

# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING



Johnson County Community College  
Career Development Center  
Student Center, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
(913) 469-3870  
[www.jccc.edu/careerservices](http://www.jccc.edu/careerservices)



## Informational Interviewing

### What is Informational Interviewing?

Informational interviewing is a discussion initiated by YOU to learn about:

- Careers
- What it's like to work in a specific occupation
- How to break into a particular field
- A specific company or organization
- Building support and contacts for the job search

Informational interviewing is not a job interview! It is a valuable career planning tool which enables you to “try on jobs to see if they fit.” When you are considering entry into a career path or making a job change, it makes sense to talk with people in the field as they can provide first-hand information. This is the equivalent of conducting market research to gain information about potential career options.

Another compelling benefit is that these interviews are an excellent networking tool and can result in finding information about job opportunities. In fact, a recent study reported on the Quintessential Careers website (QuintCareers.com) stated that one out of twelve informational interviews eventually resulted in a job opportunity!

The following suggestions will get you started on conducting informational interviews.

### Develop a list of potential contacts

Interviewing begins with developing a contact list. Include friends, neighbors, relatives, church members, professors and social acquaintances. In addition, seek out members of professional organizations and company representatives in fields that interest you by utilizing the yellow pages, websites and business directories. Professional associations and human resource departments can often provide the name of a person working in a job related to the field you are targeting.

### Set the appointment

Make contact by calling the person directly or by sending a letter or e-mail explaining the need for information. *Be sure to explain that the meeting is for information gathering only – you are not contacting them for a job.* Ask for 15-30 minutes of the individual's time to discuss their job, the career field and the organization where they work. Let the person know you value their time and any information they can provide. Most people are happy to share information and discuss personal experiences. A nice touch is to invite the person for coffee or lunch, but this is not a requirement.

### Research the organization

Research the organization and learn as much as possible before the interview. Create a list of questions and keep in mind the amount of time requested when you go into the interview. See sample questions below.

### Meet with your contact

Dress professionally and discuss why you are interested in the field. Take a resume but offer it only if requested. Project enthusiasm, listen and observe keenly. Refer to your list of questions but be informal and flexible. Make notes so you don't forget details.

Be sure to ask for suggestions regarding additional people with whom you might talk and ask permission to use the person's name as a referral. This is a very important part of building a network!

Do not go into the discussion with any illusions that this is a job interview – your objective is to gain information. If there is interest in you as a job candidate, naturally you will be receptive and provide a resume.

### End the interview and follow-up

Be sincere in your appreciation for the interview and ask if you can stay in touch and keep the person informed about your progress. Be sure to request a business card. Always, *always* write a thank you letter after the interview.

## **Sample Questions to Ask**

### ***Position/Job Function:***

What is a typical day like?

What are the duties and responsibilities of the position?

What do you like best about your work?

What do you find most frustrating?

Do you see your position as similar to others in a similar setting?

What skills are needed to be successful in your position?

What other fields or job roles could you enter with the skills and experience you have?

What kinds of continuing ed or updating is necessary or recommended?

What do you wish you had known before entering this field?

What personal qualities do you feel are most important in your work and why?

What types of people survive and do well in this field?

What is the salary range for a person in this field?

What kinds of problems do you deal with?

What kinds of decisions do you make?

What work-related values are strongest in this type of work?

If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?

What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?

Is there anything else about this field that would be helpful for me to know?

***Entrance Requirements:***

How did you get into this field?

How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences led you to this job?

What suggestions do you have for an individual wishing to enter this field?

What would you stress to anyone who is considering entering this occupation?

What training would you recommend for someone who wanted to enter this field?

What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work?

What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anyone pursuing a career in this field?

Are there any written materials you suggest I read to help me learn more?

***The Organization:***

Why did you choose this organization to work for?

What do you like most about this company?

Is there a basic philosophy of the company? If so, what is it?

What can you tell me about the corporate culture?

Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?

***Outlook/Trend:***

What are the opportunities for advancement, promotion or mobility?

Is this field expanding? Taking any new directions?

How is the economy affecting this industry?

What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field?

What changes do you see occurring in this field over the next few years?

***Referrals:***

Can you give me the names of other people who share your enthusiasm for this kind of work?

How can I contact them?

May I use your name when I contact others?

What related occupations might I investigate?

If you are talking with a company representative instead of an individual worker, modify the questions to reflect expectations critical to the success of employees within that organization or job role.



## To Review

Informational interviewing is invaluable for gathering information and building a network. According to Richard Bolles, author of What Color Is Your Parachute, who helped pioneer the concept, it is an equally valuable tool to screen out careers before you commit to one. Informational interviewing is not a request for a job – however, the interviewing process can result in productive contacts and potential job referrals.

Steps to effective informational interviewing include:

- 1) Developing a contact list
- 2) Requesting the interview by phone or mail
- 3) Researching prior to the meeting
- 4) Preparing a list of questions
- 5) Conducting the interview within the timeframe
- 6) Writing a thank you letter
- 7) Follow-up on further contacts

The benefits of conducting informational interviews are diverse and include opportunities to:

- Explore careers and clarify goals
- Identify professional strengths and weaknesses
- Learn about various companies and organizations
- Build confidence for job interviews
- Expand your professional network

Informational interviewing is an excellent tool in the quest to make good career and life decisions! You will also meet interesting people, encounter little-known facts about careers and expand your world by taking steps beyond books, periodicals and websites to enrich your knowledge.

Sources:

QuintCareers.com

The Career Fitness Program, Exercising Your Options, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2001

UCSC.com

Bolles, Richard, What Color is Your Parachute, Ten Speed Press, Berkley, CA, 2002