Informational Interviewing: The Neglected Job Search Tool
By Carole Martin, Monster Contributing Writer (Abbreviated Version)

Informational interviewing is a largely overlooked process, because it is misunderstood. In an informational interview, you are seeking leads and information regarding an industry, a career path or an employer by talking to people you know or who have been referred to you. Before you run out and begin informational interviewing, you have to do your homework. Follow these 10 tips to prepare:

Identify the Information You Want
Deciding which position, company or industry you want to learn about will depend on what you want to do with your life and career. You should have a sense of what is important to you and what you want.

Make a List of People You Know
Choose those who can help you connect to other people within a company or an industry. Since this is part of networking, you will want to include anyone and everyone you know, from your barber to your sister-in-law.

Make the Appointment
Set up a 15-to 30-minute interview with the person identified, regarding his/her specialty. Most people will be more than happy to help you. Don't get discouraged if you find some people are just too busy to give you an appointment.

Plan an Agenda for the Session
This is your meeting. Don't assume the person will give you the information you need unless you ask the right questions. Select questions that will give you the most information. Be efficient, and do not overstay your welcome.

Conduct Yourself as a Professional
Dress and act the role of the position you are seeking. Know as much as possible about the company before the interview so you can ask informed questions.

A few questions you may want to consider:

• Would you be willing to share your background and how you got to this position?
• Is there anything specific you feel prepared you for this position?
• What do you like most about what you do, and what would you change if you could?
• What skills, experiences, personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this field?
• What advice would you give to someone seeking a position in this field?
• If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to gain entry?
• What are the typical entry-level job titles, functions, salaries?
• What entry-level jobs offer the best opportunities for the greatest amount of learning?
• What does a typical career path look like?
• What kind of growth potential or professional development is available at this organization?
• What are some of the biggest challenges facing your organization today, what challenges do you foresee in the future?
• How do you see this field changing in the next 10 years?
• What’s a typical day like for you?
• What do you read — in print and online — to keep up with developments in your field?
• What factors did you consider in choosing to work at this organization?
• If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? Is there anything you would change?

Be Prepared to Answer Questions About What You’re Looking For
Have a short personal statement prepared that you can present if you’re asked about your job search. Bring a resume, but don't offer it unless requested. Remember, the purpose of this interview is to obtain information.

Get Names
Ask for other contacts in the field. If no names are suggested, be grateful for information or suggestions obtained.

Send Thank-You and Follow-Up Letters
Thank the person at the conclusion of the interview, but also send a letter stating your gratitude for the time given. Stay in touch with your contacts by writing notes or emails, informing the person how helpful his suggestions have been to you.

Take Advantage of Any Referrals You Receive
In this process, you will have to take risks and stretch beyond your comfort zone. Each step will take you closer to that job offer.

The informational interview is a source of power you can use to your advantage. With preparation, listening and follow-through, you will find the power of people helping each other.