Building and Sustaining Connections: The Process and Pitfalls of Informational Interviewing

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What is Informational Interviewing?

• A networking tool for learning about a career path, employer, industry, or other career-related information

• The process of conducting exploratory conversations with people for advice and information which can:
  ❖ help shape and define your goals
  ❖ allow you to develop an effective job search strategy
Informational Interviews

Provide the means to:

• Gather information
• Cultivate relationships
• Make a favorable impression
• Obtain referrals to other contacts and potential opportunities
Information Interviewing is…

- A strategy to use when exploring career fields
- An effective way to build a professional network
- A way to evaluate an organization’s overall fit for you
- The job seeker’s equivalent of market research
When Should You Conduct an Informational Interview?

*Anytime!*
When Should You Conduct an Informational Interview?

**At the end of your degree program**

- Establish contacts for having resume forwarded
- Learn about upcoming job opportunities
- Gain insider information
- Clarify what jobs are really like before committing to the application process
- Ask questions that may not be strategic or appropriate during a job interview (*i.e.* opportunities for advancement, salary ranges, benefits, vacation, etc.)
- Develop a job search strategy
When Should You Conduct an Informational Interview?

At the end of your degree program

In the middle of your degree program

• Explore potential organizations to work for
• Identify additional skills to develop
• Identify internship or research opportunities
• Build support and expand your network
• Build confidence and poise for later job interviews
When Should You Conduct an Informational Interview?

At the end of your degree program
In the middle of your degree program
Early in your degree program

• Clarify your area of study or thesis topic
• Learn about potential career paths
Let’s Hear From You

• What has been your experience with informational interviewing?
• What has worked particularly well?
• What strategies have you incorporated to become more effective at informational interviewing?
Important Points to Remember

• The person requesting the informational interview guides the conversation
• It is essential that you are clear about what kind of information you are seeking
• You are interviewing for information, not a job
Crafting an Effective Informational Interview Request

The Goal:

Establish contact with a succinct, yet purposeful, professional email.
Subject line: Student seeking help

Hello,

I'm a student at Cornell University, and was referred to you by Barbara Smith from XYZ Company in Boston. She recommended you as an excellent source of information on the communications industry.

My goal is to secure an entry-level position in communications upon my graduation from Cornell. I would appreciate any advice you have.

I truly appreciate your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Karen Jones ‘13
607-555-1212
Crafting an Effective Informational Interview Request: Potential Pitfalls

• Using a vague or generic subject line
• Being too informal
• Failing to provide information about yourself
• Being vague about what you are seeking
• Relying on the other person to initiate the step
Subject line: Current Cornell student seeking informational interview

Dear Ms. Gable:

In a recent conversation with my Cornell master’s degree advisor, Professor Eden suggested you might be willing to speak with me regarding my interests in the science policy arena. Through participation in Cornell-in-Washington as an undergraduate, and an internship at The Institute for Science, Engineering, and Public Policy I have discovered an interest in communicating science policy to the general public.
As I am graduating in May, I’m in the early stages of my job search and hoping to speak with professionals in the science policy field for some guidance. I’m very interested in learning about your career path along with how you approached your job search upon completion of your graduate degree. Additionally, I would be interested in your thoughts on the types of positions I might be suited for based on my educational background and interests.
I will contact your office next week to discuss the possibility of scheduling a twenty-to thirty-minute telephone informational interview. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Kira Jones ’13
607-555-1212
Crafting an Effective Informational Interview Request: Corrected Pitfalls

- Using a specific subject line
- Being formal and professional
- Providing some background information about yourself
- Being specific about what you are seeking
- Being proactive about initiating the next step
What Does An Informational Interview Look Like?
Informational Interviewing: Example A
Informational Interviewing: Potential Pitfalls

- Being unprofessional
- Being unprepared
- Asking vague questions
- Disrespecting the interviewee’s time
- Talking about yourself most of the time
- Asking for a job
- Having high expectations of the interview
Informational Interviewing: Example B
Informational Interviewing: Corrected Pitfalls

- Had professional demeanor
- Arrived early
- Had relevant questions to guide the conversation
- Focused conversation on the other person
- Was respectful of the interviewee’s time
- Gathered useful information and advice to guide next steps
- Had realistic expectations of the interview and outcome
The Follow-Up

• Send a thank-you note/email within 24 hours of the interview
• Thanking people in your network is an on-going process
• Staying in touch *does not* equal reaching out when you need something
• Create a database of people you’ve done an informational interview with and include notes from your conversation

*How can your thank-you note set up a framework for further contact?*
The Thank-You Note

- Thank them for resources and suggestions
  - Share your own resources (articles, events, contacts)
    - Let them know what you found after following their advice

- Highlight interesting aspects of the conversation
  - Occasionally send articles related to topics discussed
    - Let them know what your next steps are
      - Let them know how this interview affected your knowledge of the field, career choice, job search, skill development

- Thank them for resources and suggestions
- Let them know what your next steps are
The Thank-You Note

Ask if they can recommend any colleagues that you can talk to you as you gather information.

Tell them that you talked to these individuals and mention how it was helpful.

Invite them to events where they could meet new contacts.
Additional Methods Of Maintaining Contact

• Send an occasional note on meaningful days
  – holidays, Cornell reunion time
• Reconnect via email after an internship or attending a conference
• Use social media
  – Request LinkedIn connection
  – Follow on Twitter
• Share information:
  – articles, conference information, Cornell news*

*Alumni are typically curious about campus happenings
What Are Your Questions?