

Informational Interviewing

POSTDOCTORAL ASPIRE CAFÉ

ASHLEY E. BRADY, PHD

MAY 10, 2018



It's not What you may be thinking.....

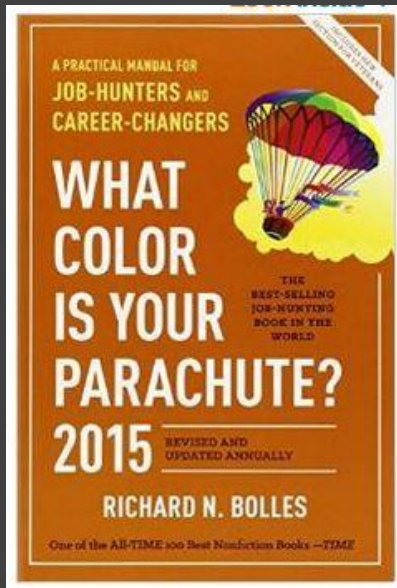
...It's just talking and listening



How would you explain/define an informational interview?

Has anyone ever participated in
an informational interview?
- Interviewer or interviewee?

What is an “Informational Interview”?



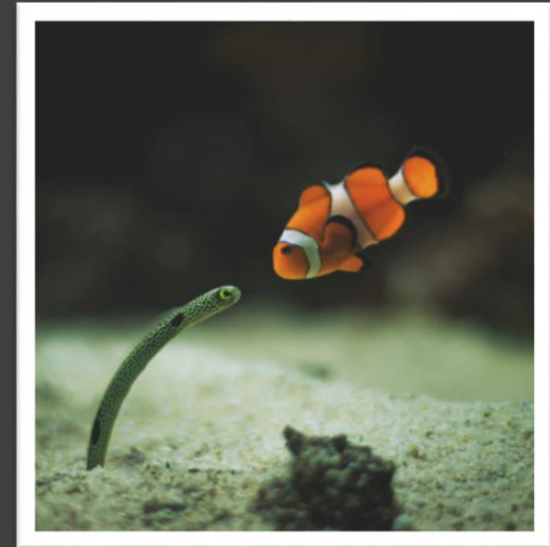
- ❖ Term coined by Richard Bolles, in his book, *What Color is Your Parachute?*
- ❖ Informal, but professional, meeting with someone in a career area of interest to you
- ❖ Opportunity to screen a job and a company before you take a position– “trying on jobs”

*****Intention is not to get job offers or to respond to an open position*****

But! 1 in 12 informational interviews results in a job offer (vs 1 in 200+ resumes)

What can you gain from an “Informational Interview”?


- ❖ Meet someone new and learn about their current position/company and career path
- ❖ Grow your network— often they will suggest others you should talk to
- ❖ Learn about resources available to you to gain important skills/experiences
- ❖ Gain insight into “*Hidden Job Market*”
- ❖ Build confidence—low-stress environment to practice talking to people
- ❖ Exposure to career/company may make you a more impressive job candidate



How do you find people to interview?

- ❖ Revisit your personal network
- ❖ Ask your PI if they know of anyone you should approach
- ❖ Review meeting agendas before you go to professional meetings
- ❖ Look for alumni contacts
- ❖ Scour industry websites and LinkedIn for people doing things that interest you

The Google logo is displayed in its characteristic multi-colored font (blue, red, yellow, blue, green, red) on a white background.

Join our group 

Vanderbilt University
Biomedical Research
Graduate and Postdoctoral
Trainees and Alumni

How do you ask for a meeting?

How do you ask for a meeting?

{Take a few minutes and draft an email to someone asking for a meeting}

How do you ask for a meeting?



1. Make sure you have a descriptive subject line
2. Keep it succinct and easy to read
3. Tell them who you are
4. Why you are contacting them
5. Include any connection you may have— alumni, reference etc...
6. What you are asking for— meeting, phone call etc...
7. Offer a time/date (can be general)
8. Include your contact info in a signature

Example email request:

Re: Meeting request with Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellow ← Descriptive subject line

Dear Dr. Who,

I'm a postdoctoral fellow in Cancer Biology at Vanderbilt University. I am in the process of exploring my next career steps and am particularly interested in applying my background in cell proliferation and tumor initiation to develop precision chemotherapy for cancer patients. (My advisor, Dr. What, suggested that you would have a very good perspective on the current field.)

I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you briefly to learn more about your career path and current role at DiaTech Oncology. I'm especially interested in any advice you may have for someone who is interested in transitioning from academia to industry.

Would you have time to meet for a coffee at some point in the next month?

My best,

Ashley

615.123.1234
bradyae@gmail.com

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← Your connection

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What you are asking for

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Offer a time frame

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← Your Contact info

Email conversation cont...

Once the meeting is set, you can confirm details and include your CV/resume (pdf)

Re: Meeting request with Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellow

Dear Dr. Who,

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me at 11:00 am on Tuesday, March 14th at Starbucks on 21st Ave. I'm attaching a copy of my resume to give you a little more information about my background.

Looking forward to seeing you,

Best,

Ashley

615.123.1234
bradyae@gmail.com

Prepping for an Informational Interview

- ❖ Research the person and their company/department/industry: Google away! websites, annual reports, press releases, news articles, LinkedIn etc...
- ❖ Prepare a short “elevator” pitch to tell them who you are and what you are trying to learn. (Café July 26th, 2016)
- ❖ Bring a copy of your resume to share, even if you sent it ahead of time



Prepping for an Informational Interview: Questions

Plan focused questions (10-12):

- *Career Path
- *Daily Activities
- *Work-culture
- *Education/Training/
Experience needed
- *How can I learn more?



What Questions should I ask?



- ❖ Tell me about your career path— how did you get here?
- ❖ What are some of the skills that you find most valuable to you in your job?
- ❖ What are you are looking for when you hire new people for a position like...x,y,z...?
- ❖ Do you know of any places where I might be able to build my skills in X?
- ❖ I'm interested in "X" type of position. Do you know of other places where this type of job might exist, or other positions that might use similar skills?
- ❖ Do you know of any other people doing something like this who might be good for me to talk to?

Prepping for an Informational Interview: Day before

Send a final confirmation email the day before the meeting & include your cell phone number

Re: Meeting request with Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellow

Dear Dr. Who,

I'm looking forward to meeting with you at 11:00 am tomorrow at Starbucks on 21st Ave. Here is my cell phone number in case anything comes up last minute: 615-000-1234.

Here is my LinkedIn profile so you know who to look for:
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/aebrady>

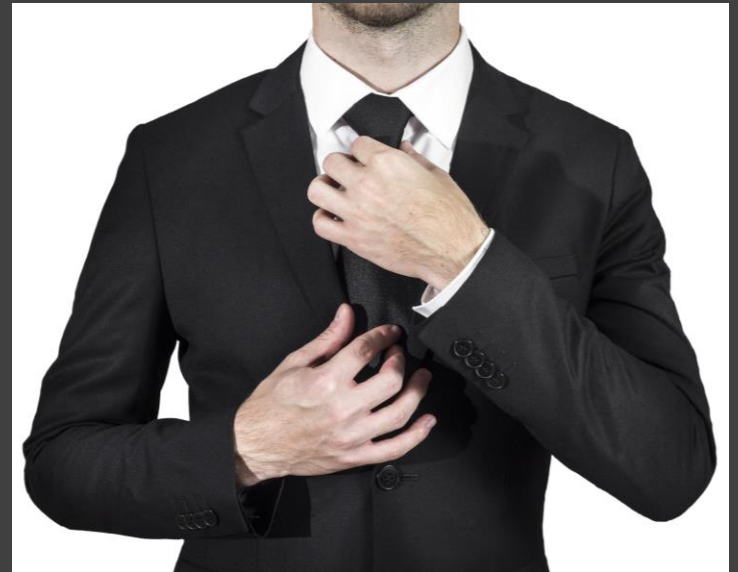
Thank you so much for your time,

Best,
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Informational Interview Etiquette

- ❖ Dress professionally, but a suit is likely over-kill.
- ❖ Be on time (early)
- ❖ Turn off your cell phone
- ❖ Buy their coffee, or at least offer.
- ❖ Bring some paper and a pen to take notes
- ❖ Be a good listener
- ❖ Be mindful of their time



At the interview



- ❖ Thank them for their time
- ❖ Emphasize that you are there only to learn and gather advice
- ❖ Share something about yourself, but don't dominate the conversation-employ an informal dialog
- ❖ Be enthusiastic and show interest
- ❖ Be direct and concise (don't ramble)
- ❖ Have good eye contact and posture

Follow-up

- ❖ Send a thank you email within 24 hours of your meeting. Can follow up with a hand-written note.
- ❖ Connect via LinkedIn if you haven't already.
- ❖ Include a specific item you learned from them or enjoyed hearing about.
- ❖ Also include any specific follow-up items (e.g. things you offered to send them or vice versa --contacts, websites, or other information)



Example Thank you email:

Re: Meeting request with Vanderbilt postdoctoral fellow

Dear Dr. Who,

It was great to have the opportunity to meet you yesterday. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your experience with me. It is very encouraging to hear about the exciting opportunities you foresee in the area of precision cancer therapeutics and I hope to be able to contribute to this area as my career develops.

Thank you also for suggesting I reach out to our local biotechnology industry organization, Life Science TN. I will let you know how that goes. Please continue to keep me in mind if you learn of any other opportunities or resources that might be helpful to me.

I would also like to connect via LinkedIN so that we can stay in touch.

My best,

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Follow-up

****Remember:** This person has invested time in you– they like to know if their investment paid off.



Periodically check in:

- To let them know if any of their suggestions have been helpful
- If you have any successes– new job, internship etc...
- If you come across something that would be of interest to them – a news article, a book, a speaker coming etc...
- Congratulate them on a recognition, promotion etc...

Thank you!

ASHLEY.BRADY@VANDERBILT.EDU