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Networking Interviews

Definitions

Informational Interviews are used to gather information and assist you in narrowing your job search targets. They are used to supplement information you already have about a profession as a result of secondary research and speaking to people informally about your choice(s).

Following is a list of reasons to conduct an informational interview:

- to explore careers and clarify your career goal
- to access the most up-to-date career information
- to identify your professional strengths and weaknesses
- to expand your professional network
- to build confidence for your job interviews

Referral Interviews are used to build a network of contacts, gather information about how to obtain a position in a job market, and match you with a job in which you can be successful. While you may ask the same kinds of questions in a referral interview as you do in an informational interview, your reasons for conducting the interview are different.

Following is a list of reasons to conduct a referral interview:

- to expand your network of contacts
- to learn more about critical skills and qualities needed for success... in an industry, a company culture, or specific position
- to learn and practice the language of the profession
- to get advice on how to improve your prospects for hire
- to develop relationships with people who can provide you with information that can differentiate you from your competitors in an interview
- to learn about new contacts and opportunities that you wouldn't learn about if you weren't conducting the interview, e.g., employment opportunities that are not advertised

Referral Interviews and The Job Search

There are four basic principles of human nature that are fundamental to this process. First, people like to say "yes": they dislike rejecting you. Second, people like and need honest recognition. Third, people like to give advice; asking a person's advice is granting that person recognition. Fourth, people prefer to be approached gradually; they dislike being put under pressure.

The Referral Interview is a purposeful discussion with another person about your career. It is an excellent way to obtain information and to make contacts. When implemented correctly, it will lead to job interviews. Your understanding of the purpose and technique of the Referral approach is going to be one of the most important tools for your job search.

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Hard And Fast Rules Of A Referral Interview:

Never ask for a job. When you ask interviewees for a job, you put them under pressure. When you make it clear to them that you do not expect them to have a job opening, or to know of one, you take the pressure off them. They become more willing to listen to you and to remember you favorably.

In no way are you trying to hide the fact that you are looking for a position. You are on an active job search, with the specific purpose of finding the right position, and it is very important that the interviewee is aware of this.

Every referral interview has FIVE SPECIFIC PURPOSES:

1. To establish rapport with your contact;
2. To give and receive information about your job market;
3. To get advice on, and reaction to, the way you conduct your market campaign;
4. To continue building your contact network by asking for one or more referrals; and
5. To be remembered favorably and actively by contacts.

Conducting a Referral Interview

1. Identify contacts. People you already know might be a good source of information and advice. Ask friends, relatives, professors, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. if they know someone you can speak with who might be helpful to you.
 - Your ideal interview candidate is someone who had the position you seek within the past five years, but someone working within one of your target companies is also helpful.
2. Arrange the interview. With permission to use the name of the person who referred you, arrange the interview. Contact the person to set up an interview by telephone, by an email followed by a telephone call, or by having someone who knows the person make the appointment for you. An example follows:
 - Hello Mr. Jones, my name is YOUR NAME. Sally Smith indicated you would be a good person for me to speak with for information and advice on the NAME industry. I'm a senior at Trine University and am gathering information for my job search. I will not ask you for a job, just for your information and advice. If possible, I'd like to set up a short meeting with you in the next two weeks.

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Treat the appointment as you would a job interview. Prepare for the interview by researching the company in which your contact works. Dress professionally. Print out a list of ten questions you'd like to ask your contact. Bring copies of your resume with you to the interview. Consider emailing a confirmation of your appointment with your professional resume attached to the message as background information about you.

3. Be flexible and listen. Be prepared to run the meeting, but allow the interviewee to take over if they are prepared with an agenda. Listen carefully to the advice.
4. Ask for additional referrals. After thanking your contact for his or her time, ask if he or she knows of one or two other people that you might be able to speak with for information and advice.
5. Send a thank you card. Ask for a business card and send a thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview. Personalize it, let them know your next steps, and follow through.

Informational/Referral Interview Questions

For a 30 minute interview, select no more than 10 questions.

1. How did you become interested in this field?

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2. What are the responsibilities and duties of your position?
3. How would you describe the demands of your position with respect to time involved per week, pressures, job complexity and people problems?
4. What do you do on a typical day in your job?
5. Did you do anything yesterday that was different from the day before? Last week? Last month?

CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKERS IN THIS OCCUPATION

6. What kind of people do you work with? Do you like them?
7. What sorts of special knowledge does a person need to have in order to do this occupation/role well?
8. What kinds of personal characteristics do you notice in people who are very good at this occupation/role?
9. What kinds of skills or abilities does a person need to be good at in order to do this occupation/role well?

SATISFACTIONS AND FRUSTRATIONS

10. What do you like best about your occupation?
11. What characteristics of this position cause the most frustration or dissatisfaction at times?

QUALIFICATIONS NEEDED

12. What qualifications are needed for this kind of work: education, training, experience, license/credentials, Union membership?
13. Can people specialize in this occupation? If so, what are the areas of specialization?
14. What are the career ladder possibilities in this field?
15. What advice would you give to a person planning to do this type of work?
16. What kinds of things do you think people should look for in a job?

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FUTURE OUTLOOK

17. What kinds of changes are taking place in this type of work?
18. What does the future look like? Will there be good opportunities for someone like me?
19. Are people with your kinds of skills usually needed even when business may be bad?
20. What experiences and training on the job might prepare you for another jobs should you ever want to change, or need to change?
21. What other occupations are related to this field?
22. If an individual does not want to or cannot work full-time, are there opportunities for part-time work or job sharing?

YOUR LIFESTYLE AND THIS OCCUPATION

23. What problems, if any, do you see in combining a marriage/family with this occupation?
24. How can a person who takes time out to rear a family remain professionally alert during his/her parental leave away from his/her professional field or occupation?
25. How many hours a day do you have for leisure activities?
26. What are your leisure activities?
27. Did any of your leisure activities increase your ability to obtain this job or to help you perform better on this job?
28. Who else do you recommend in a position such as yours or a related position that I might talk with? (If the employer does refer you to someone else, be sure to ask if you may mention his/her name to the other person.)

Some helpful sources on Informational/Referral Interviews include:

- Quintessential Careers: Informational Interviewing Tutorial: See, “Before the Informational Interview.” <http://www.quintcareers.com/tutorials.html>
- Alvernia College Career Services: Note the section about conducting the informational interview. <http://www.alvernia.edu/careerservices/interviewing.htm>
- Hasse, J. Essential Career Marketing Tactic: Preparing for Informational/referral Interviews. eSight Careers Network. (November 2002). <http://www.esight.org/>

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Referral Interview Sample Correspondence

YourFirstName YourLastName

Address

City, State, Zip

Mr./Ms. Contact Name

Title

Company

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear Mr./Ms. Contact:

I was referred to you by Diane Smithers from XYZ company in Angola. She recommended you as an excellent person to seek advice from for the communications field.

I would like to schedule a meeting with you to learn more about your personal experiences and to seek your advice on how I might best prepare myself to be successful in your field. This meeting will take about 30 to 40 minutes, and I will prepare questions in advance of our meeting.

Please let me know your availability for a meeting within the next two weeks. I will call you to follow up in the near future. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

YourFirstName YourLastName