

➤ Experience ➤ Compassion ➤ Guidance

THE CHAZIN GROUP

Career Coach Extraordinaire



Career Learning Series | Ace the Informational Interview.

Why the Informational Interview is so critical to job search success.

The informational interview is a tool that you can leverage, in order to obtain the information you need about an organization, to decide if you want to pursue a career with them. It also is invaluable for getting information about an industry that you are interested in transitioning to. You can also conduct informational interviews in order to learn from people how they started their own business, left full-time work at an employer to break into the consulting field, or find out what is involved with purchasing a franchise operation.

It is the single most effective tool in your career and professional development tool kit.

How does the “informational interview” work?

You reach out to someone in your personal and/or professional network that either works in a job you want to obtain OR they work in an industry that you are interested in breaking into. Following is a suggested call script to help you plan how you will ask people to meet with you:

“Hello Ms. Jones, my name is Ethan Chazin. John Doe suggested I call you. I am a marketing professional but I am interested in transitioning into the video game industry (the industry that Ms. Jones works in and Ethan wants to break into.)

I would like to buy you a cup of coffee and chat with you for fifteen minutes about how you can to work at the ABC Video Game Company and your experiences working there. Would you have fifteen minutes to meet with me in the next few weeks?”

Sounds easy, right? Well, it is except... MOST PEOPLE FEEL VERY UNCOMFORTABLE DOING THIS. Why?

Any time you call a stranger or someone that you do not know particularly well and ask them for something, it is a stressful experience. There is always the fear of rejection...what if they say NO?

The truth is, most people LOVE getting these calls and are willing to help. First of all, you are appealing to their egos. You have identified them as being someone that’s established in their field, and someone to look up to and seek counsel from. It’s FLATTERING. Next, people are not blind to what’s going on. Deep down they want to help, and they know that “There but for the grace of G-d go I.” They realize they could very well be in your situation. They understand that it is a very small world and in the future you may well be in a position where you can return the favor. So, nearly 100% of the time they say yes.

But what if they still say “NO”? You should reply:

“I understand. I’m sure you can appreciate that in this market it is very difficult to meet people. Can you think of anyone else that you suggest I reach out to?”

Even if they do not agree to meet with you, you can check them off your list AND you’ve gotten a new contact to pursue. New contacts equal new leads to follow up with.

Best practices to conduct a truly effective informational interview.

Notice that I said 15 minutes. How can you get everything you need out of so little time. Once you begin speaking, they will be glad to give you 30 minutes or more of their time.

You need to understand that **you are NOT asking for a job**. The sole intent of the informational interview is to learn as much about/from them as you can to decide if you still want to work where they work or do what they do for a living. THAT'S ALL! EASY, RIGHT?

It really is, IF YOU ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.

Some excellent questions that you should ask during an informational interview include:

- What do you like MOST/LEAST about your job?
- How did you get your start in [insert name of their field/industry here]?
- What did they do that served them well in breaking into the business?
- Is there any accreditation or certification that is needed to break into or advance in the field?
- Are there any courses or training programs that might be helpful for you to take?
- What is a typical day like for you?"
- What do you enjoy MOST about working there?"
- How would you advise someone that is looking to get into this field do to do it?
- Which organizations are the leaders in your industry? Who are the up & comers?
- What industry events, trade shows, and conferences do you attend?
- Which industry publications and blogs do you read, and e-newsletters do you subscribe to?
- Who are the rising stars and thought leaders in the industry?

While it is acceptable to talk briefly about yourself, remember that the purpose of the informational interview is to obtain as much information about the individual you are meeting with as possible.

Remember the universal truism that all people LOVE to talk about THEMSELVES.

After 15 minutes you say you want to be respectful of their time, and understand if they need to end the meeting or have no more than another 15 minutes to chat. They are bound to give you extra time. Make sure to end it after a half hour UNLESS they are willing to sit and chat beyond the half hour.

At the end of the informational interview, be sure to thank them and also ask if there is anyone else that they can think of that you should talk to.

Should you give them your resume? No! Remember, this is NOT a job interview. HOWEVER...if you feel like you really connected with them and they seemed comfortable with you, you can hand them a copy or two of your resume and say: "Please feel free to share this with anyone in your company or your network that you think might be able to assist me."

That same day you must send them a HANDWRITTEN thank you note. People don't write handwritten correspondence anymore, so this will make a great impression. If you have sloppy handwriting, give the copy to someone you know with neat penmanship then by all means give them the text and have them write it for you. Thank them for taking the time to meet with you and share their experiences. Ask if

they can suggest anyone else in their network for you to with. You also need to list all of their information in your NETWORKING TRACKING SHEET. Maintain a spreadsheet with the names, job titles, organizations, email addresses, telephone numbers, and comments for the people you meet through your networking efforts. This will enable you to manage your search much more effectively.

RESOURCES:

Quintessential Careers: www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html

The Undisputed Expert in Online Networking Is...Linked In.

As I sit here writing this, the most popular networking tool online for facilitating introductions between and building relationships for professionals, business people, recruiters and hiring managers is:

www.Linkedin.com. There are currently over 90 million users on Linked In.

Once you create your profile in LinkedIn, you can join up to 50 groups of professionals that work in the industries you are interested in breaking into. Join the Groups that interest you most, and actively follow the discussions that take place in those groups.

Other popular networking sites include:

- www.twitter.com
- www.unyk.com
- www.meetup.com – a great tool for finding groups of professionals in your area that share your professional background, training, experience and credentials and networking with them.
- www.myfamily.com
- Facebook: If you have not already done so, be sure to convert your existing Facebook profile that you use for personal use into a professional account OR create a new Facebook profile just for job searching and professional development activities
- A comprehensive list can be found on Wikipedia:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

There is a service called **www.Friendfeed.com**. It allows you to integrate your communications with peers, friends, and family across Yahoo, Gmail, Twitter, and Facebook. You might wish to create an account here, to bring together your disparate social networking efforts.

Create Your Bio on These Sites

For the social networking websites that you want to have a presence on, you need to create a professional bio, also called a profile. That way, people you meet or have worked with can contribute recommendations on your profile page and connect to you, so you can build your network online.