

# Informational Interviewing

One of the best ways to learn more about an occupation is through what's called *informational or research interviewing*. Unlike a job interview, an informational interview is one that you initiate by contacting an individual currently working in an occupation that interests you. The purpose of the interview is for you to obtain information about the career, NOT to get a job. This is something for you to clarify from the beginning with your contact.

Some reasons for using informational interviews include:

- *to explore careers and clarify your career goal*
- *to discover employment opportunities that are not advertised*
- *to expand your professional network*
- *to build confidence for your job interviews*
- *to access the most up-to-date career information*
- *to identify your professional strengths and weaknesses*

## Steps for Conducting an Informational Interview:

### 1. Identify the Occupation or Industry You Wish to Learn About

Based on what you've learned about yourself, your interests, aptitudes, work values, etc., decide on an occupation or industry to learn about.

### 2. Identify People to Interview

Start with lists of people you already know - friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. Professional organizations, the yellow pages, organizational directories, and public speakers are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title. Job Corps instructors and your counselors are also great resources.

### 3. Prepare for the Interview

Prior to the interview, learn as much as you can about the occupation and the industry. Although the purpose of the informational interview is for you to obtain information about the career, having preliminary information will help you ask the right questions.

Prepare a list of questions ahead of time. At the end of this tip sheet is a list from which you may want to select your questions.

### 4. Arrange the Interview Contact the person to set up an interview:

- by telephone,
- by a letter followed by a telephone call, or
- by having someone who knows the person make the appointment for you.

### 5. Conduct the Interview

Arrive on time to the interview, dressed appropriately. Introduce yourself and shake the person's hand.

The whole interview could be spent finding answers to the dozen or so questions you decide to ask. But as you practice and move further toward your target, questions will probably pop into your head spontaneously based on what you need to know. Pay careful

attention to what's said by the person you interview. Ask questions when something isn't clear. People are often happy to discuss their positions and willing to provide you with a wealth of information. Try to keep the conversation friendly, brief, and focused on the contact person's job and career field.

You may want to take some notes during the interview, but don't become so involved in note-taking that you are no longer having a conversation. It's important to keep the flow of discussion going.

At the end of the interview, be sure to thank the person for his/her time.

#### 6. Follow Up

Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a thank-you note to your contact within one week of the interview. Use the information you've gathered to determine if this is a job you think you would want to do.

### **Possible Informational Interview Questions**

From the list below, select 12-15 questions to ask during your informational interview. You may want to get permission from your interviewees to tape-record the conversations, but be aware that transcribing taped conversations can be very time-consuming.

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What kinds of problems do you deal with?
3. What kinds of decisions do you make?
4. What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
5. How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
6. What training or education is required for this type of work?
7. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
8. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? most challenging?
9. Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
10. How did you get your job?
11. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
12. What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
13. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?
14. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
15. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
16. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
17. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
18. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
19. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
20. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
21. How is the economy affecting this industry?
22. How has your job affected your lifestyle?

23. What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
24. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
25. How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
26. What courses have proven to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?
27. What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field? Do you have any special word of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
28. Who do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?