



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE

- Gather information about an occupation or an industry.
- Learn more about a career that you might like to do (education, skills, experience required, challenge etc.).
- Clarify and confirm your career choice.
- Build confidence for future job interviews.
- Make contacts and expand professional network.
- Discover employment opportunities that are not advertised.

HOW TO MAKE CONTACTS AND NETWORK

- People you already know (friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, advisors or neighbors).
- Professional and Trade organizations (Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureaus etc.).
- Others (Yellow Pages, Organizational Directories, Trade Journals, Newspapers, Employer Directories, public speakers etc.).
- Clemson Alumni.
- Through someone who knows the person you want to meet.
- What should you do if they decline? - Simply ask if they can refer you to someone else and always thank the person for his/her time and consideration

HOW TO SET IT UP

A letter followed by a phone call. Here is a sample letter:

March 27th, 2015

Mr. Joe Right
RIGHT, RIGHT and SONS
123 Right Avenue, Suite 123
Pink City, SC 12345

Dear Mr. Right:

I am currently a senior at Clemson University. In the fall, I will begin studying at the USC School of Law. Labor law has been of interest to me since I took a class in the subject as an undergraduate and I plan on my area of concentration being in this field of study.

Your practice has an outstanding reputation in this field, and I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to briefly discuss your specialty area. I am especially interested in your views regarding public vs. private employment experience. Any further insights you have would be greatly appreciated.

I will contact your office the week of April 3rd to set a mutually convenient time for this informational interview.

Sincerely,

Anthony X. Best Jr.

Phone call:

Here is a sample script:

“Hello, my name is _____, and I am a student at Clemson University. (Name of the person of place) referred me to you. I am trying to determine my future career direction and I am interested in the field in which you work. Would you be willing to spare 20 to 30 minutes to meet with me and discuss your current position?”
(Be prepared to suggest days and times to meet.)

HOW TO PREPARE

How to dress and behave:

- Dress as if you were going to a job interview.
- Bring a notebook and prepared questions.
- Be punctual, polite, and professional.
- Stay specific and stay on track.
- Express interest, listen attentively, show enthusiasm and appreciation.
- Relax.

Gather information about the company, the field, industry and person you are going to meet. You may consult:

- Company literature (available at the Career Center and Chamber of Commerce).
- Articles in business magazines.
- LinkedIn
- Company website or other appropriate websites

Questions to ask:

How did you get started in this field?

- What training or education is required for this type of work?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful?
- How do people find out about job openings in your occupation?
- How did you get this position? What are common career paths?
- What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
- Are there internship or volunteer opportunities?
- What are typical hiring procedures?
- What areas of knowledge are most important for advancement in this field? What degrees? Certification?
- If you were starting out again, would you do anything differently?

Daily work routine and work environment:

- What do you do on a typical day in this position?
- What are your alternative career paths?
- How many people do you supervise and to whom do you report?
- What part of this job do you find the most challenging or satisfying?
- What are the positive/negative aspects of working in this field?
- What are the "hot issues" in this field?
- How many hours do you typically work each week? Do you often work in the evenings or weekends? Can you arrange your own hours?
- What is a typical starting salary? Average salary? Other benefits?
- What are some of the rewards of your occupation?
- What are the geographic restrictions in this field? How much are you required to travel?

About the organization, industry and future:

- Please tell me more about your organization and its purposes.
- How was your organization founded?
- What is unique about your organization?
- What is your job security within this organization?
- Would you rather work for a smaller or a larger company? Why?
- Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
- What are the problems you see working in this field?
- How does your job fit into the organization or department?
- What is the "corporate culture" here, i.e. is it formal, informal, do people work autonomously, does everyone come early, stay late?
- What are the toughest challenges you face in the organization?
- How would you evaluate the future of this career field? How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future? What areas do you feel promise the most opportunity? The most growth?
- What opportunities for advancement are there in this field? How will this job change over the next 5 years? 10 years?
- Is your organization expanding, shrinking or maintaining? Who are the competitors in this field?

Special interest questions:

- What special advice would you give a person entering in this field?
- What, if anything, do you wish you had known before you entered this occupation?
- What are the professional journals in this field that I should read?
- What strategy would you suggest for a person to break into this field?

Do not forget to ask:

- Do you have one or two additional people you'd be willing to connect me with to do an informational interview? If so, when I reach out to them, may I use your name?
- Can you suggest anyone else whom I could contact for additional information?
- If I wanted to apply for a job, whom should I contact in this organization. What is the long-term/short-term outlook for hiring?
- Is most of the hiring done on an external or internal basis?

THE FOLLOW UP

Assess the interview:

- Did you get the information you needed?
- How do you feel about this occupation?
- Did you get an objective opinion?
- Did you demonstrate professionalism when connecting with this person? Remember your brand!

Make notes:

- Immediately after the interview, record any information you could need in the future.
- Keep records of all people you meet (take business cards, names and addresses of contact information).

Keep in touch:

- Maintain a list of contacts in an Excel spreadsheet or another way to ensure you have everyone in your network in one place.
- Follow-up with future notes or phone calls once or twice a year to let them know their help has been of service and how you are doing in your career exploration. This periodical contact will further remind them of you and encourage them to let you know of future opportunities.
- When you follow-up with a contact, update your Excel spreadsheet to reflect when you reconnected with the person and any new information you learned – for example: the person changed jobs.
- Connect through LinkedIn if the person has a profile.
- Write a thank you letter/note (within 24 hours after the interview).