

"... everybody with a normal vanity quotient loves to be interviewed for information in her/his field. Do you know anyone who doesn't like to give advice?"

- Richard Irish, *Go Hire Yourself An Employer*

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Informational interviewing is an important part of developing your education plan. It can help you more clearly understand specific job titles and define job objectives; it is a practical way to develop interviewing skills; and it is a useful way to build up a personal network of contacts. (See Partnership's *Education Guide 7: Networking*). The suggestions, questions and sample phone call included here will help you begin to use the informational interviewing technique.

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Where Can I Go?

How do I learn about the ins and outs of jobs in my field of interest? Who can advise me? From whom can I get the most accurate information about the field of my choice and what goes on in it? The best career information comes from people who are active, successful and knowledgeable in your field of interest. Interview them!

But - you object - you cannot expect these people to give you their time. Reread the Richard Irish quotation above and remember four things:

- 1. You are not asking for a job.** You are simply asking for information and advice, so you are not putting this person on the spot.
- 2. You have the right and a responsibility to yourself** to seek advice and information from those who can best help you.
- 3. The most effective action you can take on your behalf is to develop mentors.** Mentors are people, experts in the field of your choice, who take an interest in you and your professional development, advise you, help you along, and inform you of appropriate opportunities. You will also need to develop professional contacts – people in, or related to, your field that help each other by exchanging information about what is going on, including educational and job opportunities – the "old boy" and "old girl" networks.

4. Because you are doing the interviewing, you are in charge. You prepare. You ask the questions. Your mentor can lean back and talk to her/his heart's content, and will – if you listen well.

How Do I Find out Who These People Are? Ask. Ask this question (or one like it) of everyone you know and everyone you meet: "Do you know anyone who ...?" [is knowledgeable about, or is an expert in, or I can talk to about _____ (field or occupation)]. The next question to ask is: "Would you mind if I use your name?"

Another way to gather information is by reading. Read newspapers, magazines, journals and books that have information about the kind of work that interests you. Check resources in local libraries and career centers.

The Internet is a priceless tool for gathering career and job related information. You can access the NYS Department of Labor website (www.labor.ny.gov) to obtain facts on various jobs. You can receive in depth information on a wide range of exciting careers in New York State at www.careerzone.ny.gov. You can connect to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics and their Occupational Outlook Handbook at www.bls.gov/ooh. The Occupational Outlook Handbook has information on trends of various careers. The Career Mobility Office www.careermobilityoffice.cs.ny.gov can assist you in finding out about occupational titles and career paths within the New York State Civil Service system.

How can I conduct these informational interviews most effectively so that I get the information I need and also establish a good relationship with this person?

- **PREPARE.** Inform yourself about the field, the organization, and the person you will be interviewing.
- **PREPARE** a list of the questions you want to ask, and some that you know will be interesting to answer.
- **PRACTICE.** Review THE PHONE CALL section below. Practice interviewing people for information whenever you get a chance to. It's fun. You'll find that people really like to talk about themselves and their work.
- **EXPRESS** interest, listen, and show enthusiasm and appreciation. Watch your non-verbal behavior.

Make up your own questions out of the information you have, in your own style, and based on the information you need. These sample questions are simply to give you some ideas.

Though the informational interview is not meant directly to get you a job, a job offer often occurs. Why? Because you have made yourself visible and impressed someone with your interest and your ability to seek information in an intelligent way.

Suggestions For A Phone Call

Hello ...

My name is _____.

Mr./Ms _____ suggested I call you, because you're an expert in _____.

I'm interested in your field (or occupation), and have some questions I would like to ask you. I'm not looking for a job now; I just want some information and advice. When could I come to talk with you? I'll just take 20 or 30 minutes of your time, if that's O.K. with you.

Set time and place to meet with the expert. Sometimes you can conduct an interview over the phone. Thank the expert.

Tips to Consider When Making Phone Calls:

- Speak clearly enough to be understood easily over the phone.
- Call when there are no distractions like a radio or TV noise, or loud conversations in the background.
- Do not chew gum or make other distracting sounds.
- Sound friendly and sincerely interested in meeting with the expert. SMILE.

Is it appropriate to send an email to ask for an informational interview?

It may be appropriate, but here are a few words of caution about using email:

Your email may not get to the right person and it may get discarded. It's easier for the person to say "no" to your email request for an interview. Your sincerity and enthusiasm may not be conveyed as well in an email.

Sample Questions for Informational Interviewing

Here are some questions you may want to include in your informational interviews. Some may not be appropriate for the career that you investigate. You may also have some questions that are not on this list. In any case, have your questions ready and your objectives in mind.

1. How do you like your career?
2. What do you do in a typical day?
3. How did you enter this job/career?
4. What would you have done differently in your career?
5. What are the career prospects in this field?
6. What are the emerging jobs in this career area?
7. How would you recommend someone break into this field?
8. What educational background is required?
9. What kind of experience would help in this career?
10. What are the trends in this field?
11. What are the disadvantages and advantages to this career?
12. What type of people work in this field?
13. How does one acquire training in this career?
14. What are the employee benefits?

- 15.** What is the typical beginning salary level?
- 16.** What technologies are integrated into this career?
- 17.** What recommendations would you have for an entry-level person considering this career?
- 18.** What kind of work schedule does this career require? Overtime, flextime, part-time, job sharing, travel, on-call basis, 9-5, evening, or night shift work, etc.?
- 19.** What rewards do you get from your job/career?
- 20.** What style of supervision is used in your job?
- 21.** What type of environment is this to work in? Pressure, people contacts, office arrangements, etc.?
- 22.** What combination of skills and abilities would be valuable in this career?
- 23.** What kind of independence do you have in your career/job?
- 24.** How can I learn more about this career/job?
- 25.** What kind of cooperation or competition exists between co-workers in this career?
- 26.** What effect does this career have on your life style and family life?
- 27.** What professional organizations are active and responsive in this career field?
- 28.** Who else would you recommend I contact for more information about this career?

Of all the questions listed above, it is essential to ask Question #28 of each expert that you interview. Often, a good contact in your field of interest will have a number of names to give you.

Informational interviewing is an effective tool in your approach to education and life planning. It can be one of your most important resources as you plan your career and lifestyle. It provides you with the opportunity to discover much of what you need to know in order to make a knowledgeable and satisfying decision. Make the interview a benefit for you. Add the expert that you just interviewed to your network of contacts! For more helpful hints on networking, view the Partnership's *Education Guide 7: Networking*).

Finally, remember to send a thank you note after your interview. The person that you interviewed shared his/her valuable time with you. It is important and professional, and demonstrates good manners to formally say thank you for their time and expertise.