

# **THE Lawyer's Career Management Handbook: Your Bridge to a Satisfying Career**

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## Chapter 7:

# Informational Interviewing

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Whether you are considering options inside or outside the law, informational interviewing considerably facilitates career exploration. What better way to learn about a particular career path than from a primary source?

### ◆ TOP 10 REASONS TO CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

- (1) Enhance your knowledge of, and assess your interest in, a particular field.
- (2) Gain insight into current regional market conditions and hiring trends.
- (3) Evaluate your qualifications for a particular career path.
- (4) Clarify your career goals and next action steps.
- (5) Identify ways to gain additional skills and training to enhance your candidacy.
- (6) Learn essential information to target your application materials.
- (7) Begin to formulate tailored interview responses.
- (8) Establish and build rapport with contacts.
- (9) Expand your network through referrals to additional contacts.
- (10) Discover potential job opportunities.

**§ 7:1 Identifying whom to target**

To conduct informational interviews, first identify professionals in your interest area with whom you might like to speak. Start with people that you already know. Consider family; friends; law school and college classmates, professors, and alumni; current and former colleagues and supervisors; and professional and community acquaintances. Even if your own contacts lack the experience you seek, ask whether they know any professionals in the specific field. You can also contact your law school or college career services or alumni office to find alumni with the experience you seek. Research trade associations and read trade journals to identify professionals in the field. If you are exploring within the legal field, search such resources as Martindale Hubbell and the Directory of Corporate Counsel to locate lawyers in a specific practice area.

**§ 7:2 Arranging an informational interview**

Whether trying to connect with a friend or a stranger, ideally arrange to speak in-person. Face-to-face meetings better allow you to establish rapport, and the contact will be more likely to think of you if he or she learns of openings. Communicating by phone is a next-best option, especially when a contact is in a different locale. While email can be a useful tool to schedule an informational interview, do not try to actually conduct the interview electronically.



Your approach to requesting an informational interview will vary depending on your relationship with the contact. If you know the contact well, then you may simply call or email to suggest a time to meet for lunch, coffee, drinks, or dinner.

If reaching out to an acquaintance or following up on a referral, then either call or send an introductory email noting your connection. For example:

*My colleague, Bob Jones, recommended that I contact you. I am currently a litigation associate at Andrews & Andrews, where I have done significant immigration pro bono work. I have found this work extremely rewarding and am interested in working full-time on public interest immigration matters. Bob suggested that you may have some advice as to how I might approach such a career transition. I was hoping that you might be available to meet, on an informational basis, at a time of your convenience. I can be reached at this email address and at xxx.xxx.xxxx. Thank you in advance for your time.*

Similarly, if you are trying to arrange a meeting with someone that you do not know and have no close connection to, then you

can send an email introducing yourself and explaining why you are writing. For example:

*I am a fellow Georgetown alum and found your name in the alumni directory. I am currently a fourth-year securities associate at Jones & Hayes and am seeking to transition to a career with the Securities and Exchange Commission. I was hoping to have the opportunity to speak briefly with you on an informational basis about your experience at the SEC and to get your advice on the federal government job search generally. I am available at this email address and at xxx.xxx.xxxx. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your time.*

◆ **TIPS**

- Make it clear in your initial communication that you are asking for information, not a job.
- Do not attach your resume to the email so you do not appear to be asking for a job.
- If you do not hear back from the contact in about a week, and your initial communication was via email, then follow-up with a phone call referencing your prior email. Alternatively, if your initial communication was a voicemail message, you can follow-up with an email referencing your message.
- Keep your email or voicemail message short. The goal is simply to arrange a time to speak, not to get answers to specific questions.

### **§ 7:3 Preparing for an informational interview**

Plan ahead to make the best impression and to make the most of the interview. While the timing will vary depending on the contact's schedule and availability, you should generally plan for a 20–30 minute conversation.

Spend some time researching the field generally, the individual, and his or her organization. While this is not a job interview, you want to appear knowledgeable about the field and have a general sense of the contact's experience. Review the organization's website, and note whether any current job openings exist. If an opening exists, you may want to ask the contact about his or her knowledge of the position to help you evaluate whether you want to apply.

Prepare a list of questions ahead of time, tailored to your contact's experience.

#### **◆ SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- Describe the type of work you do on a daily basis. What does a typical day look like?

- How did you get into this practice or field?
- Where did you work before this organization? What was your experience like there? Why did you transition?
- What skills, knowledge, and experience are most important for your type of work?
- What have been some of your most interesting projects?
- How much interaction do you have with colleagues and clients?
- What do you like most about your job? What are some of the challenges?
- Is there growth opportunity for attorneys or other professionals in this field and in this city?
- What qualifications are required (or preferred) for entrance into this field?
- What is a typical salary range for someone with my background?
- Given my interest in this field, what other organizations would you recommend I look into?
- Do you know anyone else in this field that might also be willing to speak with me about their experience? May I use your name and reference our conversation as an introduction?
- Can you suggest how I might learn of openings in this area?
- Do you know of possible volunteer or contract work opportunities in this area?
- What job search resources and trade journals would you recommend?
- Which professional organizations do you recommend I join, and which conferences should I attend?
- Do you have any other advice regarding my job search and career goals?



While you conduct the informational interview, the contact may ask you questions in return. Therefore, in addition to preparing questions for the contact, prepare your own responses to such questions as: Why are you interested in this area? What experience do you have in this field? Why do you seek to leave your current position? When do you hope or plan to make this transition?

#### **§ 7:4 Conducting an informational interview**

While the informational interview is not a job interview, you do want to present yourself as a polished professional. What you wear may depend on the nature of the relationship and the context or setting of the actual meeting, so use your best judgment. In general, dressing in business casual is appropriate if you anticipate that the contact will be dressed similarly. If,

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however, the contact will likely be wearing a suit, then you should wear a suit. When in doubt, err on the more formal side.

Like any interview, a good informational interview is a dialogue. As the interviewer, however, you need to be prepared to guide the conversation. Most people (especially attorneys) like to talk about themselves and their profession, so listen carefully and allow the contact to do most of the talking. Bring a pad of paper and a pen so you can jot down information and, hopefully, names of referrals. You can bring your resume in case the contact asks for it, but again be cautious not to appear as if you are asking for a job.

Try to relax and adopt a conversational tone for the meeting. In addition to getting information and advice, you want to begin to establish a relationship with the contact. Do not be afraid to discuss other topics about which you have a mutual connection or interest. Likewise, remember, you asked for the meeting, so if you are getting coffee or lunch offer and be prepared to pick up the bill.



## **§ 7:5 Following up**

Be sure to send a thank-you note following the informational interview. Email is usually appropriate and allows for an easy reply. Thank the contact for his or her time, advice, and information. If the contact gave you any referrals or other specific advice, note how you plan to follow-up.

Once you have made the effort to create these new contacts, maintain the relationships. Let them know how you have followed-through on their suggestions and advice. Keep them updated on your job search. Send along relevant articles they might find interesting or offer to introduce them to others with whom they may share a mutual interest. As much as possible, you will want to establish and continue a reciprocal professional relationship.

Informational interviews require an investment of time and energy, but they are an excellent way to ensure that your next career move is in the right direction and to further your job search efforts.