

# Networking & Informational Interviewing

## Uncovering Opportunities

You can find information about many careers in the library, on the Internet and by talking with people you know or others know. Working conditions, geographic location, skill qualification and employment outlook are just some of the topics covered. If you have some of the following questions, you can find the answers:

- What college majors are available? What classes are needed for a particular major? Can I have more than one major?
- What type of occupations would satisfy my skills, interests, values and personality?
- What do people in these occupations do all day?
- What are the average salaries for these occupations? What type of education or additional training will I need to pursue these different careers?
- How many hours a week does a person in this occupation work?

A number of avenues are possible for uncovering new opportunities. While the best options are informational interviewing and networking, you can also research potential careers by:

- Meeting with recruiters and attending job fairs.
- Reading newspapers and national publications.
- Visiting your local Chamber of Commerce and professional associations affiliated with specific careers.

## Six Degrees of Separation

Any two people in the world can be linked through just six social ties or so scientists believe. While the Internet has proven to be a useful tool and may even connect us to others around the world, it is your family, friends, classmates and acquaintances that form the web of your personal and professional networks.

What is a network?

- Your network includes your family, friends, classmates, professors, and co-workers.
- Your network is essentially anyone you know on at least a casual basis.

The good news is that you are already building your network every day. Each time you attend a job fair, reception, dinner, school event, conference or lecture, you are essentially networking by meeting people with similar interests and passions. You are networking!

- 80% of jobs are found through networking (Forbes.com)
- 1 of every 200 resumes results in a job offer (Quintessential Careers)
- 1 of every 12 informational interviews, however, results in a job offer (Quintessential Careers)

Your opportunity to network and build your list of resources may take place in a classroom, in your residence hall, or in your science lab. Networking does not have to be superficial or aggressive. In fact, a good networker is positive, respectful and a good listener—not simply persistent.

Good networkers keep in touch with the people they know and not just when they are looking for a new job. Job hunts often stall because personal networks are neglected. Strangers will seldom be as responsive and interested in your life as people whom you've met before, even if the meeting was a brief one. There is a reason why cold calling is called cold calling.

### **Five Reasons to Conduct an Informational Interview**

1. Gather firsthand information about the fields, positions, organizations and industries that have sparked your interest.
2. Build your confidence for actual job interviews.
3. Clarify your career goals by exploring fields.
4. Learn about a field's job growth potential, training requirements and salary possibilities.
5. Gain an "insider's view" to better evaluate whether a field or position matches your own personality, interests and values.

### **How to Find the Right People**

Write down the names of all the people you know who are either in your field of interest or know someone who is. Begin with relatives and friends, acquaintances and neighbors, Hamline alumni and professional association members, co-workers and supervisors, as well as classmates and professors. Professional journals, newsletters or newspaper articles often identify leaders in particular fields. Perhaps you have an opportunity to attend a conference or seminar in your interest area. Relationships are the cornerstone of finding a job and building a career. With each phone call to a friend or relative, professor or neighbor, you will likely come away with more names to consider (be sure to ask for more names!).

We recommend that all students practice the following while networking:

- Ask for advice and/or information regarding a particular field or industry, do not ask for a job or internship.
- Do not ask a contact to mass distribute your resume.
- Do not share a networking contact's information without permission.
- Do not spam a contact with multiple emails or stalk with multiple phone calls.
- Follow-up with a brief thank-you letter after networking with an individual.

**LinkedIn's Alumni Tool** is another way to find Hamline connections. Explore to see where graduates live, the organizations they work for, and the types of jobs they've had. You can also narrow your search by date range, what they studied, what they're skilled at, and how you're connected on LinkedIn. Meet with a career counselor for more detailed information on how to use LinkedIn.

You do not have to conduct informational interviews with every person you have on your list. However, do not settle for one or two interviews. Select the top five to seven contacts on your list for informational interviews and begin there. Information gathered should be taken with a grain of salt. If you talk with one professional they are only giving you information from their own perspective. Talk with a variety of professionals in different work environments or settings.

### **Setting Up an Interview**

You may either call or email a contact to request an interview. Always give your name and affiliation with Hamline University. Follow a "to do" list during your request:

- Set a specific date and time for the meeting
- Get complete directions to their place of business and details about parking options
- Leave your phone number in case the meeting needs to be rescheduled
- Know the person's title so you know who to ask for when you arrive

**Always ask for a meeting in person.** An in-person interview provides you an opportunity to see work environments. People are also more likely to remember you from a one-to-one meeting rather than from a phone conversation or email exchange.

**Explain the purpose of your visit.** For example, if you would like to discuss a career in communications and your contact is a reporter, ask if it is possible to have a tour around the newsroom.

**Be flexible.** The time allotted varies so be flexible and prepared. Some sessions can be as brief as twenty minutes while others may include an hour-long meeting, a cup of coffee and a tour.

**The Art of Conversation** - Your informational interview is a conversation not a sales job!

**If you ask for a job,** you run the risk of offending the person you are speaking with and will likely destroy a golden opportunity to gather valuable information.

**If you stick to information gathering** and avoid job-hunting, the person you are speaking with may be more comfortable and share a unique perspective of their career field and work environment. Because you are not carrying the pressure of trying to land a “real job”, you have more time and opportunity to ask the questions that are most important to you.

- Your preparation will keep you focused and ensure that your time and the time of your interviewee are well spent.
- An Informational Interview requires your consideration and attention before, during and after the interview.

Here is a sample email message to send to a contact. You may adapt and use as a phone script as well, but an email is less intrusive and a nice way to start the conversation, unless you know this person prefers phone conversations.

*Subject: Referral from Vanessa Jones for questions on career planning*

*Dear Mr. Clemski,*

*Vanessa Jones, my softball coach at Hamline University, suggested I contact you to discuss my career plans. I am a senior accounting major and am very interested in learning more about the Big Four Accounting Firms as well as some other local firms in the Minneapolis/ St.Paul area. Vanessa was telling me that you have had a wonderful experience working at KPMG.*

*I'm wondering if you would be willing to spare 30 minutes of your time to chat with me about your career and working at KPMG, specifically. I would be happy to take you out for coffee or meet you at your office. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be grateful for any assistance you could provide.*

*Sincerely,*

*Peggy Piper  
651-555-4932  
[www.linkedin.com/in/PeggyPiper](http://www.linkedin.com/in/PeggyPiper)*

Do not attach a resume to your email. You are solely asking for information at this point and you do not want the interviewee to assume you are asking for a job or internship by attaching your resume. Also, do not ask the interviewee to call you to set up a time. You may ask what a good time to call them may be, so the work is on you-not them.

## **Informational Interviews by Phone or Email**

While in-person informational interviews are preferable to phone or e-mail contact, people's time is more and more limited. You can conduct an informational interview over the phone or by e-mail simply by modifying a few steps in the process:

- Prepare your self-introduction and a list of questions
- Ask for ten minutes of a person's time
- Tell the person you are speaking with that you are looking for the names of people they might know in your field of interest
- Ask if you could send your resume and ask for a meeting to talk further
- Record all contacts given to you but try to set up meetings in person

Sometimes you may have trouble getting past the front desk to set up a meeting or have conversation. Turn this roadblock to your advantage. Receptionists and personal assistants can be a gold mine of information for you and often know much more about the workplace than we acknowledge. Be creative. Ask support staff questions about job requirements, the names of key people, and the pace of the workplace.

### **Before the Interview**

- Research the industry, career area and organization the person represents.
- Keep track of all your possibilities in a spreadsheet, notebook or any method that works well for you. Did a contact name come from an alumni or a family member? Where does the contact work and what is his or her job title?
- Develop a list of potential questions regarding the organization, people, position, field or work and how the person came to the organization and his/her career.
- Plan and practice an introduction for yourself briefly outlining your interest and skills.
- Update your resume and bring a copy of the interview; your contact may ask you for a copy.
- Be prepared to tell the interviewee about your skills, abilities, experiences and goals if asked.
- Make sure you have the time and date of the interview and directions to the site on your calendar.

### **Day of the Interview**

- Dress professionally as you would for any interview.
- Arrive ten minutes early.
- Bring a small notebook with your questions and a pen.
- Introduce yourself. Thank the person for their time and willingness to meet with you.
- Give a brief interest summary and explain how you decided to call this contact but don't ramble.
- Ask your prepared questions but listen closely to the conversation as it may generate other questions.
- Show enthusiasm and interest.
- Make eye contact.
- Take notes on the conversation, work environment and how other employees interact with each other.
- Keep track of time.
- Ask for referrals. This will keep your networking growing! "Do you know anyone else I might contact?"
- You may ask the interviewee if it would be okay to provide your resume to him or her and ask for any advice. You may also offer to send it via email after your meeting.
- Thank the person for his/her time, interest and information.
- Ask for the person's business card.

## **After the Interview**

- Write a short, personal thank you note with mention of one or two pieces of information you found helpful and a pledge to keep in touch. (You should also send a thank you or email to the original person who made the introduction, if applicable).
- Review your notes from the interview.
- Record the name of the person interviewed, the date of the interview, notes from the meeting, the main things you learned and new contact names acquired.
- Keep in touch with those you meet and let them know about your progress.
- Add your new contacts on LinkedIn.
- If you received a name from a person you interviewed, be sure to follow the lead.

## **Questions to ask during the interview**

### **How Did You Get Started?**

- How did you choose this industry and this organization?
- How long have you worked in this field and with this organization?
- How did you get to this point in your career?
- Would you have taken the same path or not?
- What is a typical career path in this field?

### **What Are the Skills Required for the Job?**

- What type of educational degree, training, experience is required? What kinds of courses are most valuable in order to gain the skills necessary to work in this field?
- What suggestions can you give me for obtaining an entry-level position in your field? Which organizations in this industry have the best training programs? Why do you think so?
- What type of person is most successful in this field?

### **What is a Typical Day Like?**

- Please describe a typical day, week, month?
- What do you like most about your work?
- What are the major frustrations of your position?
- How much work-related travel is involved with your job?
- How many hours a week do you work, including evenings and weekends?

### **What is the Outlook for Your Field?**

- Do you see your field as one that will grow in the future?
- What suggestions do you have for discovering or identifying job opportunities in this field? What are the positions that may be in a related field?
- Can you suggest other people who might be good sources of information? Which professional publications or journals would be useful for me to read or subscribe to?

## **Informational Interview Contact Log**

Come up with an organizational system for keeping track of your potential contacts, notes on your interaction, dates you plan to follow up and any “to-dos” that came from your conversation (especially new contact referrals). It is important to maintain records on all your networking activities.

## **Top 10 Ways for You to Shine**

1. Enjoy networking. Lighten up and have fun. Share your personality.
2. Learn about people’s interests and share yours with them.

3. Have your story ready to share. Anticipate questions people may ask you about your goals and interests and be ready to answer.
4. People like to be kept up to date. Send a note, leave a voice mail, or fire off an email. Don't just be in touch when you need a person's help.
5. Practice your handshake. A firm handshake will build your confidence and those you meet.
6. Maintain good eye contact in conversations. Don't scan the room for your next prospect.
7. Listen. By being an active listener you will build your reputation.
8. Be genuine. Networking is a tool but it is also about conversation.
9. Respect each person you meet and not just because what they may be able to do for you.
10. Cast a wide net. Incorporate people you meet in student groups, at the gym, at work, at social gatherings into your network.

### Top 10 Fatal Flaws

1. Avoid the "hard sell". A potential employer does not want to be pressured, rather persuaded.
2. Do not monopolize someone's time. Be respectful of a person's commitments.
3. Do not intrude on a conversation, include yourself in it gracefully.
4. Do not dress inappropriately for the occasion.
5. Be careful whom you align yourself with. Others may be using you to advocate their own cause.
6. Lower your voice. The whole room doesn't need to hear you.
7. Don't brag about your skills. Let your resume and persuasion speak for itself.
8. Steer clear of "put down" humor.
9. Networking is not simply job hunting. If you focus on finding a job, you will be disappointed.
10. Do not gossip and spread information.

### Next Steps

So, your interest has been piqued. Now it is time to take a test flight to see if your choices may be a good fit.

- **Talk** with professors or students in majors you are considering. Take a class within a particular major to determine if you enjoy it.
- **Develop** or update your resume and cover letter and plan for the internship or job search. Have a CDC counselor review your documents.
- **Land** an internship in a specific area to see if it is a possible career choice; visit the CDC to determine how to find an internship and receive LEAP credit.
- **Continue** to conduct informational interviews with people in the field.
- **Read** books in the CDC library to find out what you can do within particular majors and jobs.
- **Find** a part-time job or summer job in a particular area.
- **Reflect** back on skills, interests, values, personality to see if the career is indeed a good fit.
- **Ask** your professors, advisors, and internship supervisors for potential leads.
- **Prepare** for job interviews by participating in a practice interview.
- **Research** graduate programs and prepare for graduate school.

### Remember

#### **A Good Networker:**

- Keeps in touch with the people they know and not just when he or she is looking for a new job. Too often job hunts stall because personal networks are neglected.
- Is positive, respectful and a good listener – not simply persistent.