

Informational Interviews

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One of the easiest and most effective ways to meet people in a professional field is to conduct informational interviews. Informational interviewing is an approach in which you interview a professional in a career field that interests you. By doing so you can do the following:

- **Meet key professionals**
- **Gather career information**
- **Investigate career options**
- **Obtain advice about job search techniques**
- **Obtain referrals for other professionals**

What is an Informational Interview?

Interviewing for information is a process of gathering facts about people, activities, and occupations in a career field. You can use this type of interview to develop a better idea of where you might use your skills, learn about various jobs, and determine the work environment that best suits you. You can also develop a rapport with someone who can hire you and teach you the vocabulary of a particular profession.

Meeting With Pitzer Alumni

The following are some reasons to conduct informational interviews.

- Building your confidence for job interviews
- Finding out about jobs and career paths you did not know existed
- Discovering the best personality type for the jobs you are considering
- Deepening your understanding of the world of work in a variety of settings
- Finding out what you should be reading & which professional associations you should join
- Clarifying goals
- Learning what skills and experiences are required for various jobs

Why do I Interview?

Identify the organizations and people that are of interest to you. You can obtain names from many sources including LinkedIn, business directories, chambers of commerce, and Pitzer alumni. When deciding who to interview, keep in mind”

- You may already know someone who can answer your questions. You probably know about 200 people including friends, family members, teachers, and people with whom you have professional relationships, such as doctors and bankers.
- Many contacts are right for your fingertips...for example, Pitzer's alumni network is a great place to find potential contacts for interviews.

Look for people whose interests are similar to yours. Cut out interesting newspaper and magazine articles, and begin to create a file. Take notes as you watch television listen to the radio. These articles and notes contain the names of people who are doing what you want to do... set up an appointment and go talk to them.

Making the Appointment

Once you have identified who you would like to talk to, you need to ask them for an informational meeting. You can schedule a meeting by doing the following:

- You might be talking with the wrong person. If your contact is not able to answer your questions, ask for names of other potential contacts. This may mean speaking to a person on the same level, a higher level, or someone in a different organization.
- The person may not want to talk to you. There is not much you can do if your contact is inattentive, disinterested, threatened, or hostile. You might try asking if there is a more convenient time to meet.
- You may somehow give the impression that you are looking for a job, not information. This may be the hardest issue to deal with to deal. If you are looking for a job, it is going to be difficult to prove that you are not. It is important to be clear to yourself and to the other person that although a job is your ultimate goal, information is your immediate concern.

Do not hesitate to discuss any problem with a career counselor. The counselor can assist by reviewing your stumbling blocks with you and making suggestions for successfully conducting your next appointment.

Evaluating the Information

Ask yourself the following questions after each interview. The ability to answer a majority of these questions will help you further identify your career desires.

- Does this person use the skills I want to use?
- Would I be qualified for this job?
- Do I understand what this job entails?
- Would I enjoy working in this capacity?
- Did I get additional ideas or alternatives?
- Do I have an idea about the salary ranges?
- What impression do I now have about this area of work?
- Would I enjoy working for this organization?
- What are the goals (needs, concerns, problems, issues) of this area of work or organization?
- How can I help meet those needs and accomplish those goals?
- Which of my personal assets could I offer?

If you can answer most of these questions, you have gathered some valuable information and have developed a clearer picture of the kind of work you want to do. This information will help you make a better decision about what you want to do with your career.

Follow-Up

Make sure to send a thank you note within 24 hours of the interview. Summarize what you learned or appreciated. Take action on any suggested steps (i.e. contacting someone else, sending a resume). A thank you letter might read like the following:

“I would like to thank you for your generosity in sharing your experience and ideas with me. I am following your suggestion and applied for membership in the local chapter of the professional organization in my field. As we agreed I will be in touch with you and let you know of my progress.”

Helpful Hints

- Bring a small notebook for any notes you might take.
- Ask for a business card.
- Bring a copy of your resume in case they ask to see it.
- Be prepared with thoughtful questions, but do not merely read your list of questions.
- Send a thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview.