



## INFORMATION INTERVIEWING - TALKING TO THE WORKERS

It is a good idea to research the job types you are considering a future in by searching the Internet and through other methods of research, but you will never quite get the same honest and up-to-date inside information that will be obtained by actually talking to someone who is now doing that job- and in particular someone who has done it for some time.

The most accurate way of knowing what a job is like is to go and talk with someone who is already doing it.

During these talks, you may well discover that some of your job selections are not suitable. This is a great time to find out.

Making wrong decisions in job selections reminds me of an experience I had many years ago when I purchased a secondhand computer.

I looked it over, tried it out and paid the money. I was looking forward to how this fast computer with all the bells and whistles was going to make life easier. Alas, there was a problem lurking. I soon realised I had not done the background research on my beloved computer *before* making the decision to purchase.

I later discovered that this computer was very user *unfriendly*. It frequently lost its memory, and constantly needed some kind of repair or maintenance. And due to the brand of computer, a lot of service departments couldn't service it. How different something looks when we learn the whole truth about it.

Of course making a wrong decision with a career selection will have far greater consequences than simply buying a wrong computer. To avoid this sort of pitfall with your career selection, it is wise to research your potential job types *before* applying for a job.

It's a sad fact that many job applicants screen the job *after* they have been hired and then often regret ever accepting the position. It is wise to spend a little time finding out as much as you can about a job before saying yes to it.

## Getting Started (see flowchart next page)

Choose one of your job titles and set about finding someone in your city who does this type of job. This is not as difficult as it may appear.

Simply ring up one of your contacts and ask them. [*a contact is simply any person whatsoever that you know. Whether that be family, friend, work colleague, sporting club or church acquaintance etc.. You don't have to know them all that well and they **do not** have to be connected to the industry that you want to get information from*]

After your initial introduction and small talk, the conversation may go something like this:

*"Do you happen to know anyone who works as a [e.g.] Personal Assistant."*

### **If their answer is "Yes"**

You have your first point of contact.

Ask for their contact details and then say something like:

*"Would it be okay if I said that I was talking to you and you suggested they would be a good person to talk to?"*

When you call the second contact [person who is now working in the industry], explain to them that you were talking to their friend and she said that you would be a good person to talk to. Then explain that you are doing some forward career planning and are considering a few new career ideas, and you have identified this career as one possibility that you wanted to explore further. **Verbally state that you are not looking for a job** but rather gathering together information on a number of industries as part of your career evaluation process.

Then ask them if they would be willing to give you 20-30 minutes of their time to answer some questions about the work they do.

Arrange a time and place convenient for a casual chat, for example in a nearby café etc..

### **If their answer is "No"**

If the first person you contact does not know anyone who works in your chosen job type you simply ask:

*"Do you know anyone who might?"*

Then you contact that person and repeat the process above until you have found someone that works in the field you are interested in.

The 6° of Separation theory ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six\\_degrees\\_of\\_separation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six_degrees_of_separation)) tells us you should have your person within six phone calls on average.



## Over the Phone or in Person

It is possible to do this type of interviewing over the phone and often positive results can occur. However there are three reasons you should choose to visit rather than telephone:

- 1. You build a much better relationship with the person whom you talk to in person. This can be invaluable later if you want to contact them again as a potential employer.*
- 2. Soon you'll be going for "real" interviews [ie] with a person who has the authority to hire you. This pre-employer interviewing will give you valuable experience in talking to people in the industry and hold you in good stead when the more important employer interviewing begins. **This is probably the most important reason for not using the phone.***
- 3. Information you gain will most likely be more in depth and of a better quality. One-on-one, in person discussions seem to be better at uncovering the in-depth industry details you need.*

## The Meeting

When you meet the worker, be clear in your own mind exactly what it is you want to find out. Write out your questions and take them with you. Remember it is you who has called this meeting and you need to direct it.

One question you should ask and at the completion of your meeting is:

*Do you know of anyone else they could suggest you talk to? [try to get 2-3 names if possible and phone numbers as some may turn out to be unproductive].*

Many of these workers you talk to may be in their lunch hour or may in some way have inconvenienced themselves to talk with you. So be sure not to take any more time than you stated and express a very grateful spirit throughout.

Here are some examples of questions you could ask. Drill them as deeply as you can. Usually the first answer a person gives to these sorts of questions is not the most valuable answers. So listen very carefully to their answers and then drill them deeper based on the answers they provide:

- 1. What aspects of your job or the industry do you like the most?*
- 2. What aspects of your job or the industry do you like the least or do you find most difficult?*
- 3. What does a typical day look like for you?*
- 4. What types of people do you mostly deal with in your job?*
- 5. What challenges do you see within the industry? Or, What do you see as the industry's greatest problems at the moment? At this point pay particular attention to the problems of a person who would have the authority to hire you [Do your natural skills match their problems? Can you help them?]*
- 6. Enquire about any new developments within the industry that you have heard about and would like to know more about.*
- 7. How did you get into the industry?*
- 8. What type of person do you think best fits this job type.*

9. *What do organisations like yours value most in an employee in this field?*

10. *What qualifications do most people have in these types of roles? Are these qualifications legally required or are they just what most employers prefer?*

11. *What would you do differently if you were starting in this career again?*

12. *Is there anyone else you think would be good to talk to in my research? i.e. another worker (Don't forget to ask this question every time)*

Although your primary purpose during these meetings is to find out all about the job type, other beneficial information may be forthcoming during the course of the meeting. In particular listen for information which may indicate answers to the following questions: What is staff turnover like? [This may tell you something about the satisfaction of those working there].

- How does he/she and other workers feel about the management team? [Listen carefully but remember there are two sides to every story]
- Does the person you talk with seem happy in their work? What about any other workers you encounter in the workplace (if you are meeting there). Are they happy? Stressed? Etc.
- What is the organisation's policy on education, training and other staff development practices?
- Does the organization communicate well? [between management and workers especially]
- Does the organization or industry have some crisis looming [i.e.] a situation which unless resolved soon could bring disaster on itself?

Write down important information either in the meeting or immediately after while it is still fresh in your mind.

Think about other aspects of the particular job you would like to know about and create your own questions. The more specific your questions, the more specific and helpful the answers will be.

During any interview remember to mix talking with listening. Don't do too much or too little of either. Half talking, half listening is a good rule of thumb.

The primary purpose of these interviews is for you to strengthen or weaken your desire for this type of job by getting inside information. **You are not looking for a job** and you should let the person know this when you first make contact by telephone.

Never enquire about a vacancy once you have set up one of these meetings. That will destroy your credibility.

### **Interview Again**

When you get home, begin to think about whether or not this job type might be for you. You will nearly always need to investigate a job type by interviewing more than one worker in each industry. If you are unsure about whether this type of work is for you or not, just keep interviewing more people until you have enough information to decide one way or another.

Remember also to keep several different job type meetings on the go at once. Don't pursue just one job type. This can cause disappointment and loss of momentum if you decide you aren't interested in that type of work and have no other options being actively pursued.

It is a difficult task to have your enthusiasm split between more than one job type when doing this research. But this method will allow you to compare and evaluate from a wider perspective. So from the outset, purpose to be arranging meetings for at least two different job types simultaneously.

Remember also to keep notes for each person you meet and to send them a thank you note for their time (a hard copy note rather than an email is best). At some time in the future you may want further help from these people to find a job, so you need to nurture these relationships.

The more of these information interviews you carry out, the more confident you will become. And once you've spoken to a number of people in the same industry, you will become quite knowledgeable and be able to hold an intelligent conversation about that industry, perhaps even being able to provide industry information that they didn't know about.