Informational or Occupational Interviewing

Often overlooked by job seekers, informational/occupational interviews are an important step toward the ultimate goal of landing a job. These interviews will give you valuable information about particular jobs and careers, especially the skills and experience employers expect you to have for different jobs. This type of interview also yields important job information and helps develop referral networks. You'll get to know a profession from the inside out, and you'll benefit from the recommendations and experience of seasoned professionals. Informational/occupational interviews can even lead directly to formal job interviews.

In order to make this kind of interview work for you, follow this guiding principle:

***Never** ask for a job. **Always** ask for information, advice, and referrals.*

1. Start with friends of your parents and parents of your friends. While most of these people do not have job openings in your area of interest, they do have important resources - information, advice, and networks - relevant to your job search. You request these interviews in order to gain access to their resources. Also think about contacting professors and alumni from your college.

2. Your goal is ***not*** to get a job from these people - only useful information that makes you a more savvy job seeker.

3. You want to be ***remembered*** by making a positive and professional first impression. You want those you interview to feel comfortable sharing information with you, keep you in mind for future job openings and more referrals, and be willing to talk to you again in the future.

4. Keep the interview brief (20-30 minutes at most).

5. Dress appropriately and professionally.

6. When you get a lead, show that you appreciate it by actually following up on it.

7. Always send a thank you letter or note after an interview. And keep in touch with your new contact – that's how you maintain the network you're building.

8. Be prepared. Make a list of questions before the meeting – questions that will help you to get the information you need to help in your job or internship search.

Your initial questions should focus on how to improve your job search rather than gather information on the person's company. If, as the interview progresses, it seems appropriate to ask specific questions about the company, go ahead and ask; but be careful. Remember, you are ***not*** interviewing for a position with this company - ***you are seeking information about a job or career in a given field***. You do not want to wear out your welcome by making the individual feel uncomfortable with questions about a job vacancy this person might have for you. People ***do*** get uncomfortable when you start asking them for a job.

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Formulating Questions

In the informational interview *you* are the interviewer. It is you who is primarily seeking information. Therefore you need to think through, prior to the interview, several questions you want information about. Select relevant ones from the list below.

Career Specific

- Describe your career path. How did each job lead you to the next?
- How did you decide to pursue this path?
- How did you find this particular job?
- Where can someone in an entry-level position expect to be in two years?
- What is the employment outlook in your field?
- Could you describe a typical day?
- What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
- What do you find most enjoyable?
- Is there a busy season for this career?

Responsibilities

- What are your responsibilities?
- Describe your work environment.
- What are the titles and responsibilities of others with whom you work?

Industry Questions

- What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities?
- Why do people leave this field or company?
- Who are the most important people in the industry today?
- How competitive is this field?

Salary and Advancement Opportunities

- What would be my earning potential if I entered this field?
- How are promotions handled?
- How long does it take for managers to rise to the top?
- What is the background of the most senior-level executives?

Training and Preparation

- What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
- What type of skills and knowledge are needed to perform your job (or any other job in the company in which you have interest)?
- How do most people enter this profession?
- What do you think of the experience I've had so far? For what types of positions would it qualify me?
- What do you think of my résumé?
- Do you have any suggestions about where I can improve or specific experiences I should seek?
- What companies might be interested in hiring someone with my qualifications?
- What type of objections might employers have to my work/experience background?
- How can students find summer opportunities in this field?
- What advice do you have for those preparing to enter this field?
- How would I best acquire the skills necessary for this job?
- Do you know of other professionals with whom I might speak for more information about this field? When I call, can I use your name?
- Where can I get up-to-date information on salaries, employers and industry issues?
- What professional journals and organizations should I tap into?