Informational Interviewing
The Neglected Job Search Tool
By Carole Martin, Monster Contributing Writer

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. But 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 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.

Show Interest

A little flattery goes a long way. Say something like, "Mary gave me your name and told me you're considered to be an expert in your field. How did you get started?"

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

An informational interview can be a powerful tool in the job hunt process. It's important to show your thanks to the person who took time out of their schedule to meet with you. 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.