



Networking - Informational Interviews

Informational interviewing is a method of career exploration and a way of discovering the 70-80% of jobs not publicly advertised. It is not the same as a job interview. Informational interviewing allows you to talk with people already in the industry you have targeted. By obtaining informational interviews, you have gained access to the “inside information” regarding career paths, alternate careers that will use your skills, and people to contact who may be looking for an employee like you. It is an effective technique because it allows you to:

- investigate a specific career field
- narrow or expand your options
- obtain advice on where skills might be applied
- broaden network contacts for future reference
- learn about important issues in a career field
- build confidence for actual job interviews
- expand your job market information
- discover jobs/career paths that you didn't know existed
- deepen your understanding of the world of work in a variety of settings
- learn the methods that others used to get to a particular career point
- clarify your weaknesses in education, skills and development, and therefore improve those areas
- develop your listening/social skills

Remember to:

- Dress professionally.
- Be on time or early.
- Prepare questions in advance.
- Listen carefully and attentively to the contact person.

Building a Contact List for Informational Interviews

Networking is creating a system of contacts both for information and support. It may include anyone from your career advisor to your neighbor. **A key to successful networking is learning how to move beyond initial rejection; not every person you contact will be willing or able to help you.**

Networking is a refined skill learned through experience. Some good examples of people to network with are:

- Family and Friends
- Fisher and Ohio State
 - Fisher Alumni
 - OSU Alumni
 - Office of Career Management
 - Student Organizations
 - Centers of Excellence
 - Professors
 - Staff
 - Classmates
- Past/Current Employers
 - Coworkers
 - Bosses
 - Clients and Vendors
- Extracurricular Groups
 - Social organizations
 - Industry associations

- Interest groups

Tips for Professional Networking

- In your initial e-mail or outreach to a contact, please note how you obtained the contact's information. In addition, provide background information on yourself and share your career goals and experiences.
- Ask for advice, not a job or internship position.
- Respect their time.
- Once your contact has responded to your initial outreach, please make every effort to respond in a reasonable time.
- Conduct research on the company/industry/career and prepare questions to ask during the informational interview (see sample questions below).
- Follow-up promptly with a thank you e-mail or letter.
- Stay in touch and keep a contact informed of your progress.
- You may wish to continue your contact through e-mail, telephone, or personal/group meetings.
- Obtain a business card following networking.

Sample Networking Correspondence

The following sample letters are provided to guide you as you develop personalized and thoughtful outreach to a potential contact.

Sample email request for informational interview

To: Barry Alumni
From: Jane Job-Seeker
Subject: Fisher College Student – Seeking Career Advice

Dear Mr. Alumni:

I am a sophomore majoring in marketing at The Ohio State University Fisher College of Business. I found your name through the Fisher College of Business LinkedIn group.

I am interested in talking with you about your position as a Brand Manager with Acme Perfect Products. I first developed an interest in marketing through my activities with the American Marketing Association on campus, and I hope to leverage my past experience and my undergraduate studies in order to attain my long-term goal of a career in marketing within the consumer packaged goods industry. I would also be interested in learning about how your experience at Fisher prepared you for your career.

Would it be possible to arrange a time to speak briefly over the phone? I would need only 15-20 minutes of your time. Please let me know if there is a time that would be a convenient for you or I can send you some days and times that work for me. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Jane Job-Seeker

Sample LinkedIn request for an informational interview (300 character limit)

Best Practice – Always add a personalized note to your connection request. Use the samples below for inspiration, but be sure not to just copy/paste!

Dear Ms. Alumni,

I am a sophomore marketing major in the Fisher College of Business at OSU. I saw that you work in marketing at XYZ Co. and wanted to see if I could ask you some questions about your experience in this field? I look forward to hearing from you. Thanks for your time.

Brutus Buckeye

Sample thank-you following an informational interview

Dear Mr. Alumni:

Thank you again for meeting with me yesterday to discuss your career path and for me to learn more about your company. I truly value the advice of professionals like you who know brand management so well.

I especially appreciate your offer to introduce me to other professionals in your network, which I know will be extremely helpful to me. I have contacted Ms. Patel as you suggested and have arranged a time to meet with her.

I can't thank you enough for your willingness to help me learn more about marketing. I will be sure to keep you informed of my progress. And please do not hesitate to contact me if you think of any additional suggestions for expanding my network and establishing my career in marketing.

Best regards,
Jane Job-Seeker

Sample Informational Interview Questions

Choose **a few questions** and be sure to tailor them based on any research you've conducted on the company or the contact.

About the Individual

- What would you say is the best path to this career?
- What attracted you to this industry, your company, and your job?
- What do you enjoy most about this industry, the company, and your job?
- What aspects of your career have you found most and least rewarding and why? Any regrets?
- What are your educational and career backgrounds? What would you do differently if you were starting over?
- What do you see as possible next steps for you? What career expectations do you have in the short and long term?
- What are you most excited or concerned about for this industry/company/career path in the future?
- If you were in the job market tomorrow, what would you do?

About the Job

- What are your primary responsibilities? How do you spend your time?
- How do you value/measure your results and effectiveness?
- What do you do in a typical day or week? How much time are you in meetings, on the phone, on the road, and working in teams versus working independently?

About Skills

- What skills are most critical to your success?
- What weaknesses in a person's skill set would make him or her ineffective in this business?
- What are the most valuable skills in your job? Which experiences enabled you to develop these skills?
- How do you keep skills current? What do you read? What professional associations do you belong to? What seminars or continuing education do you consider useful?

About the Company

- What would you do differently if you ran this company?
- What are the common misconceptions about working in this company?
- What do you see as the biggest competitive challenge for your company?
- What are some of the defining characteristics of the individuals who have been hired by your company in the past for this position?

About the Industry

- What have been your biggest surprises in this field?
- What are the common misconceptions about working in this field?
- What motivates you to continue in this business? What do you like most?
- What are the vulnerabilities of this business? What worries you?
- What biases or barriers to entry does this business have in terms of hiring practices?
- What do you expect of people starting out in this field? What educational and personal qualities in candidates attract you? How do you determine a candidate's compatibility for the field, including education, personality, and cultural considerations?
- Can you recommend others I can talk to about this field?
- What are some of the ways I can become familiar with the industry jargon?

About Me

- What kind of job responsibilities could I expect given my background and experience level?
- What strengths and weaknesses do you see in my current background?
- Is there anything else you think would be helpful as I consider this field?
- Looking at my résumé, what advice would you have for me on next steps if I were interested in this industry/company/career?