Exploratory Career Conversations

Exploratory Career Conversations are discussions with individual(s) who are currently working in a field of interest to gain a better understanding of an occupation or industry and to build your connections in that field.

What would it look like if you had an exploratory career conversation with a professional in the field?

- Gather information about various careers by speaking to professionals in those fields
- Learn what types of job opportunities/ career paths exist in a given field or organization
- Begin to develop connections with individuals in your field of interest.
- Enhance your confidence by speaking to a variety of professionals in a low pressure, open-ended situation
- Visit people in a variety of settings to gain insight into different work environments

With whom can I have Exploratory Career Conversations?

You can make valuable career connections through a variety of sources, including:

- Your personal relationships: Talk to your relatives, family friends, members of your religious community, and members of organizations you belong to.
- Your professional relationships: These include colleagues, internship supervisors, members of professional associations, customers, and clients.
- Your social media networks: Social media sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter give you instant access to a world of contacts.
- The Boston College Career Community LinkedIn Group: Thousands of BC alumni and students are connecting on this LinkedIn group. Make sure your LinkedIn profile is complete before reaching out to alumni.

How do I set up an Exploratory Career Conversation?

- You are not asking the person for a job. Keep in mind that you are gathering information on which to base some decisions. Make sure your contacts understand this.
- If you have been referred by a specific person, mention that early in your message.
- Request a 30-minute meeting at or near each contact's work site to make it convenient for him or her and so that you can experience his or her work environment. You can also offer to take them out for coffee.
- In your initial outreach, state how you found them and why you are reaching out.
- If you can't meet face-to-face, set up a time to "meet" by Skype or phone.
- Prepare questions to ask ahead of time. In addition to some of the general questions listed on the other side, plan to develop questions specific to the industry, position and organization of the person you are interviewing. It can be helpful to visit the person's LinkedIn profile to learn more about them and tailor your questions according to their background.

"I've recently graduated from Boston College, and I'm interested in learning more about the field of publishing. I found your name in the Boston College Career Community group on LinkedIn, and I'm wondering if you'd be willing to set up a time to meet with me so I can ask you some questions about your career."

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What can I expect during an Exploratory Career Conversation?
- Be prepared to take the lead in the conversation.
- Dress in professional attire to make a positive impression.
- Respect the person’s time. Be appreciative without being apologetic.
- Recognize that everyone has his/her own attitudes, biases and feelings which must be evaluated. By talking to several people, you will gain a variety of opinions.

What Happens After an Exploratory Career Conversation?
- Send a thank you email within 24 hours following your meeting.
- If somebody referred you to another contact who was particularly helpful, write to the original person and let them know.
- Keep your contacts updated on your progress. Maintaining your contacts is an ongoing process which will help you throughout your career.
- Networking is a mutually beneficial process. If you discover a resource or article that you think one of your contacts would appreciate, pass it along.

What can I ask during an Exploratory Career Conversation?
- **Questions About The Individual's Career Field and Company**
  - What skills or personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this industry?
  - What are the positive/negative aspects of working in this field?
  - What are typical entry level jobs? Is there a definite career path in this field? If so, can you describe it?
  - Why did you decide to work for this company?
  - What do you like most about this company?

- **Questions About The Individual’s Job and Career Path**
  - What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
  - How do you spend a typical day/week?
  - What do you find most/least satisfying about your job?
  - How does your time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity constant?
  - What projects have you worked on that have been particularly interesting?
  - What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these?
  - In which professional associations do you participate?
  - In what way did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
  - What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?

- **Questions About Preparing for This Career:**
  - How does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
  - What courses or experiences do you wish you had taken that would have prepared you?
  - If you were a college student again, what would you do differently to prepare you for this job?
  - What publications or professional journals should I be reading?

- **Wrap-up Question**
  - Is there anyone else you can suggest I contact for additional information?

You've got this!  Keep in mind this a friendly conversation, and the individual with whom you're meeting is likely thrilled to be able to help you and talk about him/herself.

Once you've completed this exploratory career conversation, consider with whom you would like to speak next. These conversations are part of an ongoing process and you can always learn more. Take some time to reflect on what you learned during the conversation. Does this solidify your interest in that career field or organization? Did something surprise you? Is it time to reconsider your goals? To discuss your goals and next steps, schedule an appointment with a Career Coach.