

CAREER SATISFACTION WORKSHOP
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

I. OBJECTIVES OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

- A. Establish adult-to-adult relationship (stature) versus programmed, subservient/subordinate posture.
- B. Establish positive rapport with the person you are interviewing.
- C. Build a foundation for meeting a second or third time if desired.
 - 1. Obtain specific information about the field/area of law/career path of the interviewee.
- D. Obtain specific information about the firm/company/nonprofit agency/opportunity versus presenting yourself as a job hunter.
 - 1. Is this the kind of firm or company that fits you (appropriate organizational structure, ethical stance, people you feel comfortable with....)?
 - 2. What does the firm/company need? Are you capable of filling the identified need, and do you want to?
- E. Obtain additional referrals from each person interviewed.

II. APPROACH IN OBTAINING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW (DOES NOT APPLY TO A SITUATION WHERE YOU KNOW THERE IS A JOB OPENING): before beginning to schedule, informational interviews, research general practice area, job or career area, firms, companies.

- A. If you have been given the name of someone and obtained permission to use the referral source's name, call or email new referral directly and ask to meet with him/her. ".....recommended/suggested that I contact you."
 - 1. Explain to the person that you are hoping to meet with them for at least 30 minutes so that you can learn about the career path and the kind of work that they do."
 - 2. Explain to the 'person that you are currently considering a career transition and hope to learn from them.
- B. If cold call/contact:
 - 1. Send a Hand written brief note or E-mail.
 - a. Succinctly state the purpose of the letter/request -to meet personally.
 - 1) If sending a note, indicate that you will call them the following week to schedule a time to meet and then follow through.
 - 2) If sending an email ask them if they would be willing to meet with you to discuss their career path and career/area of law. Emphasize that you would like to learn about them and their occupation and that you are NOT currently seeking a job from

them. Give a brief explanation of who you are and that you are considering transitioning into their field. Do not send your resume or complete bio. Remember you want to keep the focus on them but allow them to understand that you

- 3) If sending an email use a heading that will distinguish you from SPAM mail. Do not use exclamation points in the heading State concisely, "Learning about" or, "Informational Interview" or, some variation.
2. Follow-up telephone call or email.
 - a. If you are following up with a telephone call:
 - 1) Avoid being screened out by intermediary by explaining the general purpose of your call so that the intermediary/assistant will not think you are a solicitor.
 - 2) Remember the person's assistant deserves your respect and can be very helpful .in helping you connect with the interviewee and setting up the informational interview.
 - 3) If you receive voicemail, leave a brief message with a general explanation and your phone number and let them know you will attempt to call them back.
 - b. When you have made telephone contact with the identified potential interviewee:
 - 1) Ask if he or she received your letter.
 - 2) Explain that you are only asking for advice/feedback.
 - 3) Try to schedule a time to meet a week or so down the road.
 - a) suggest meeting for coffee for at least 30-45 minutes (if you suggest lunch be prepared to pay). The goal is to schedule a face to face meeting vs. conducting the interview by telephone.
 - c. When responding to an email of an identified potential interviewee:
 - 1) Try to schedule a time to meet a week or so down the road. Suggest meeting for coffee for at least 30-45 minutes (if you suggest lunch be prepared to pay).

III. INITIAL INTERVIEW ITSELF

- A. Eye Contact & Posture: make eye contact, but don't overdo it; lean forward vs. sitting back.
- B. Opening statement: A clear and concise statement of your purpose for meeting with other person that includes five parts:
 1. Establishes equal adult to adult stature.

2. Reflects your systematic approach to exploring your career direction/specific area of practice.
3. Names your career target/goal.
4. Relates to the ego of the person you're interviewing.
5. Provides an easy transition to the question phase of the interview.

C. Question Phase of Interview:

1. Don't wait to be asked questions; take initiative to ask questions.
2. Don't allow an employer/interviewee to take control of the interview by asking about your background, or past employment history.
3. Goal of questions asked is to elicit openness and responsiveness of the person interviewed; lower communication barriers.
4. Learn to listen to body language and nonverbal communication.
5. Avoid argumentation; try to orient the interview toward areas of agreement.
6. Must approach an interview from position of professional-to-professional. .
 - a. You are there to gather information and advice.
 - b. You are there with the mindset that you won't take a job after one or two interviews no matter what is offered, so that the employer has no power over you.
7. Types of Questions. The goal or intent is to ask questions which stimulate open communication.
 - a. Open-ended questions are most helpful.
 - 1) Examples of...
 - a. How do you feel about ... ?
What is your opinion regarding ... ? (Ego-oriented• question.)
 - b. How would you advise me regarding ... ?
 - c. How do you see, assess ... ? See examples – **Appendix A**
 - 2) Advantages of: ..
 - a. You do not force other person to adopt a position; As long as you are asking this type of question, the person you are interviewing will be talking.
 - 3) Most of the questions you ask should be open-ended questions.
 - a. Informational Questions: Asking for specific information.
8. A good test for the validity/quality of a question is to ask yourself whether you're asking the question to honestly identify the other person's viewpoint or are you asking the question to receive a response you hope to hear (leading question).

- D. Ask/Obtain Additional Names/Referrals:
 1. Check time: "I know it's getting late and I don't want to take too much of your time. Before I make any decisions I need to talk to other people in the field/industry at your level/stature, who do you recommend I contact?"
 2. Take out a small notebook and pen. You may need to prompt a little more.
 3. In contacting these people can I use your name? **YOU MUST ASK THIS QUESTION.**

- E. Get commitment for a second meeting if you have a good rapport.
 1. "This has been very helpful. In case I need any further advice, may I contact you?"
 2. Alternatively: If meeting was particularly good, you may say, "This has been particularly helpful; I would like to pursue it further. Would you have some additional time you could give me at some future point?" Or "I have several additional questions that would take too much time today, could we meet again in a week or so?"

- F. Take the initiative/responsibility for ending the interview/meeting.
 1. For a first interview, don't take more time than requested and no more than 30-60 minutes.
 2. Ideally, person being interviewed will talk 80% of the time.

- G. Write a follow-up "Thank You" within 24-48 hours.
- H. When additional names/referrals provided by contact prove helpful or lead to a job opportunity, write or re-contact and let them know, and again, thank them.
- I. Regarding resumes and applications:
 1. Don't send or provide a copy of your resume before the informational interview if asked.
 2. Don't bring a copy of your resume to the informational interview.
 3. A polite way to deal with a question regarding your resume is "I am not ready to submit an application or resume at this time."

IV. GETTING STARTED

- A. Initial Interview Program
 1. Start right away, the earlier the better.
 2. Pick people you know well enough, but who are not in your target field –
Appendix B
 3. Formulate questions: Almost any questions you can ask a friend, you can ask an employer.
 - a. Need to establish stature.

- b. Seek information.
 - c. With friends you can ask if they are making enough money.
 - d. Follow same approach outlined in Section III.

- B. Most people don't know how to go to their friends. They are afraid their friends will feel used. Emphasize that you are not asking them for a job or what they think you should do. You are only asking their feedback on your decision.
 - 1. You're just asking them for names.
 - 2. Interviewing is a learned skill; you must practice it.
 - 3. Interviewing with friends is a real-life interview; may directly/indirectly translate into opportunities.
 - 4. Resist temptation of asking friends what they think of your idea (passing judgment). If you ask, they may get the impression you are not serious and may try to talk you out of a viable idea. Don't go to friends with that in your mind. Interview your friend; retain control.

- C. Implementing Interview Plan
 - 1. List the names of potential contacts that you plan to call and schedule meetings with.
 - 2. Establish a Scheduling System:
 - Examples:
 - Week 1 –letters/initial phone call
 - Week 2 -follow-up letters with phone calls; follow-up phone call with appointments
 - Week 3 -follow-up phone calls with appointments; follow-up appointments with thank-you note
 - 3. Keep record/"Summary of Activities"
 - 4. Suggested/recommended Intensity of Activity:
 - Minimums:
 - 2 interviews with friends/week
 - 2 interviews with new contacts/week
 - Maximums:
 - 5 & 5, respectively (as per above)
 - 5. Start with friends, then:
 - move to interviews with more distant acquaintances
 - move to firms/companies within field that you wouldn't want to work with
 - final step, approach firms/companies and positions you are really interested in
 - 6. Keeps a separate diary regarding feelings with respect to the day's activities.

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What do you find most interesting and rewarding about your work?
- If you could change something about your work, what would it be? How would you describe a typical work day?
- Describe your career path. How did you progress to your present position?
- What types of skills and/or experience are necessary to be effective in this field?
- When you are looking for an associate, what are some of the characteristics you seek?
- Describe the changes taking place in your field. What changes do you see taking place in the next five years?
- If you were entering this field/profession today, how would you do it?
- How does one hear about new openings in your field?
- What academic background is most valuable in this field?
- What are the greatest challenges or toughest problems you face in this work?
- If you could give me one bit of advice about entering this industry/profession/field, what would that be?
- Can you suggest someone else in this field that I might talk with? May I use your name when I contact them?

Appendix A

Who Are Your Contacts?	
Family	
Prior Jobs	
Current Job	
Judges/Lawyers	
Law School Professors	
Law School Students	
Law School Placement Office	
College Acquaintances	
Sorority/Fraternity	
Alumni Association	
Church/Synagogue	
Hobbies	
Professional Associations	
Volunteer Affiliations	
Children	
Neighbors	
Customer or Clients	
Armed Forces	
Doctors	
Dentists	
Accountants	
Bankers	
Insurance Agents	
Sports Teams	
Athletic Club	
Counselors	

Appendix B