

CAREER CORNER

#1 IN A SERIES

The Benefits of Informational Interviewing

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Are there career fields or specific jobs that you would like to know more about? Is there a particular organization where you always thought you would like to work? Pursuing an internship or volunteering for an organization in your desired field are good ways to learn more about a career path. However, like most of us, you are probably balancing the responsibilities of a job, family, and school. Another valuable career development technique through which you can gain a wealth of knowledge, known as informational interviewing, may well be a more practical and focused use of your time.

An informational interview is a method of researching the career field of your interest by conducting an inperson workplace visit with people who are employed in that field. It is not a job interview, but rather a great way to learn more about positions and organizations before you become an actual job candidate. This is an interview that you initiate — you arrange it and you ask the questions.

People generally like to talk about themselves and their work. If you approach them professionally and with respect for their time constraints, your meeting can prove to be very productive.

What Are The Benefits Of An Informational Interview?

1. It provides you with specific job description information.
2. It assists you with exploring and identifying appropriate career choices and clarifying career goals.
3. It can help develop your interviewing skills and self-confidence.
4. It provides you with job-related information that can help in developing a sharp and focused resume.
5. It will add to your network of useful contacts that could eventually help you to locate the job you want.

What Are The Guidelines For Informational Interviewing?

1. You should first assess your interests, abilities, values and skills to identify the career field and/or occupation you wish to learn about.
2. Remember, the informational interview is not a job interview. This is not a time to inquire about job openings. The focus should be on obtaining career information.
3. Make a specific appointment for a short period of time (20 to 30 minutes). Be sure to arrive and leave on time.
4. Approach the informational interview with professionalism. Be enthusiastic, polite, and dress appropriately.
5. Be prepared. Conduct some research prior to the interview. Arrive with questions that you want answered.
6. Before you leave, ask for names of at least two referrals of other people in the field who might be helpful for you to also interview.
7. After the interview, make notes of the information you have gathered.
8. Send a thank-you note and try to mention something valuable you learned during the interview.
9. Keep well-organized records of the informational interviews you have conducted, including names and date of meetings.

How Do You Make Contact?

1. Identify people to interview. Begin with people you already know.
2. Ask friends, relatives, fellow students, professors, and present or former co-workers if they know of anyone who might be a helpful contact to interview. Professional organizations, the yellow pages, and public speakers can also be good contacts.
3. Write or call the contact person. If you call, be sure you are available for a return call. If you write, be sure to provide information on how you can be reached.
4. Whether you call or write, be polite and concise. State your name and the reason you are contacting the person. Request a brief meeting at their convenience and be prepared to be flexible. Be appreciative of their time and assistance.

What Are Some Sample Informational Interview Questions?

1. How/why did you decide to pursue your present career?
2. What was your college degree in? Did it help you prepare for your career?
3. What additional/other training or education have you pursued? Is it necessary for success in this field/position?
4. Describe the path your career has taken. How did each job lead to your next position?
5. Describe your responsibilities and how you spend a typical day.
6. What do you find most challenging/enjoyable in your job? What do you like the least?
7. Describe your work environment. What is it like to work here?
8. Is a graduate degree important for this field? If so, what fields of study are helpful?
9. What starting salaries/salary advancement can someone expect in this field?
10. Can you suggest any professional organizations that I should join or journals that I should read?
11. What advice do you have for people looking to enter this field?

Remember, learning something new requires that you ask questions. If you find yourself contemplating what a certain job or career would be like—consider conducting an informational interview. It can help to resolve unanswered questions and bring you closer to your career goals.

Another Helpful Career Resource to Learn About Jobs and Careers

If you want to read more about current jobs in a particular field, take a look at the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) published by the U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics. The OOH provides comprehensive information on the characteristics of today's workplace and on future hiring trends for approximately 250 occupations. The OOH has facts about job duties, working conditions, level and places of employment, education and training requirements, opportunities for advancement, job outlook, salaries and jobs with similar requirements.

You can find the OOH in public libraries, college libraries or career centers. You can also find this resource online at:

<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>

Enhance your career development — check it out!

The Internet resource listed above may change over time. Enrolled students and alumni can access the most current information as well as many additional career-related links on the Excelsior College Web site. Go to **www.excelsior.edu**, then log in and click on the Career Resources link on your *MyEC* page; for graduates, click on the Alumni Connection.

Questions or comments about this article?

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