INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews help you explore a wide range of career opportunities. They vary in length (15-60 minutes), but it is best to initially ask for a relatively short period of time, like 20 minutes. They can occur in person, via email, over the phone or Zoom. Live conversations are preferable to emailed lists of questions. **The purpose of an informational interview is to ask for information, not a job.**

After you briefly introduce yourself, the bulk of the conversation should focus on them: their position, their background, their career trajectory, and their advice. At the end of the interview you can return the focus to yourself, and ask questions about potential contacts, advice about your resume or CV, etc. But for the most part, consider yourself a journalist, teasing out their experience. After several interviews, you'll have enough data points to draw some conclusions about what job possibilities are available, how you should organize your job search, and prepare for the interview and negotiation process.

Interview Goals: By the end of your conversation, you should understand and be able to explain:
1. A sense of that person's job responsibilities.
2. An understanding of how they found the position and succeeded as a job candidate in the interview process.
3. An awareness of future career opportunities for someone in that position.
4. Information about 1-2 other individuals who can share their experiences with you.
5. Information about 1-5 organizations you should explore.

As such, use your own judgment to determine which questions will get the conversation rolling and give you the answers you need to meet those five goals.

General informational interview questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your current responsibilities?
2. Could you describe a typical day?
3. What types of skills and experiences are key to succeeding in your position?
4. What are common qualities of individuals who are successful in this kind of position?
5. How did you get into this field? What path led you to this position?
6. Can you tell me why you chose to pursue a PhD/MD/Master's/etc?
7. How did you organize your job search?
8. What was your interview process like?
9. What's been particularly rewarding about the path you've taken? What would you do differently?
10. What are some of the future career opportunities for someone in your position?
11. What was the most obvious difference between working in academe and working in industry/ government/non-profits, etc.?
12. Can you talk about how industry/government/etc. and academe are different in terms of work environment, typical compensation packages including vacation, salary range, and work/life balance. What was the most obvious difference between working in academe and working in this field?
13. Can you talk about the norms of working at a research-focused institution and how they differ from a teaching-focused institution in terms of hours/ responsibilities/ expectations/ typical compensation packages including vacation, salary /work-life balance?

13. What advice would you give someone in my position who wants to be successful in the field?
14. When you think about your first year in this position, what actions/activities were key towards your success (engaging other staff, attending meetings, your science, etc.)?
15. I have a copy of my resume. Would you be willing to look at it and let me know what you think?
16. From the research and informational interviews I've done so far, I've developed a list of companies in your field that I am interested in. Can you tell me anything about them? Are there firms I've left off that I should look at more closely?
17. Do you know of any companies/organizations that might be expanding or hiring in the next [6] months?
18. **Can you recommend anyone else for me to talk to, either with a background similar to mine (in terms of research, or international background), who are in the area of X?**

Questions about an individual's organization:

1. What makes the organization a particularly good place to work?
2. How would you describe/what do you like about your work environment?
3. What are the fastest growth areas within the organization? What are the most promising new products or areas of research in the company?
4. I noticed in the Wall Street Journal that your company is in merger talks with XYZ, Inc. That sounds exciting! How will that impact the business and/or science of the company?
5. How would you describe the culture, management style and organization of the company?
6. What's the history of the company? How was the company financed originally and what's the current situation?
7. Do you know of any former NIH trainees who currently work at the company?

Remember, at the end, thank the person for their time and advice and be specific about what you found valuable. Also ask to keep in touch. A final statement could be something like:

"Thank you so much for sharing your perspective and background. I appreciate you taking the time. I have found your advice about preparing for my job talk and focusing on how much research could produce tangible therapeutics most helpful. I'll also contact Albert Einstein at Jazz Pharmaceuticals by the end of the week. I'd like to keep in touch with you as I move forward in this process. And if I can ever return the favor, please don't hesitate to contact me."

Always remember to send a thank you note within 24-48 hours! This is just the start of building your professional network.

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F È Introduceˇˇ@¸Á[˘Ậ^È *My name is X and I am currently a trainee at the NIH. I'm interested in public health.*

G È V^||Á¸@{˙Á@¸˙Á[˘Á[˘}åÁ¸@˙ã¦Â{}œ&œÅˇ-¦{ æœ}È *I found your email through my alumni database.*

H È Explain why you are writing. *Do you have 20 minutes to speak with me about your role at ABC?*

Final Note:

The benefit derived from informational interviews is often cumulative. Go into this process with a curious mindset and try not to form wide-ranging assumptions about a job or a career path based on only one person and one conversation. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact Career Services at OITE.