INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is one of the most important parts of successful career planning. Getting information about your target career fields, industries, and markets saves valuable job search time and resources. It also helps you build a network of contacts that can help you now and in the future.

WHY GO ON AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

- Networking opportunities
- Get data about a particular career and what it takes to do well in the field
- Obtain feedback on (and hopefully support for) your potential to succeed in the career field
- Get market-based information on what job opportunities exist in a given field
- Have your resume evaluated for its "selling value" to prospective employers
- Practice describing your skills and goals in a non-threatening situation

WHOM DO I CONTACT?

- Friends and relatives
- Former and current employers
- Faculty and administration
- Fellow or former students
- Alumni (via Emerson Connections, eHire, or LinkedIn)
- Community and civic leaders (if applicable)
- Government representatives (if applicable)
- Professional association members in your industry
- People you've read about in newspapers and magazines
- People listed in directories of companies and associations
- Professionals working in a field or organization of interest to you
- Anyone you've met

HOW DO I PREPARE?

- Conduct a thorough self-evaluation. Know who you are, what you feel you can do, and why you believe in your potential to succeed in the field.
- Demonstrate your interest by doing some preliminary research on the career field and market you'd like to know more about.
- Have a specific agenda in mind. Your contact is giving you valuable time; don't waste it.
- Develop questions to fit your particular situation and experience level. Some suggestions are:
    - What do you do in a typical work day?
    - What kinds of problems do you deal with?
    - What kinds of decisions do you make?
    - Describe how your job fits into the organization or department.
    - How long have you been in this position?
    - What are your major responsibilities?
    - How did you enter this field?
    - How did you reach your current position in the organization?

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- What skills, education, and experience are required to succeed in this field?
- What are typical entry-level jobs in your field?
- What courses or work experience would you recommend?
- What do you find most satisfying about your job? Most frustrating?
- What are the toughest problems you face in your organization?
- What social or other obligations outside normal work hours go along with your job?
- How many hours do you work during an average week?
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your field?
- Is there a definite career path in your field/organization? Can you describe it?
- What sort of professional publications or associations do you recommend?
- If I decide to pursue this type of work, what suggestions do you have for how to conduct my job search?
- What is the job market like in your field?
- What are realistic entry-level salary expectations in this field?
- What trends do you foresee in this field over the next 5 or 10 years?
- What kind of growth or job outlook do you anticipate during the next 5 years?
- You've been really helpful. Can you recommend anyone else I should speak with for additional information?

HELPFUL HINTS…

- ***You are not asking for a job.*** You are gathering information on which to base some decisions. Make sure your contact understands this.
- ***Always make an appointment.*** This puts your conversation on businesslike terms and helps eliminate interruptions.
- ***Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation.*** Remember, you are doing the interview.
- ***Do your homework.*** Learn everything you can about the person, the organization, and the field.
- ***Respect your contact's time.*** Do not be apologetic, but do plan a manageable agenda. Do not wear out your welcome.
- ***Recognize that everyone has his/her own attitudes, biases, and feelings that must be evaluated.*** Talk to a number of people within your field of interest.
- ***Keep your eyes and ears open*** for other clues about the organization and its environment.
- ***Be sure to send a thank you note within 24 hours*** following the informational interview.
- ***Keep your contacts informed*** of job interviews and offers, especially if you believe they have taken an interest in your career. Keep in touch even to wish them happy holidays so you stay on their radar.
- ***Ask your contacts for a business card and keep a record of people you have met.*** Maintaining such contacts is an ongoing process. Create spreadsheet contact information and date you met/spoke with the person and 1-2 tidbits from the meeting to jog your memory.

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