

3 Tips For Acing An Informational Interview

I'm the career version of the woman who meets someone great who is single and immediately starts thinking about people she knows who would be a good match for them. No, I won't help you find your one true love, but I get a charge out of helping great people find great jobs.

An [informational interview](#) is a great way to get your foot in the door. I am frequently asked for them. And, while I cannot accommodate all of the requests, when I do sit down across from someone and everything goes right, I sometimes get a faraway look while I scan my mental Rolodex for people I know who might want to hire this person.

What is it that makes "everything go right" from my point of view? How can you up your chances that I will be sending you back out of my office with solid tips for improving your resume and promising leads for a next job?

1. Treat It Like A Real Interview – Except Don't Ask For A Job

Dress professionally, arrive on time, and greet me with a smile, handshake, and eye contact. Talk about what you are looking for and what your qualifications are. Bring your resume for feedback on how to make it better. If you're in my office, be there for business.

Don't ramble about your move to Los Angeles or tell me about your roommate problems. I may seem interested, but if I've got a tight schedule, that's going to cut into the amount of time I can spend giving you career guidance. Plus, it will impact whether I refer you to another busy executive for an informational interview (or a real [job interview](#)). I don't want to risk wasting anyone else's time.

2. Let Me Know Your Value And Appreciate My Time

Yes, following the advice in item number one will do this, but you also want to express gratitude for the opportunity to sit down with me. In addition, know something about my career path, if possible and what my company does. Ask questions that reflect that knowledge. It's okay to have questions about my company or my job, but there's a big difference between the kind of questions

you would ask after doing Internet research on me and my company and the kind of questions you would ask instead of doing Internet research.

Even though you are not interviewing for a job, everything you do in this interview is telling me what kind of employee you would be. This is your opportunity to get my wheels churning. “Personable, attentive, does his homework... I wonder if we have any openings coming up – or maybe so-and-so needs a good new hire...”

3. Figure Out How I Can Help You – And How I Can’t Help You

This is where you put into action number two. If you’re dying to work for a company I used to work at or you want to work in an area where you know I have expertise, you can jump right in. If my wheels are churning, this kind of specificity will help me focus my thinking.

One good way to bring up my previous company without asking me to help you get a job there (remember, this interview is for information, not a job) is to ask *what it was like* to work there. Similarly, to let me know your interest in an area I have a background in, say market research or mobile apps, express your interest and ask me about what changes have happened in the field since I was in it and where the opportunities are.

Conversely, if you have a simultaneous dream pursuit, such as acting or TV writing, but the stated topic of the interview was job information, mention the dream pursuit but don’t dwell on it. I don’t know anything about the quality of your writing or acting and I’m likely not in a position to get you a writing job or representation.

And, even if I’m an agent, if you did not get the interview to talk to me about representing you, it will feel like (and be!) bait and switch. If I’m interested in and able to help you with that aspect of your professional career, I will let you know.

It’s true that not everyone you have informational interviews with will have the same passion (or knack) for professional matchmaking as I do – and sometimes even I’m not in that mindset. But if you follow the above advice, you will have the best chance of getting something – a referral, a lead, or a key piece of guidance – out of your meeting. And even if all you seem to get is a handshake and a “good luck” now, in this ultra-connected world, an impressive informational interview now could be a referral or a [job opportunity](#) later.

