Informational Interviewing Do's and Don'ts

by Katharine Hansen

Whether you are a college student starting a new career or a professional thinking about a job or career change, you should consider a networking technique that frequently results in high-quality contacts and referrals -- informational interviewing.

- Do realize that informational interviewing, a subset of networking, is not only an excellent way to explore careers and determine what’s right for you, but a surprisingly effective way to maximize the effectiveness of your network if you trying to launch your career or out of work and getting concerned about landing that next job.

- Do use the networking process to identify people with whom to conduct informational interviews. Anyone in your network can be either the subject of an informational interview or can suggest others to interview. The ideal subject of an informational interview is someone who is in a job you’d like to have.

- Do scrutinize your network for people who would make good informational interview subjects. The best sources for informational interviews for established job-seekers and career-changers include members of professional organizations. If no one in your network fits that description, start asking members of your network to suggest people in the type of job you’d like to be in.

- Once you've identified someone you’d like to interview, Do decide whether to ask to conduct the interview over the phone, through e-mail, or in person. Face-to-face interviews are by far the most valuable and effective.

- Do plan to ask for 20-30 minutes of your prospective interviewee's time.

- Do enlist members of your network to help set up informational interviews.

- Do write, call, or e-mail your request for the interview.

- Before going to the interview, Do research the company. You don't have to do quite as much research for an informational interview as you would for a job interview, but some degree of research will greatly enhance the quality of informational interviews.

- Do decide if and how you will record information, such as on a small notepad or tape recorder (Be sure to obtain your interviewee's permission before you tape.)

- Do plan to dress for success -- the same way you would for a job interview.

- Do plan to update and bring your resume. The interviewee may ask for a copy.

- Do consider asking the interviewee to take a look at your resume to see if he or she can offer any suggestions for making the resume a more effective tool for obtaining a job in this field or company.

- Do practice with a friend or family member if you're not an experienced interviewer.

- Do call to confirm your appointment.

- Do prepare a list of questions.

- Don't, repeat, don't, go into the interview with any illusions that this is a job interview. You are not there to ask for a job. You are there to glean information only. If the interviewee shows interest in you as a job candidate, do, of course, be receptive if you’re interested.

- Do arrive on time for the interview.

- Don't forget to greet your interviewee with a moderately firm handshake and a warm, enthusiastic smile.

- Do absorb your surroundings; listen and observe keenly.

- Do project enthusiasm and show your personality.
• Do end the interview when you promised to (though sometimes the interviewee will want to keep talking).
• Do ask if you can stay in contact
• Do ask for referrals.
• Do ask for the interviewee's business card.
• Do thank the interviewee (and do so again later in writing).

Source: http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing-dos-donts.html