

The Information Interview
Part of the Follow Your Dream Series
by Kathie Hightower

“*The* most powerful job search tool is the information interview,” contends Rosemary Barnhart, an 18-year Career Planning and Employment Consultant. “You get ideas, make connections, get volunteer opportunities, find great resources. You clarify in your mind whether or not this really is the job for you.”

The idea is that, rather than judging a job or career path as appropriate for you just based on your interests and what “you think” that job consists of, you talk to people doing that job to see if what you think matches reality. You gather information, learn the language, see how your skills fit in, make contacts, and determine your energy and enthusiasm for that career field — *before* you dive into a job search.

I learned the hard way that it’s important to interview more than one person. And to ask the questions that are most important to your situation.

As a brand new Army Lieutenant, I was offered the Club Management specialty as one option. It sounded glamorous and fun. I met one person working in that field who raved about it. In a very short ten-minute conversation, I listened without asking many questions and made a decision that impacted my next two years and put me in a job that convinced me to get off active duty. Knowing what I know now I would have asked lots of questions, and I would have talked to other club managers to get a better sense of this career field.

Let’s consider Air Force wife, Rose, who is interested in becoming a paralegal. Who would she talk to and what would she ask?

“I’d certainly suggest she talk to other paralegals,” says Barnhart, “but she shouldn’t limit herself to that.” There are so many legal paraprofessionals, she goes on to say, from paralegals to lawyers to people who do legal research. Barnhart suggests talking to all of them to get a sense of the job and opportunities. There might be related positions Rose had never thought of or heard of — possibly even positions that fit her skills, interests and situation better.

Why would someone grant you an information interview? “People love to talk about what they do,” says Barnhart. “98.9% of people will say yes.”

As to what to ask, start with the list of questions in the sidebar and add others you think of, which for military spouses might include things like “Are there opportunities for doing this kind of work virtually over the Internet?” and “How might this fit into a mobile lifestyle?”

This powerful tool doesn’t just help with career decisions. Use it for other life decisions. Say you are thinking about homeschooling your children or taking on a volunteer

position. Talk to others who are doing the same. Then make the decision with lots of facts, not just a mental image of what you think it might be like.

Sidebar:

Information Interview Questions

What do you like best about what you do?

What are your biggest challenges?

What new and interesting things are happening in this field?

What skills are needed to perform the job?

What advice can you give me regarding a search for a job in this field?

What advice can you give me as how to best prepare myself for this career?

Can you recommend other people I could meet?

Would you be willing to call ahead to check with them regarding this referral?

What professional associations should I know about?

What publications should I read?

And any specific to your workplace considerations...i.e. Does this job involve a lot of travel? What are typical work hours?

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