

Guidelines For Information Inter-views

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The Purpose of an Information Interview

The first thing to be clear on is that an information interview is not a job interview. The purpose of a job interview is to get a job. However, the specific objective of an information interview is to gather data on important aspects of a position, or a set of positions, in which you believe you are interested.

The overall or long term purpose of engaging in these interviews, is to gather numerous additional points of job-relevant data. These data are to be used in combination with the information you have already obtained earlier, in the self-evaluation process, in order to help you make better, more informed career decisions.

The Benefits of Doing Information Interviews

There are two major advantages of performing information interviews. These advantages are both quite substantial and rewarding. First, as you do more interviews you will be gathering further information about the suitability of particular careers for you. As the information from each interview accumulates, you may decide that, in fact, a career path you thought looked suitable, is not. Such information is essential in helping you avoid potential job mismatches. Furthermore, this knowledge will allow you to narrow down the available career options and permit you to focus on other viable alternatives which are more personally congruous.

If, on the other hand, you find you do like an area you have been investigating, and it seems that it suits you quite well; then certainly you are getting a relatively clear signal to make an earnest effort to pursue this career. In addition, if you currently have the requisite qualifications for the occupation, then it is time to diligently do some job hunting.

Besides the informational benefits mentioned above, you will also likely profit in a second important way: Your probability of a job offer will increase as you do more information interviews. For instance, if you perform three of these interviews for the same occupational area, your chance of getting a job offer is about twenty-five percent (25%). If, on the other hand, you opt to do eight or more information interviews, then the likelihood of a job offer increases to about ninety-five percent (95%).

There is one very important caveat I must interject at this time. People often take the above job offer information to heart and bring their resumes with them on information interviews.

However, the purpose of the information interview is definitely not to obtain a job or a job offer. As I stated above, it is to gather information. The job offers you may obtain are just a pleasant and desirable "side effect" of the process. Never compromise the intent of the information interview by bringing a resume with you. The individual with whom you are speaking will rightly interpret your behavior as an attempt to subvert the normal job interview procedures. Such behavior is clearly unacceptable, and an insult to the person who has agreed to take some time out of his or her busy schedule to provide you with helpful career information. So please never, ever carry your resume with you on these interviews. However, you should always have one ready to send subsequent to the interview, if the person requests it.

Summing up then, the information interview is an extremely important and effective tool in gathering data regarding your suitability and likelihood of success and happiness in various career areas. Please use this tool ethically and well.

What follows are:

1. A set of procedures for obtaining an information interview.
2. A number of recommended questions to ask during the interview.
3. Suggestions for what to do after the interview is completed.

Obtaining an Information Interview

Never call ahead, go there instead *

When first attempting to obtain a "cold call" information interview, it is important to remember that you should never call ahead for one. Instead, you should go to the place of business and present yourself personally. Evidence demonstrates that those who call ahead on their first set of visits only make it through the door and get an appointment about 5% of the time, while those who present themselves personally at the business have a 95% chance of being able to obtain an information interview.

The reason for the disparity between phone calling and in-person visits, is simply that it is quite easy to put someone off or hang up on them over the phone. However, the power of personal presence makes it much more difficult to easily get rid of an individual. Therefore, by appearing in-person, you are substantially more likely to get what you want ... an interview.

[* Please note that this approach generally works in Arizona and the Southwestern US. However, it is not an appropriate "cold call" strategy for certain professions (e.g., Medicine, Law, Financial Services, etc.) and in major metropolitan areas in the Eastern US, Upper Midwestern US, and California.

Please also note that after your first interview or so, you will probably have obtained a number of referrals. In instances of referrals it is not only more appropriate, but also more effective

to phone or email these individuals in advance to set up an appointment. Be sure to use the referral source as an entre to the communication, otherwise you may not get past the receptionist or delete button. So as you can see, the in-person initial contact is only suggested for "cold calls," where you have no recommendation to go on. After you have a referral, however, then it is more effective to contact the individual by phone or email.]

Never go on Monday morning or Friday afternoon

Never go on Monday mornings or Friday afternoons. The reason for this is that on Monday mornings individuals are just starting to catch up with work that they have left unfinished from Friday. They are also trying to pick up speed and get into the swing of work for the week. Therefore, if you are going to go on an interview Monday, go on a Monday afternoon.

Friday afternoons are times that individuals are trying to wrap things up and leave work. People's minds are on attempting to get out of the office and begin their weekend activities. They will have little time to sit and speak with anyone while they are so preoccupied. Consequently, if you are going to perform an information interview on a Friday, go in the morning.

Go between the hours of 9:00am and 10:00am or 1:30pm-2:00pm

It seems that between 9:00am and 10:00am or 1:30pm and 2:00pm are the most commodious times to present yourself for an information interview. Most individuals get to work between 8:00 and 9:00 in the morning and often do not have meetings or appointments scheduled until about 10:00am or thereafter. Consequently, getting to the business at approximately 9:00am will afford you some time for interviewing an individual in the position of interest.

Between 1:30 and 2:00 in the afternoon is also generally a good time to attempt an information interview. This is just after most people are getting back from lunch. Meetings, appointments, and other regular activities often do not begin again until 2:00pm or later. Therefore, getting to the organization at approximately 1:30 in the afternoon is going to be the optimal time at which you are most likely to obtain an interview with someone.

Tell the receptionist that you are requesting an information interview, not a job interview

Once you arrive at a business you generally will first be greeted by a receptionist. When you introduce yourself to her or him, explain that you would like to speak with someone in the position of interest to you. Explain further that you are in the midst of a career change or making a major career decision and evidence from your career self-assessment indicates that the position you have indicated appears to be an appropriate avenue for you. In addition, emphasize that you are asking for an information interview, not a job interview. If the receptionist does not understand how an information interview is different from a job interview; explain that in an information interview, the purpose is to obtain practical information about an occupation from individuals who work in the position of interest. The data you collect from these interviews is to be used to help you make a more rational, well-considered decision about whether

or not to choose this career path.

Once it is clear to the receptionist what your objective is, she or he usually is quite helpful. Many times, in fact, the individual will become your ally in securing you an interview. If no one is currently available, ask the receptionist to request an appointment for a more convenient time. Generally speaking, most individuals will be quite willing to accommodate such requests.

The Interview

When going to the interview, make sure that you: Dress well, give the individual you are about to interview a firm handshake, and thank the person for taking the time to speak with you. In addition, state again the purpose of the interview and be prepared to clarify the distinction between an information interview and a job interview, if you are requested to do so. Finally, when the individual brings you into her/his office, make sure you sit at a comfortable interpersonal distance, so that you are poised and feel relaxed.

The Questions

1. What is your job title?
2. What exactly do you do here? What percent of your time do you spend in these tasks?
3. How long have you worked in this field? In this organization?
4. What do you like best about this job?
 - What makes you want to come to work or look forward to coming to work every day?
5. What do you like least about your job?
 - What would you like to change about your job if you could?
6. Work style preference and core values questions (generated from your JSI Profile).
7. "
8. "
9. "
10. How much could a person in this field expect to make in 1 year? 5 years?
11. What are some things you might suggest I do to make myself more marketable in this area?
 - academically
 - hands on work experience
12. I still have X more interviews to do, I wonder if you know of anyone else in this area that

you might be able to suggest that I speak with about their job?

13. May I say that you recommended them to me?

The Conclusion of the Interview

Upon the interview's conclusion, you should firmly shake the person's hand and thank her or him for taking the time to be so helpful. In addition, make sure that you send a thank you letter in a business style format and follow-up on any recommendations you were given.

The Thank You Letter

The thank you letter is an extremely important aspect of the entire information interview process and it serves two major functions. First, the letter formally thanks and acknowledges the individual for taking the time to listen, answer questions, and generally aid you in your career exploration. Second, in receiving the letter (and I can tell you this from personal experience), the individual will feel as though the time with you was well spent. The person will feel good in that she or he was able, in some way, to aid an individual in making an important life decision.

The letter will certainly allow the information interviewees to feel some benefit from the interview. In addition, if they enjoyed the interview (as they often do) and thought you were a intelligent individual, asking reasonable questions, then they will most likely contact you if they know of a compatible job opening. Keep that in mind. The benefit of this letter can clearly accrue to both parties.

On the following page is an example of a thank you letter.

10 March 2002

Joseph Jones
1020 N. Clearway Pl.
Phoenix, AZ 85001

Ms. Felicia Doyle
Personnel Supervisor
Alton Industries
2043 W. Camelback
Tempe, AZ 85281

Dear Ms. Doyle:

Thank you for the time you spent with me the other day. It was very useful in helping me think more clearly about the career directions in which I am now moving.

As you recommended, I have set up an appointment with Mr. Joe Smith at XXX Corporation and will be meeting with him next week. Thank you so much for suggesting I speak with him. I look forward to the interview and to gathering further information about a career in the Personnel/Human Resources field.

Again, I want to say how much I appreciate all the time you spent with me. It was very thoughtful and helpful.

Sincerely,