

Informational Conversations



CLARK
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Informational Conversations:

Validate your industry, function, and target company



One of the most important tools you can use to help discover what career you want is the “Informational Conversation”. **What better way to discover what you want than to ask someone who is doing it?** You should be trying to validate your function, industry, and target companies.

PURPOSE

Unwritten Rule: *Never* ask for a job or internship directly. You can say that you are looking and welcome ideas.

- Discover important information about a specific function, industry, or company.
- Make a new *meaningful connection* (friendship) in an industry in which you are interested.
- Develop new career possibilities you never thought of or didn't have before.
- Find out if your profile/background aligns with what hiring managers want.

PHASES OF INFORMATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Self-Exploration

Phase 1 – Career Exploration

- Present yourself as someone on a path of exploration. Goal is to gain advice, information, and referrals.
- Aim is to determine if you would like the industry/role and if you have the necessary skills to be successful.
- Ask specific questions to help you understand the industry or role and determine if your background fits.
- After you have met with 4-6 people, you will know whether or not you want to pursue this target.
- Develop meaningful “friendships” with your contacts. This will take several conversations over time.
- Stay connected throughout your search and beyond. Offer to help them on projects or challenges they have.

Execution

Phase 2 – Conduct a Targeted Search

- You know what roles to target but want to learn more about the industry and specific companies.
- Have a more strategic meeting – Discuss specific roles you may want and unpublished opportunities.
- Ask questions that demonstrate how much you know about the field and how you can add value.
- While most of the conversation is still focused on them, inject points about your background and experience.
- Rapport and relationship building is most important. Focus on common interests and good conversation.
- After making a strong impression, you must then build a relationship over time (at least three meetings).

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SECURING AN INFORMATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

- Research a specific industry, function, or target company you want to learn more about (Career Action Plan)
- Search for people who work in those industries or at those firms (LinkedIn, Clark Connect)
- Narrow down the results by filtering on location, industry, and connection type (1st level, 2nd level)
- Review each connection to see what common traits you have (school, industry, location, Interests)
- Develop an email/LinkedIn script to immediately connect and get them to respond (See Sample Email Guide)

CONDUCTING INFORMATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

This is your opportunity to learn (Phase 1) and impress (Phase 2). Remember, you requested the meeting, and controlling the content is your responsibility. Here is a 4-stage structure to ensure a logical flow for the conversation.

Introduction

- Thank them for taking the time to meet with you and set the agenda (why are you here). This should be about research gathering and information sharing.
- State specific goals of the meeting. EX: I'd like to learn more about you and what you do.
- Tell them about you. Be brief! This should only last one or two minutes. **Do not ask for an internship or job.**
 - What did you do before school? Job function and what you liked about it.
 - Why did you choose to go back to school? Show a relationship to the industry you are asking about.
 - What are your top three professional characteristics or traits that make you stand out?
 - What is your **professional** passion and interest?
 - **You can talk about wanting an internship or a job as long as you don't ask them for one directly!**

Discussion

- Ask questions about them and the industry. Take detailed notes to see if you can help them later.
 - Have a list of 10 -1 5 questions to ask that show you did some research on them and the industry.
 - Ask about a specific challenge or issue they are having to see if you can help.
- Share knowledge that you have gathered during your research to-date.
- Stick to the time. Don't go over unless they are fully engaged. Even then, be respectful of time.
- Ask for one referral they might know who can offer additional information.
- Thank them for their time and promise to keep in touch.

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FOLLOWING UP AFTER INFORMATIONAL CONVERSATIONS

- Follow-up is an on-going activity that keeps you connected. It is initiated by a thank-you note you send within 24 hours of the meeting. It continues as you meet with individuals to whom you were referred.
- Keep your contact informed by phone or email of your follow-up efforts and the value they've contributed.
- Send articles and information that may interest your contact.
- Through on-going communication and mutual exchanges of information, you will build a strategic network of professional and meaningful relationships - not just an expanded list of acquaintances.

HELPFUL LINKS

- 3 Steps to a Perfect Informational Interview: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/3-steps-to-a-perfect-informational-interview>
- How to Talk to People More Successful Than You: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFrTQcIZMGE>