

Informational Interviews versus Job Shadows

An **informational interview** gives you the opportunity to obtain an inside view of a job field that interests you by speaking with people who are currently working in that field. This is either done in person, through email or on the phone. It can be an hour or less, depending upon the availability of the person with whom you are interviewing. The main goal of the informational interview is to speak with professionals about their job. A benefit of this experience is the smaller time commitment for the professional. Therefore, it is a better way to approach a contact you do not already know in an industry in which you are interested.

A **job shadow** is conducted by students who are very seriously considering an occupation and want to view a professional doing the job. Job shadows last longer— a half or full day, or more—and often include meetings with key staff in the company. The main goal of the job shadow is to watch a professional at work and to follow them as they do their daily activities. The job shadow takes more commitment on the part of the professional, and may involve you signing something to address the privacy of the organization and/or its clientele.

Both experiences will help you gain a better understanding of an occupation or industry and to build a network of contacts in that field.

Setting up an appointment:

- Conduct research about the company or the field before scheduling an appointment.
- Make an appointment for an informational interview or job shadow with a professional working in a field of your interest. Schedule the appointment in person, on the phone or by email.

If you are not certain how to begin your conversation, here is a sample phone conversation:

“Hi, my name is _____ and I am a student at Kalamazoo Valley Community College studying_____. I was hoping you would be willing to help me learn more about_____. Could you set aside some time to speak with me? What time would be convenient for you?”

During the meeting:

- If you are meeting in person, dress for a professional interview and appointment. Be on time, and do not exceed the amount of time scheduled for the interview.
- Prepare a list of questions ahead of time. (Please see back page for a sample of typical questions.)
- Send a thank you note within a day of your interview.
- Do not ask for a job. The informational interview or job shadow is for information gathering only.

Sample Questions for your Informational Interview or Job Shadow

The employer may ask you:

What can you tell me about yourself?

What can I do for you?

Typical questions to ask the interviewee:

How did you get into this field?

What is a typical day like for you?

What made you decide this was the occupation you wanted to pursue?

What kind of degree, license, or certification do you need to be successful? What kind of skills should a person possess to be successful in this field?

Where might you go from here in your career?

What professional/trade associations or union organizations do you belong to, and what roles do they play in your career?

What do you like and not like about working in this field?

Would you do anything differently if you could do it over?

Does this company have a history of promoting from within?

Are there specific recommendations you might make for further training or credentials?

What advice would you give a new professional entering into this industry?

What are the most effective techniques for getting a job in this field?

Is there anyone else you would recommend I talk with? May I let them know you referred me?

What next steps might be helpful?

Typical questions to ask about the industry:

What training or professional development do companies in this field generally provide?

What trends do you see influencing the future of this field?

What are the most common problems or issues confronting employees within this field?

What are the best sources for learning more about the industry?

What is the preferred way to network within this field?

For further information about informational interviews, job shadow, and networking, contact Kalamazoo Valley Career and Student Employment Services: 488-4040.