



Networking through *Informational Interviews*

One highly effective way of both gathering information about a career you are interested in, and learning more about possible job opportunities is to talk with individuals currently working in the field you are interested in. Whether you are exploring options and want to learn more information about a field you are considering, or if you have decided on a field or occupation and you are looking for tips on job searching--an informational interview is a fantastic resource.

At the base level, you will leave the conversation with new, helpful information, however, you could even learn about a possible opportunity and make a new connection in the process. It's a win-win. After all, over 70% of jobs are found through networking, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

When done right, networking should feel like a conversation. You should build rapport through asking questions and learning more about the other person and their background.

This process is called "informational interviewing." Informational interviews can happen in person or over the phone, whatever makes the most sense and is most feasible for both parties. Typically they are between 20-60 minutes in length, and can be structured or unstructured but it helps to have questions prepared and to know a little about the person beforehand.

You can use these questions as a guide of what to ask, but consider what you are most curious about learning about that person, and go from there. Think about what is most important to you, and prepare a list of questions, using this list as an inspiration. Remember, this is not a comprehensive or all-encompassing list of questions.

Informational interview Questions:

Category: Person's professional background

Related Questions:

1. How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
2. What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in this industry?
3. What things did you do before you entered this occupation? Which have been most helpful?
4. What other jobs can you get with the same background?
5. How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
6. Why did you decide to work for this company?
7. What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
8. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?

Category: Day-to-day work

Related Questions:

1. Could you describe a typical day?
2. What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
3. What kinds of problems do you deal with?
4. What kinds of decisions do you make?
5. What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
6. How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?

Category: Information about the company/organization

Related Questions:

1. What do you like most about this company?
2. How does your company differ from its competitors?
3. Why do customers choose this company?
4. Are you optimistic about the company's future and your future with the company?
5. What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
6. How does the company make use of technology for internal communication and outside marketing?
(Use of e-mail, Internet, intranets, World Wide Web page, video conferencing, etc.)

Category: Information about the field/occupation

Related Questions:

1. What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
2. How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
3. What is the best way to enter this occupation?
4. What are the advancement opportunities?
5. What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
6. If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?

Category: Qualities that lead to success in the field

Related Questions:

1. What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
2. What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program?
3. How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary background for a position such as yours?
4. How well did your graduate experience prepare you for this job?
5. What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?

Category: Company Culture

Related Questions:

1. How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?

2. Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people, service or product oriented business?)
3. What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
4. What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
5. Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
6. What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?

Category: Their professional opinion on your background

Related Questions:

1. These are my strongest assets (skills, areas of knowledge, personality traits and values)... Where would they fit in this field? Where would they be most helpful in this organization? Where might they fit in other fields? Where might they be helpful in other organizations?
2. How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
3. [If you feel comfortable asking and it seems appropriate:] Would you mind taking a look at my resume?
4. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?

Category: Job outlook

Related Questions:

1. How is the economy affecting this industry?
2. What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your occupational field?
3. How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing?
4. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
5. What are the typical job titles and functions that are growing?

Category: Their professional recommendations

Related Questions:

1. Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills?
2. What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here?
3. Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?
4. Are there any written materials you suggest I read?
5. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
6. How did you learn about this particular position/organization?
7. What are resources you would recommend as I search for a job/internship in this field?