can we talk over coffee sometime? [name]*

Someone who works at your ideal company
Hi [name]: It was very impressive to read the news release on your company's recent technology award. As a U.S. veteran, aspiring materials engineer and recent graduate of XYZ College, I would like to learn more about your work. May I ask you a few questions at your convenience? [name]

Request an introduction
Hi, [name]: We met at last month's XYZ Charity Run*. You may recall that I'm a veteran in career transition. I'm very interested in social media marketing. Would you kindly introduce me to your colleague, [name]? I'd like to see if she'll grant me an informational interview. Many thanks, [name]*

In Conclusion

We hope you find these insights and introduction templates helpful. It's natural to feel awkward or intimidated. However, keep in mind that you're not only giving someone the opportunity to meet you, which may very well be in their best interest, but also enabling them to experience fulfillment by being able to help and share a part of themselves. We're all in this together!

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