

How to Conduct an Informational Interview

The Handout Companion for the Webinar

October 4, 2017



Benefits

- Better understand specific roles
- Explore organizational fit
- Improve your interviews
- Extend your network

Purpose

- Learn about a position & organization
- Develop your plan
- Make better decisions
- You are not asking for a job!

Types

- Position focused
- Hiring manager
- Organizational

Set-up the Interview

- Ask for a warm-connection and follow-up quickly
- Keep the interview short (20 minutes)
- Make it easy for them
- Include your resume in the appointment request
- Prepare a short intro & why statement
- Do your research



At the Interview

- Bring coffee (get their order when setting up the interview)
- Be prepared with your 30-second elevator self-introduction
- Come prepared with questions
- Ask follow-up questions, but keep your eye on the time and what you want to know (avoid rabbit holes)
- Take notes (see “After the Interview”)
- At the end, if appropriate, as for other introductions (e.g., “You mentioned so-and-so who is doing X. Would you be willing to help connect us? I’d appreciate getting his/her perspective about Y.”)
- Have a copy of your resume in case they ask for it
- Ask if you can connect with them on LinkedIn

After the Interview

- Connect via LinkedIn
- Send a *real* thank you note
- Follow-up with your “connector,” the person who made the introduction between you and your interviewee
- Follow-up with any connections you made during the interview

Notes

Pro Tips

- **Buy bulk thank you cards and lots of stamps.** I buy packs of 300 at Target in their wedding stationery section. These cards are the perfect size for a quick, thoughtful note. Of course, you could get fancy and create custom, branded cards through online printing services if that better fits you. Me? I like simple.
- **Develop an “interviewer’s mindset:” Talk less, ask more.** Over time, you can learn to conduct mini-informational interviews throughout your life. This is only one want to cultivate your curiosity. It also will change the way people think and feel about you. Not only will you learn more, but your leadership style will change, empowering those who report to you.
- **W.A.I.T. [Why am I talking?]** In interviewing, be cognizant about how much you are talking. If you are talking more than 30% of the time as the interviewer, you are wasting your and their time.
- **Don’t wait.** Start conducting informational interview long before you decide to make a career move. Cultivate and nurture your relationships.
- **Visuals matter.** Develop a one-page resume that gives a brief synopsis of your experiences, those you want to highlight in order to move toward your future self. Don’t love formatting? Work with someone who does. If needed, hire someone.
- **Record yourself.** This comes from an “Art of Charm” interview with Rob Reid. Record 10 hours of yourself in conversation with people you do *not* know well. Now the painful part: play it back and see what you notice about your speech patterns you want to change. Those who speak and ask question well have learned to do so. So can you. Just remember to get permission to record the conversation first. You don’t want to be charged with illegal wiretapping.

Action Plan

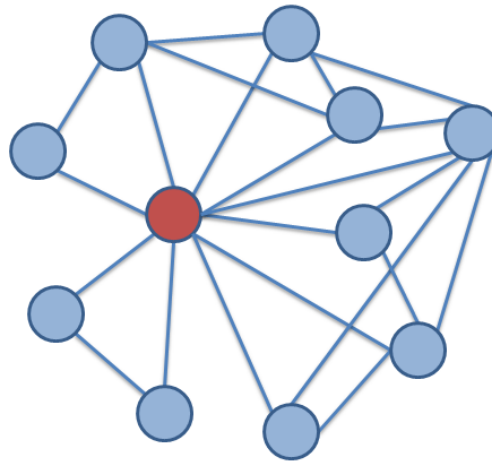
1. List 3 people, roles, or organizations you want to learn more about.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

- ## 2. Create a map: Who can help connect you to your goal?



3. Draft 3 – 6 questions for each of your 3 interviews.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

H. _____

I. _____

4. Schedule at least one interview in the next month.

Who: _____

When: _____

Goal of Interview: _____

Connector: _____

5. Notes for follow-up with your interviewee and your “connector.”

6. Reflect: What did you learn?

Questions to Get You Started

Quintessential Careers' website has a great list of questions when you are preparing for an informational interview. Kaye and Winkle Guillioni (2012) offer questions managers can ask their employees. Variations on some of these can be deployed during informational interviewing if you want to learn more about development opportunities within a group or organization.

Position

- How do you spend your day? What does your day look like?
- Most rewarding/frustrating part of your job?
- What experiences would you recommend for someone interested in your position?
- Where do you see this position leading you?
- How do you see this position changing in the future?
- What is it like working...with this team? ...in this organization? ...

Hiring Manager

- How do you spend your day? What does your day look like? Challenges & rewards?
- How would you describe the team dynamics?
- What makes a successful team member?
- How would you describe the culture of the team? Of the organization?
- When you're hiring for X position, what makes a candidate stand out?
- What advice would you give someone interested in X position?
- How do you see [this area] changing/adapting in the future?
- Where does X position lead people as they develop and grow? [Ask about their own career development and where they see their next steps.]
- Describe your ideal employee.

Organization

- How would you describe the culture of the organization?
- I read about the mission, vision, values. How does this play out in the department?
- How does the organization support development of their employees?
- What are the benefits of working for this organization other traditional benefits?

Resources

Art of Charm Podcast. <https://theartofcharm.com>

Bungay Steiner, M. (2016). *The coaching habit: Say less, ask more, and change the way you lead forever*. Box of Crayons Press.

Kaye, B. & Winkle Guillioni, J (2012). *Help them grow or watch them go: Career conversations employees want*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Olson, N. (Jan 22, 2017). Five reasons to write thank you notes. *Forbes*. Retrieved on Oct 2, 2017 from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nancyolson/2017/01/22/five-reasons-to-write-thank-you-notes/#7727e1e22811>

Quintessential Careers. Informational Interviewing:
<https://www.livecareer.com/quintessential/informational-interviewing>

Sesno, F. (2017). *Ask more: The power of questions to open doors, uncover solutions, and spark change*. AMACOM.

Sobel, A. (2012). *Power questions: Build relationships, win new business, and influence others*. Wiley.

Trebay, G. (Apr 4, 2014). The found art of the thank you note. *The New York Times*. Retrieved on Oct 2, 2017 from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/06/fashion/the-found-art-of-thank-you-notes.html>