

So I've Got This Network of People...
Tips for Informational Interviewing

I know that you are good at networking: you go to bar association events, keep in touch with previous co-workers, and attend law school alumni events. But how does this help with your job search? How can you tap into this carefully crafted and maintained network of people to find your next position?

The answer is simple: Ask for an Informational Interview.

The term “informational interview” was coined by Richard Nelson Bolles who wrote *What Color Is Your Parachute?* (which I highly recommend!). According to Wikipedia, “[a]n Informational Interview is a meeting in which a job seeker asks for advice rather than employment. The job seeker uses the interview to gather information on the field, find employment leads and expand [her] professional network.” As such, the main goal of an informational interview is to ask for Advice, Information, and Referrals, or AIR.

Advice: People love to give advice. Typically you barely have to ask someone (especially lawyers) for their opinion and they are off to the races telling you stories about when they were in your situation, what they think you should do, and how you should go about it. Some ways to ask for advice are: “What do you suggest I do if I want move in-house?”, or “What types of organizations should I join if I want to learn more about employment law?”

Information: The second item on your informational interview agenda should be asking for information. Information covers everything from your contact’s current employer and her career path, what employers might be hiring, and events and programs you should attend. Asking these types of questions not only helps you gather useful information, but also lets your contact know about your interests and shows that you are serious about asking for help and moving forward.

Referrals: Asking for referrals is one of the most important aspects of an informational interview. You should be direct and ask, “Who else do you think I should talk to?” or, “Would you be willing to introduce me to someone else who might have additional information or advice for me?” If you have created a good rapport with your contact and have shown her (through thoughtful questions and thorough preparation) what you have to offer, she should be more than happy to introduce you to at least one other person.

An informational interview will not only help your contact help you by providing useful advice, information, and referrals, but will also jog your contact’s memory as to whether she has recently heard of any job openings. It also plants the seed of your background, skills, interests, and, most importantly, availability, in the contact’s head. Thus, if your contact hears about any openings after she has spoken to you, she can be your emissary and advocate to help you connect with someone who has an opportunity for you.