~INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS~

The Informational Interview is a low-key informal experience that can be a valuable tool when making decisions about your career. As it is conducted in an informal setting, there is no pressure and you are able to accomplish several things:

- practice interviewing
- obtain information about different occupational areas or career fields
- gain insight to the hidden job market
- gain awareness of the needs of employers
- initiate personal contact among management-level personnel
- develop opportunities to create a network of contacts

The informational interview prepares you for what a particular occupation might require as far as education, training, and practical experience. It also helps you gain insight into the culture of the organization and expectations in the areas of dress code, work hours, availability of further job related training/education, and dominant management styles.

TIP: Be sure to practice with family, friends, coworkers or anyone with whom you feel comfortable. This helps minimize the anxiety you may feel about interviewing.

IDENTIFY AN OCCUPATION

Your first step is to identify an occupation you would like to investigate. Find out as much information about the employer or agency before setting up the interview. This can be done using online resources and industry/organization websites, by networking with others, or through additional sources such as trade journals, magazines and other media.

PREPARE QUESTIONS AHEAD OF TIME

Ask only the questions that are appropriate and most important to you. You have a short amount of time with the interviewee and need to spend it wisely. Asking appropriate questions will convey your motivation and interest by acknowledging the information they are providing is important and you put some thought into your interview.

PREPARE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT BE ASKED OF YOU

To help get your foot in the door, it will be helpful to brainstorm some short, concise, informative answers to the following questions:

- Why are you interested in this type of work?
- Why do you feel you would be good at it?
- What interests you about this organization or agency?
- How would you sum up your work history?
- What do you want from this contact?
- How will you use the information
SCHEDULING THE INTERVIEW
Your initial contact should be by telephone, email, or letter. Identify yourself and explain that
you are researching careers in the contact’s field and where you obtained their name. Be
flexible in scheduling time with these contacts as they often have busy schedules. As a
general rule, you will ask to spend only 15 to 20 minutes in an Informational Interview. Be willing to
call back at a more convenient time if they don’t have time right then to schedule an interview.
Although there are many techniques to conduct an Informational Interview, the following
example is a good approach to get you started.

“Hello, my name is ________________ . I am a student at Portland State University and I am conducting
career research in your occupational field. I would like to meet with you for 15 to 20 minutes so that I can
find out more about this particular field.”

Use your own creativity when making your appeal, but most importantly, emphasize you are simply
trying to get “first-hand” information, and whatever they can share with you would be greatly
appreciated.

TIP: Remember to treat the receptionist or secretary as a resource. Receptionists know a great deal
about their organization. Ask them some of your questions, including names of key people,
entry-level positions, and job requirements.

DRESS APPROPRIATELY
Because 90 percent of all jobs in the private sector are never advertised, you will uncover
job openings that may never make it to the newspaper or employment office. Be ready to
make a good first impression by way of appearance and manners.

BE PREPARED TO TAKE NOTES
Pretend you are a reporter and write down names, telephone numbers, and other
information you will want to remember. Be direct, concise, and enthusiastic with your
questions and answers. Be sure to make good eye contact and use informal dialogue during
the interview. Utilize positive remarks and don’t forget a good sense of humor.

TAKE YOUR RESUME
Take an up-to-date copy of your resume to the interview. Ask the person if they would
consider reviewing your resume after you leave. Be sure to follow-up in one or two weeks,
you may include a stamped, self-addressed envelope in which they can return your resume
with any pertinent comments, or you can offer to email it to them and they can comment if they have
time.

TIP: Call to confirm your appointment with the contact person the day before the interview. If you
have questions regarding the location of the office, this is the time to ask. Plan to arrive 10 minutes
early for the interview.
**THE INTERVIEW**
Introduce yourself, thank your contact for his or her willingness to meet with you, and re-emphasize you are there to gather information about his or her career field. Remember to use informal dialogue during the interview, such as:

- What is a typical day like?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- What kinds of problems arise and how do you deal with them?
- What social obligations go along with a job in your occupation?
- Are there organizations you are expected to join outside of work hours?
- What types of positions did you have before this occupation?
- Which were the most helpful?
- What other jobs could you get with the same background?
- What are the changes occurring in your occupation?
- What are the advancement opportunities?
- How does a person progress in your field?
- What is the best way to enter this occupation?
- What are the qualifications for success in this particular occupation?
- What can you tell about the employment outlook in your occupational field?
- Who else can you suggest I contact that is doing a similar type of work or uses similar skills?

**TIP:** *People are happy to discuss their positions and are willing to provide you with a wealth of information. Keep the conversation friendly and focused on the contact person’s job.*

**SHARE SOME THINGS ABOUT YOURSELF**
Do not dominate the interview by talking about yourself. Remember that you are there to obtain information that will help you learn about careers and be able to adequately prepare yourself to compete for job openings. Be aware, however, that many informational interviews have turned into actual employment interviews.

**TIP:** *Be a good listener. Listening is the most important half of communication.*

**FOLLOW UP IS IMPORTANT**
After the initial interview, ask if you may stay in contact. You have spent 15 to 20 minutes with this person, asking questions, getting advice, and sharing a little about yourself. This is the first step in developing your contact “network.” Most of your contacts will feel good about you staying in touch with them. They may not have a job for you, but they may know of other organizations, agencies or people to which you can be referred. People who are in the same kind of business usually know their competition. Ask your contact if they could give you names of others to talk to in their field. Always ask for their business card and exchange one of your own if you have one.
TIP: For future reference, keep a list of all people, notes, questions, and main points covered during each informational interview.

ALWAYS SEND A THANK YOU NOTE
Be sure to send a thank you card or letter within 24 hours of the interview. Thank you notes or letters are an effective way to keep in touch and a good way to remind people of who you are. Include your name, address and telephone number under your signature.

CAPTURING THAT DREAM
You have taken the first important steps in developing your career search strategy. You have shared information about yourself and gained a wealth of information from an individual who is employed in an occupation in which you are interested. By building trust with someone in your field of interest, you have begun to develop a network of potential employers. Although you have not asked for a job, these individuals are now aware of you and your interests. By establishing a network of contacts your chances of employment greatly increase.

Remember that your success is up to you. It is a process, not a destination!
~ SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ~

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE A PARTICULAR OCCUPATION
- What is your job like and what do you like best about your job?
- What skills, abilities, aptitudes and/or temperaments are needed?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- How do people get most of their training?
- Does the work serve values that are important to you?
- What is the employment outlook for this type of work?
- How do you see your job changing over the next few years?
- Do you have any tips on how to get a job similar to yours?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO LEARN ABOUT A PERSON
- What jobs and educational experiences have led you to your present position?
- Why did you choose the type of work you are now doing?
- What has been your favorite job?
- What has given you your biggest sense of accomplishment?
- Do you have any tips for building a successful career?
- What type(s) of jobs have you thought about pursuing in the future

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO LEARN ABOUT A COMPANY OR AGENCY
- What are your major products or services with state agencies?
- What different types of jobs are available overall?
- What entry-level jobs exist?
- What type of people are you looking to employ?
- What are the advancement opportunities?
- Do you provide education and training?
- What is the approximate salary range for this type of position?
- What do you see as the most important immediate and future concerns for the organization?
- What are the organizational goals and objectives over the next six months? Year? Two years?
- If you were to hire someone today, for what position would you hire?
- What is the hiring procedure?
- Do you have any literature that I may not find online about this organization?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS TO LEARN ABOUT THE CULTURE OF A COMPANY
- What kind of person (personality characteristics) do you look for when hiring?
- Does your organization foster leadership and innovation?
- What does the organization value?
- Are values clearly communicated?
- Is there flexibility in office attire, work hours, personal leave

~Adapted from the 2004 State of Oregon, Informational Interview Directory~