

# DEVELOPING & UTILIZING CONTACTS IN THE JOB SEARCH

## - Informational Interviewing -

Relative to their career plans, DePauw students often say, "I really don't know what I want to do; what should I be doing to find out?" and "I do not know how to get started - where do I begin?" **After** you have read about different occupations, jobs and industries, the informational interview is an excellent way to answer these kinds of questions. You are asking the questions and controlling the agenda; you are the "interviewer."

### WHY CONDUCT AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Conduct an informational interview to acquire valuable information for use in your occupational planning and job hunting. Specific advantages include:

- 1) It allows you to obtain additional information about an organization/company, occupation or industry.
- 2) It helps you decide on a career path, especially if you are uncertain. You can learn more about a variety of occupations.
- 3) It helps locate growing occupations, industries and related opportunities.
- 4) It helps you become more adept and comfortable at interviewing.
- 5) It increases your self-confidence in dealing with people.
- 6) It will enlarge your circle of contacts and allow you to generate more referrals.

The informational interview is an excellent way to verify what you have previously only thought about, read and heard. The person interviewed can offer information that is more:

- up to date;
- specific and related to the local situation;
- personal and subjective; and
- reflective of the "on-the-job" atmosphere.

### HOW DOES AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW COMPARE WITH A JOB-HUNTING INTERVIEW?

Like a job-hunting interview, an informational interview is a two-way conversation. However, it generally is slightly more relaxed and informal than the job-hunting interview. Additionally, the informational interview occurs in a context of extraordinary freedom and control: as the interviewer, you define its focus and structure, and you conduct it entirely for your benefit. You decide what information is needed and your questions should hone in on those needs. Your questions should help answer the following (among others): "What information about myself, an occupation and/or an industry do I need in order to make some decisions?"

## 2.

### WHO SHOULD YOU INTERVIEW?

Essentially, any individual can be of interest for an informational interview/discussion. Do not assume that potential employers are the only ones who possess good information. Look for those who:

- Share a common interest, enthusiasm or involvement in some activity or lifestyle that appeals to you (i.e. recreation, children, the environment, music.)
- Work in settings you like (e.g., hospitals, politics, business, theatre);
- Work in occupational areas in which you are interested (e.g., broadcasting, stockbroker, criminal lawyer, market researcher);
- work in specific jobs in specific organizations (e.g., a newscaster in a local radio station, a stockbroker at Dean Witter, a criminal lawyer in a legal aid office, or a market researcher at IBM.

### WHERE TO FIND THESE PEOPLE

The most obvious individuals include friends, family, neighbors and DePauw alumni. You will also want to contact faculty advisers, former internship and summer job acquaintances and the Career Services staff to generate potential contacts. Additional sources include trade and professional organizations and community service agencies (e.g. American Medical Association, The National Association of Social Workers, Chambers of Commerce, etc.).

### WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Who you approach depends on the type of information you seek. Is it concrete career information about a particular field or company? If so, then go to two kinds of people: those "insiders" who know you well enough to be candid, and strangers who will inevitably give more of a public relations spiel but may possess a broader perspective than your company "pal." Is it feedback about yourself? If so, go to people who know you well enough to give it to you.

Are you seeking insight into the future direction of an industry? If so, then go to a recognized industry expert. Is it help in identifying additional people to interview? If so, then go to those who are well-connected and can lead you to others. This may include The Career Center.

The fact is that most DePauw alumni (and many others) have been in your shoes and are eager and willing to help answer and unravel some of your questions. They are generally interested in talking about their jobs and offering helpful advice. In fact, you may have some ideas that will be interesting to them. However, do not waste their time or yours - be prepared!

### PREPARATION

Know exactly what kind of information you want. Generally, do not ask something routine that is readily available elsewhere. Know your own interests, skills, values, and how they relate to the person you are speaking with. Know as much as you can about the organization for whom the person works, as well as the industry in which it operates. Read the materials in The Career Center, Roy O. West Library, public libraries, on web sites and in other campus

offices.

### 3.

#### **HOW DO I INITIATE CONTACT?**

It is preferable for the initial contact to be made by e-mail or letter. However, if you already know the person or can mention a strong mutual acquaintance, initial e-mail or contact by phone may be appropriate. Usually you should enclose your resume with your initial letter; a "30-second snapshot" this allows the reader to learn what you have been doing the past few years. Certainly the follow-up contact to your initial letter should be by phone.

#### **POST-INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP**

**Always** follow up with a thank-you note, preferably within 2 or 3 days of your meeting. You might want to reiterate something discussed that was particularly helpful or informative. In addition, maintain a record of names, dates, comments and referrals for future reference. Keep these people posted on your progress. Write or call them periodically to let them know what you are doing. They will be glad to know if they have been instrumental in helping you make decisions; and besides, you may want to contact them later for more information.

#### **HELPFUL HINTS**

- First impressions count heavily. Be on time, shake hands firmly, smile, look professional and maintain good eye contact.
  
- Ask answerable open-ended questions that start with words like how, what, why and in what way.
  
- Ask impromptu questions.
  
- Focus on the person you are meeting with.
  
- Do not make the mistake of using your informational interview as a pretext for getting a job. It will not work and it can be embarrassing when it becomes obvious.
  
- If you are interested in someone's particular organization, subsequently follow up with them after your initial contact/ informational interview (i.e. 10 days to 3 weeks later).

#### **DEPAUW'S ALUMNI CAREER INFORMATION PROGRAM**

DePauw alumni have volunteered to provide assistance and advice to DePauw University students. These alumni names and addresses are maintained on a database in The Career Center, which you may use. In addition, you may make an appointment with Tom Cath, Director, or Erin Mahoney, Assistant Director, to discuss your occupational interests and to acquire names, titles and addresses of additional alumni or other contacts with whom you would like to speak. The guidelines outlined above must be followed when seeking occupational information from DePauw alumni or other professionals.

**4.**  
**SAMPLE QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK SOMEONE IN  
DISCUSSING THEIR OCCUPATION AND  
YOUR CAREER PLANS\***

1. How did you get into this field? (How did you get to where you are today?)
2. What advice would you give a person interested in this field?
3. What skills, qualifications and other credentials are essential to be hired for this position?  
What skills and other credentials are desirable?
4. Are there any courses I should take, books I should read, or other experiences I should gain to prepare more fully for this type of work?
5. What are some job titles for entry-level positions in this field?
6. Would you describe a "typical" work day? (or two-week period?)
7. What do you value (like) about your work? Why?
8. What do you dislike about your work? Why?
9. What are the organizational problems faced by people in your position?
10. What type of training is available in the industry?
11. What is the salary range for entry-level positions and what do the salaries look like over the longer term?
12. What advancement opportunities exist?
13. What are the future trends in this field?
14. Who are your major competitors?
15. What sets your organization apart from competitors?
16. What are some of your interests, hobbies and leisure activities?
17. What personal characteristics do you perceive to be critical to succeed in this field?
18. How has your "DePauw Experience" helped you in your career?
19. What is the "typical" career path of someone in this field?

\*The questions you ask and the way you ask them will depend on the information you seek, the person you're speaking with, the organization for which he/she works and the tone of the

discussion. Some questions will be more appropriate than others, depending on the situation.