

Informational interviews your gateway to the inside scoop

By Brenda Koritko

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The best way to gather the whole story about the industry and job you are targeting is by setting up informational interviews with individuals working where you plan to be positioned. Engaging in informational interviews will help you to gain valuable information about careers in your field and expand your network at the same time. The key difference between informational interviews and job interviews is that you have more control over the agenda when you schedule an informational interview.

Start by asking people you know for contact information

You will grab the attention of people faster when you mention the names of people they know. If you are not able to pull together the right links from your existing contact list, grab the yellow pages and contact professional organizations or associations in your region, and plan to attend the next meet and greet organized by the Chamber of Commerce in your community. You will find that most people are happy to talk about their jobs and to share a wealth of information when asked for advice.

Always point out during your initial contact that you are not specifically looking for a job with this company. State that you are seeking advice and information from successful people, and specify that you are asking for 20 minutes of their time. Cold calls should start with your name, a brief explanation about your skills and/or experience, and the purpose of your call. For example, "My name is (your name). I have worked at (or recently graduated from) _____ and have extensive experience in (specify). Would I be able to have 20 minutes of your time to ask you about your job, and ask your advice for someone looking for a position in your industry?"

Plan to help the other person help you

Do not use a standard script for every interview you schedule. Instead, prepare questions that you know will interest the person you are meeting. Try to select topics that you discovered during your research. For example, if you have read that the company has been awarded a sizeable contract, plan to ask for details related to the contract. Prepare questions related to the number of people that the company plans to employ, or ask for the insider perspective on the names and/or types of companies that will experience an increased workload related to the contract.

Always remember that busy people agree to informational interviews based on the trust that you are seeking career advice and that you are not asking for a specific job. Bring a couple of pens and some paper to your informational interview to write down anything you want to remember, such as

the names and phone numbers of the contacts they refer, or specific job related leads that emerge during the discussion conversation. Plan to ask for at least a couple of names of people in the industry that you can call.

When you plan to contact the leads provided or follow-up on a job that was mentioned during your meeting, state your intention in the thank you letter you send within 36 hours of your meeting. For example, "Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and answer my questions about pursuing a career in the (specify) industry. I have benefited greatly having met you. I will contact (name) about the position with (company name) this week. I have also enclosed a copy of my resume for future reference should a position become available with your company, or if you decide that my information would be of interest to any of your associates."

Informational interviews may seem unproductive when you are in the midst of a demanding job search strategy, but nothing could be further from the truth. Meeting with people employed in the type of job or workplace you are targeting will actually decrease the amount of time wasted spamming employers that are not hiring.

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Brenda Koritko is the author of I Manage Me Career Planning a timely ebook providing techniques to help you achieve your immediate career goals with benefits throughout your career. Secure rewarding opportunities with companies that are actually hiring. Click here to get more information <http://www.imanageme.com>

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