

CONDUCTING INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

Information Interviews are a crucial and often overlooked aspect of networking. They are the best way to find out about a career direction or job and make contacts within your field of interest.

Identifying Your Contacts

You should identify contacts within your career interests. These individuals can be identified through your contact network or referrals from others. Think about past and current volunteer, internship, work and leadership experiences. Try to make your informational interview as intentional as possible. In other words, interview someone working for an organization that could be a potential place of employment for you. Many students end up getting future internships and jobs this way.

Sources for identifying contacts

- www.linkedin.com Join the Appalachian State University Career Connection group
- www.careergear.appstate.edu Search for employers who recruit and post jobs to ASU students
- Past work, intern, volunteer supervisors/contacts
- Friends/Family
- Club/organization advisors
- Faculty/Staff at ASU
- Past conferences, workshops you have attended
- Facebook/Twitter

Approaching Your Contacts

There are many different ways to approach your contacts to request an information interview: personal referral, walk-in, telephone call, letter or email. The personal referral is the most successful approach.

When talking to your contact you should:

- Introduce yourself: tell the contact your name, school, major and career interest.
- If applicable, be sure to mention the name of the person who referred you to the contact.
- Ask to set up a convenient time for an interview. Only ask for 15-20 minutes of time.
- Emphasize that you are not looking for a job but researching the position, company or sector.
- Thank the contact. Follow up regularly with your progress.
- Before the meeting it is imperative that you research the business you are curious about. This aspect of interview preparation cannot be overemphasized. Do your homework. Research the interviewing individual(s), the organization and the field.

Research, Research, Research

- Most company information will be available via their website
- Library (books, periodicals, magazines, etc.)
- Research periodicals of the geographic region the nonprofit is located and find out if any articles have been published about the organization
- Annual reports-some available online
- Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn

You should become familiar with the organization's mission, structure, services, financial status, reputation and any recent major changes. In addition, try to discover information about the person whom you will meet—background, style, and education.

Follow up

Follow up your informational interview with a handwritten note of appreciation for their time. You can buy thank you cards at Staples. The person you interview may be a potential contact for future employment. You should always keep the lines of communication open.

Information Interviewing Questions

The following is a list of potential interview questions to use as a guide. You should also develop your own list of questions.

- What are the person's responsibilities and what duties are performed on a typical day? Does s/he have a set schedule?
- What are the salary ranges for persons in this occupation (i.e., starting out, after five years, etc.)?
- What kinds of courses are most valuable to emphasize in order to gain the skills necessary for success in this field?
- What kinds of work, internship, volunteer experience (paid or unpaid) would an employer look for in a job applicant?
- What skills & abilities are most important acquire to be successful in this occupation?
- What kind of temperament do you think a person should possess in order to be successful in this occupation?
- How does the career affect the worker's social life, leisure time, and family life?
- What type of educational background do you need for entry level positions? Do you feel you education is relevant to what you are presently doing?
- What do you like best or find most satisfying about this work? What do you perceive to be the major rewards of the job?
- What are the dissatisfying aspects of your work? What do you like least about your job? Is this typical of the field?
- How much independence is allowed in dress and personal appearance?
- How did you get into this job? Was it the kind of job you had planned on getting while you were in school? Who helped you plan or prepare for this field?
- What was your opinion of this kind of work before you got into it? Is your job different from what you expected?
- If you were to start over, would you choose the same kind of work? If not, what kind of work would you most like to do?
- Do you see this work as a lifelong occupation as a stepping stone to some other job or occupation?
- What are the opportunities for advancement on this job? in this field, or in this company or organization? To what positions? Is an advanced degree needed? In what field(s)?
- What advice would you give to a young person coming into a job like yours?