

HOW TO FACILITATE AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL:

- Introduce yourself and clearly state that you are writing for information only.
- Use the same professional format and language you would for a cover letter.
- Ask if you can set up a time for a telephone interview. *Be prepared to conduct the interview if the contact wants to talk to you immediately.*
- You should not request a face-to-face meeting unless you know the person well or you are going to be in the area (e.g., for fall break). If the individual offers to meet with you, accept the invitation and try to pick up the tab for any meals, coffee, etc.
- Tell them it will take only 30 minutes and stick with that timeframe.
- Alternatively, if you are going to be in the area, give the dates when you will be there and ask for an informational interview.
- State at the bottom of the email that YOU will contact him or her and specify a time frame (within two weeks). Be sure to provide your complete contact information as well.
- You may attach your resume, but make it clear that it is only for reference.

Sample Requesting an Informational Interview 1:

Hi [Name]:

I was excited to find your name on the Krannert Network while searching for contacts in the Bay area. As a second-year MBA student, I am focusing significant energy on my post-graduation job search, specifically looking at company culture and geographic location.

[Company Name] looks like it may provide an excellent match with my skills and career goal of working in marketing for a socially-responsible business. I am in the process of planning a trip to the Bay area to visit companies and meet alumni to learn more about their lives within those companies. I would very much like to meet you while I'm in town October 16 through 19.

I will call you on Friday. My schedule is free for travel on most Thursdays and Fridays if you aren't available any of those days.

All the best,

[Your Name]

Sample E-mails Requesting an Informational Interview – 2:

Dear [Name]:

I am a first-year MBA student at Purdue University's Krannert School of Management, originally from the Chicago area. After following corporate social and environmental responsibility issues for many years, I am very impressed with your work at [firm name]. I am pursuing a career in this area and would appreciate your advice on next steps.

I will be in Chicago on Monday December 29th, Tuesday December 30th and Friday January 2nd and I would very much appreciate an informational interview. I will call you on Monday to follow up and possibly set up a short appointment, either via phone or in person. In the meantime, please feel free to contact me at [Phone] or [Email].

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

INTRODUCTORY PHONE CALLS:

- This is normally a very brief (no more than five minutes unless the contact offers to spend more time) conversation, not a time to get into detail about your background.
- Precede your phone call with an introductory e-mail to let the person know you will be contacting him or her. This will also give the individual multiple options for getting back to you.
- Follow up promptly per the timeframes you set out in your introductory correspondence.
- Ask to set up a time for an informational interview. Be prepared to conduct the interview if the contact wants to talk to you immediately.
- If you get the individual's voice mail, do not ask him or her to return your call; rather, say you'll try again. Students are often difficult to contact during business hours; therefore, you should initiate all calls. Leave a message such as, "My name is Sally Smith. I'm a student in the MBA Program at Purdue University's Krannert School of Management and I'm following up on the e-mail I sent you last week about setting up a time to talk with you about your experiences in finance at J&J. I'll try to call again tomorrow."

Sample Introductory Phone Call

Alumna: Hello, this is Beth.

You: Hello. My name is Sarah Miles. I'm a first-year MBA student at Purdue University's Krannert School of Management. I was given your name and number from one of the coaches in KPDC. I'm calling to ask if you might have about 30 minutes sometime in the next few days to share some of your job experiences with me.

Alumna: Sure, I'd be happy to talk to you. I have to run to a meeting in a few minutes. Why don't we set up a time for next week.

You: Great! I think all I would need is a half an hour on the phone-what would be convenient for you?

Alumna: How about Thursday at 2:30?

You: I have a class at that time, but I could talk at either 1:30 or 4:00.

Alumna: OK. Why don't we try Thursday at 1:30 then? I don't want you to miss your class.

You: Thank you. I'd appreciate that. I will call you at 1:30 next Thursday the 21st. Thank you very much-I really appreciate your taking time to talk to me. I look forward to learning more next week.

Alumna: It's my pleasure. I remember what it was like to try to figure out what to do after graduation. You're smart to start thinking about these things in your first year. I'm always happy to help out Purdue University students. I'll talk to you next week.

You: Thanks again. Good-bye.

THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW:

- Ask for a telephone interview first.
- Whether by phone or in person, have a list of questions prepared so you can keep your ideas well organized. See worksheet in this section.
 - Be on time (not even one minute late) for both phone and personal interviews and maintain a courteous and professional demeanor. Plan ahead so unexpected events such as traffic or weather don't delay you.
- Be clear from the outset that you are interested in learning about opportunities in the field in which your contact works, not seeking consideration for a specific job or internship.
- Close the interview with a thank you and a polite request for names of other people who might be able to give you additional insight into the industry or company.
- See "Effective Phone Interview Techniques" in this section for more detail and a sample telephone interview.
- Follow up all telephone interviews and personal interactions with thank-you e-mails, even to those contacts who weren't able to assist you at this time.

Body of Sample Thank-you E-mail:

Dear John:

Thank you again for speaking with me this morning. I enjoyed our conversation about Proctor & Gamble and the interesting turns your career path has taken. In particular, it was great to hear your perspective on how your Krannert School of Management degree prepared you for your first position in the consumer products industry.

Our discussion regarding the concept of tryvertising was especially enlightening. I am enclosing an article I found on this subject from Brand Strategy, which provides yet another point of view on this topic.

Finally, I wanted to thank you for providing me the names of Susan Brown and James Doe. I plan to contact them tomorrow morning.

Sincerely,

Dan Smith

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR CONVERSATIONS AND SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- Particular fields, organizations, or industries for various functional areas:
 - Why did you choose this field/industry?
 - Do you enjoy it? What are the pros and cons?
 - What are the most important personal satisfactions connected with your occupation?
 - What parts of your job do you find most challenging?
 - What do you view as the most important issues for [company] in the next five years?
- Job market in this field:
 - What types of positions do people in this industry hold?
 - Is there a particular profession in this industry that is growing faster than others?
 - What profession in this industry attracts the most MBAs and why do you think this is?
 - What is a typical career path in this field?
- Skills, educational background, and experience necessary for various job opportunities:
 - What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
 - What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field or position?
 - Are there specific classes that you would recommend I take?
 - Are there other ways —outside of the classroom that a student can obtain this necessary experience to get started in this occupation?
 - What special advice do you have for an MBA student seeking to qualify for this position?
 - What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
- Company culture and expectations:
 - Why did you decide to work for this company?
 - Can you describe the work environment in your organization in terms of individual effort vs. teamwork, pressures deadlines, workload, etc.?
 - How often does your company get together for social activities, and what are the expectations of attendance?

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR CONVERSATIONS AND SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- Average workday of someone employed in a field or organization:
 - What do you do? I'm sure there isn't a "typical day," but what are some of the projects you've worked on?
- How different kinds of organizations recruit and hire new people:
 - How did you obtain this position? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
 - Does your company traditionally hire from within or recruit from other companies?
 - What strategies would you use to get your foot in the door if you were starting out now?
- Professional organizations and publications associated with the field:
 - What publications do you read?
 - Would you recommend any specific publications to someone just learning about the field?
 - Are you a member of any professional Organizations, and if so, do you know if they offer student memberships?
- Career paths of professionals in the field
 - Is there any particular career path?

CHECKLIST FOR PHONE INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Plan Ahead

- Pay attention to your mood never make calls at a moment when you are feeling bad, frustrated, or irritated. Convey an upbeat, positive attitude regardless of the situation. Smile-it comes through in your voice!
- Don't call from a cell phone - use a land line. You won't need to worry about dropping the call
- Make sure you're in a quiet place before calling.

Voice and Speech Patterns

- Pay attention to your posture - Sit-up straight or stand. Your voice tends to project more clearly and with greater energy when you stand.
- Maintain a slightly slower pace of speech than for a face-to-face exchange.
- Avoid monotones!! Use voice tone and inflection to convey energy, enthusiasm, and emphasis.
- Answer questions concisely. Use streamlined or "bullet-point" like structure to convey information.
- Use phrases like "I see" "OK," and "Yes" periodically to signal the speaker that you're engaged and understand what they're communicating.

Use of Silence

- When there's too little silence:
 - Conversation flows too quickly -not a comfortable pace.
 - Interviewer/caller has difficulty "absorbing* main points.
- When there's too much silence: am Conversation can be awkward.
 - One or both parties may be left wondering if the other is still listening-or got disconnected!
- So WHEN and HOW should silence be used?
 - Pause after important points for emphasis.
 - Allow the listener enough time to absorb essential information and take notes.
 - Allow ample time to formulate a thoughtful response to difficult questions.

Projecting Confidence and Poise: Preparation is the key!

Items to have with you during an informational interview:

- Resume & cover letter you sent to that individual
- Interview preparation notes---your 30 second introduction, information concerning the contact, points to make regarding your background/experience, etc.
- Notes from company research O Questions to ask your contact O Date book/planner/FDA to schedule follow-up calls or meetings

Wrapping Up the Call: Your Concluding Comments

- Summarize or restate your unique selling proposition and why you wish to join their company.
- Request an "in-person" interview where appropriate.
- Thank the interviewer for their time and inquire about the next steps/timeframe for making a hiring decision.

You're Not Done Yet: After the Call

- Jot down your initial impressions.
- Document questions you had difficulty answering.
- Record your follow up action, date, time, and person(s) in your planner or cell-phone.
- Send a thank-you e-mail immediately.
- If the interview was the result of a referral, thank the person who referred you, and update them on your progress!

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Introduce yourself:

Contact: "Hello—Lilly Armstrong."

You: "Hello. This is Dan Smith. I made an appointment with you last week for an informational interview. Is this still a convenient time for you to speak with me?"

Contact: "Yes, hello, Dan. Hang on for one minute--I'm on the other line.... OK, I'm back. How can I help you?"

Build a relationship:

You: "As I mentioned in my letter, I'm a first-year MBA student at Purdue University's Krannert School of Management and I'm exploring different career paths and opportunities in the field of brand management. I'm simply gathering information at this point-not looking for a job. If you're willing, I'd like to ask you some questions about what you do and get your perspective on the field."

Contact: "Sure--go ahead."

Ask questions:

At this point, you will engage your contact in a conversation about his or her work, allowing him or her to be the expert. Be friendly, pleasant, and upbeat throughout your conversation. As well as you can, let the conversation flow naturally--don't force the interview to follow your script exactly as you've written it. It is always good to "warm up" the conversation by starting out with open-ended questions that ask the interviewer about him or herself. Some questions you might ask:

- What do you do? What kinds of projects do you work on?
- How did you get started in this field?
- What is your typical day (week) like at _____? What different kinds of activities are you engaged in? How many accounts do you work on? What kinds of clients do you serve? What kinds of services do you provide?
- What do you enjoy most about what you do? What do you enjoy least?
- What kinds of skills and abilities are required for this type of work? • What kinds of people are successful in this field (this organization)?
- What training or education is required for this type of work?
- Can you describe the work environment in your organization in terms of individual effort vs. teamwork, pressure, deadlines, workload, etc.?
- What publications are especially important for people in your field?
- If you were starting out now, how would you get into this field? What strategies would you use to get your foot in the door? What advice would you give to someone in my position? What makes a resume go to the top of the pile?
- How does your firm or organization differ from others in your field?

Provide background on yourself:

You: Thank you. This has been so helpful to me. If it's okay with you, I'd like to give you a little background about my interests...." (Provide a brief sketch of your educational background and current interests. Practice this sketch in advance so you'll express yourself comfortably and briefly).

Contact: "It sounds like you've thought a lot about what you want to do, which is great."

Ask for additional contacts:

You: "Yes, I have, although it always helps to talk to people like you who are actually employed in the field. Earlier in our conversation, you mentioned that someone with my background and interests might be interested in pursuing as a career path. Do you know anyone in at who might be willing, like yourself, to talk with me about these possibilities?"

Contact: "Let me think. Two people I used to work with at _____ are now at _____. You should talk to Paula Smith or Dan Emery—I'll give you their numbers before I hang up, but don't call them until Monday so I can let them know you'll be contacting them."

You: "Thank you."

Contact: "There's another guy who works at _____ who might be helpful—I met him at a conference. I'm not remembering his name at the moment, but call you back later when I think of it. He's working in the _____ division and might be able to give you some insight about that side of the business?"

Thank your contact

You: "Thank you so much--you've been very helpful, and it's been a pleasure to talk to you today. I really appreciate your time."

Contact: "You're welcome, Dan. It's really no bother--I'm glad to be helpful, and it's been a pleasure to talk with you, too. I'll call you with that name later today or tomorrow."

You: "Thank you again. Good-bye."