Using Informational Interviews in Your Job Search or Career Transition

An Informational Interview can be a great tool for exploring new career opportunities, and learning more about your target companies and fields of interest. The purpose of an Informational Interview, as the name suggests, is to gather information that may be useful in one's job search or career transition. This information may be about a new area of the law, about different opportunities within or outside the legal industry, about a specific position and its daily job responsibilities or about starting a business. A typical informational interview consists of three parts: (1) building rapport with the person you are interviewing by showing your interest in what he/she does, (2) acquiring general information about your area of interest, and (3) acquiring information specific to your needs, job leads and tips that may lead to your employment.

Scheduling an Informational Interview.
Reach out to people in your network. Your network includes current and former co-workers, family and friends, fellow members of clubs, churches/synagogues, professional associations, classmates and alumni of your undergraduate and graduate schools, and LinkedIn and Facebook contracts. Call or email your contact and ask if he/she would be willing to give you 20 minutes of his/her time, over the phone or in person. A beginning statement may be: "I was referred to you by [name]. I understand that you have substantial experience in ______ and you are well regarded in your field. Your work sounds fascinating and I would love to hear more about what you do. [OR I am looking to transition into this practice area/field/position and would like to learn more about it.] Could we meet over coffee, or would it be more convenient for you to schedule a 20-minure phone call?"

Key Points to Remember.
Remember that people love to teach, mentor and be appreciated. Thus, the focus is on <u>them</u> during the interview – what they have achieved, what they have learned and how they got where they did – and not on you and your need to get a job. Be <u>genuine</u> and find ways to express your appreciation in a way that is sincere and appropriate to the situation. If the meeting is over coffee or lunch, you may want to offer to pay for both of you in appreciation for the time and the information you have received. Always come prepared with good questions, dress professionally, be on time and do not exceed the time given to you. Also, set your specific objective prior to the meeting: what information you are hoping to gain from this person. And before the interview is over, ask if there are other contacts this person can put you in touch with to learn more. This way, you continue to expand your network.

Follow-up after the Interview.
As with traditional interviews, follow-up is key. Always send a thank-you note within 24 hours. Although a thank-you email is more common these days and reaches your contact immediately, a follow-up hand-written note is still appreciated and will set you apart and make you memorable.

Stay in contact with the person you just interviewed and continue developing the relationship. If applying for a job, put the information you gathered in the cover letter, using language to show you are familiar with the industry and the firm. If you are comfortable with a more direct approach and when appropriate, you may want to develop your own proposal that addresses how your skills and experience can meet the company's needs.

This article has been prepared by Irina Gomelskaya, Irina is a lawyer and Certified Life Purpose and Career Coach and member of the Committee on Career Advancement and Management at the City Bar Associatio, June 2012.