

Informational Interview

This is NOT a job interview. The goal is to find out information about a position/career, to help you determine if this position might be a good fit for you. It is an appointment YOU set up with someone who knows what is involved in the job/career that you are considering. Typically it is with someone that is actually doing that job, and can last from 10 – 20 minutes. You could meet them at their work location, or invite them out for coffee—offer to pay. Be mindful of their time. Be professional and on time like you would for any interview. Do NOT ask if they could hire you at the end of the Informational Interview. Remember, your goal was to simply gather information to help you make a more informed career/job choice.

Questions You Could Ask in an Informational Interview

By Kat Boogaard

1. “What Attracted You to This Career Path?”

Kicking off your conversation with a question like this one will give you a greater understanding of what initially drew that person to this sort of position—which provides some necessary context as you move into the rest of your discussion.

2. “What Previous Professional Experiences Have Helped You Most in This Role?”

It’s always helpful to understand HOW somebody arrived at this current point in his or her own career, but don’t try to get too personal.

Perhaps a specific certification has really given that person a boost in this position—meaning it’s something that you’d also want to look into. Or, maybe he needs to rely on a skill set he didn’t anticipate.

3. “What’s Something That Would Surprise People About Your Day-to-Day?”

You might think that you know everything there is to know about that particular field. But, you’d be surprised—getting a peek behind-the-scenes is always incredibly enlightening.

Using a prompt like this one will empower you to find out more about those lesser-known parts of a specific position.

4. “What’s One Thing You Wish Somebody Would’ve Told You Before Going Into This Field?”

Sticking with that “surprise” angle, it’s worth digging more into that person’s head to find out what personally shocked him or her about that role.

Whether it’s the fact that he had no idea how much he’d need to rely on his math skills or he didn’t anticipate needing to collaborate with so many different departments, there’s bound to be some element of that job that was unexpected.

5. “What Are Some of the Biggest Rewards of Your Position?”

Of course, the goal of your conversation isn't to just uncover any surprising or negative parts of that position. You want to find out what that person loves as well.

Perhaps the income can't be beat or she loves that no two days are the same. Or, maybe the work is fulfilling and rewarding, and she knows that her work is contributing to the greater good.

Finding the right job for you involves finding one that lines up with your own values and priorities. So, it's smart to touch on the most positive pieces of that role to see if they match up with your own ideals.

6. "How Would You Describe Somebody Who Would Excel in This Career?"

The person that you're meeting with will obviously have some valuable insights into what it takes to succeed in that job, and it's worth asking how he or she would describe a qualified candidate.

If he or she touches on skills and competencies you already have? You're well on your way. If not? At least you'll know what you need to work on in order to present yourself as a seamless fit.

7. "What's Most Important to Prepare for a Role Like Yours?"

Ideally, you'll walk away from that conversation with a handle on your next steps. To get some actionable information that you can walk away with, end your conversation with a question like this one.

Is there a certain certification you need to get? A class you should take? Experience you have to have? Other people you should reach out to?

Find out what he or she recommends to help you adequately prepare for that job, and you'll have leveraged that conversation to actually take steps forward.

When you're considering a certain career path, informational interviews are an enlightening tool to lean on—provided you're prepared to ask the right questions.

Be sure to thank them for their time and express your gratitude for all the information you have received. You could ask for their business card (to send a thank you note) and to keep the connection. If you are on LinkedIn, you may want to send them a Request to Connect.