

Informational Interviews: The Key to Networking Success

UChicago Alumni Association Webinar 3/24/16

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Informational Interviews

- I) What are they?
- II) Why do them?
- III) Who to meet?
- IV) How to arrange conversations?
- V) How to conduct the meeting?
- VI) How to follow up effectively?



Informational Interviews

What are
these things?



Defining Informational Interviews

WHAT ARE THEY?

- Informal conversations arranged at your request
- Common practice among job seekers, particularly those changing fields
- Essential networking tool
- The easiest way to network- especially for introverts

WHAT ARE THEY NOT?

- NOT A JOB INTERVIEW
- Robotic interactions with single defined objective
- Sufficient on their own for developing a real relationship
- A shady exchange intended to cheat an otherwise meritocratic labor market



Informational Interviews

**Why should I
do them?**



Why you should do them

- Make contacts in an organization
- Learn more about the field and the organization
- Learn examples of personal success stories
- Discover Job openings before they are listed
- Demonstrate sincere interest in the company/job
- Have a chance to develop a mentoring relationship



Why people agree to them

- Common practice for nearly all professionals
- Opportunity to “pay forward” help/advice they received
- People like talking about themselves and are often flattered to be asked about their experience
- They may actually be looking for talent
- They know you could help them one day
- Some people are just really nice and like to mentor



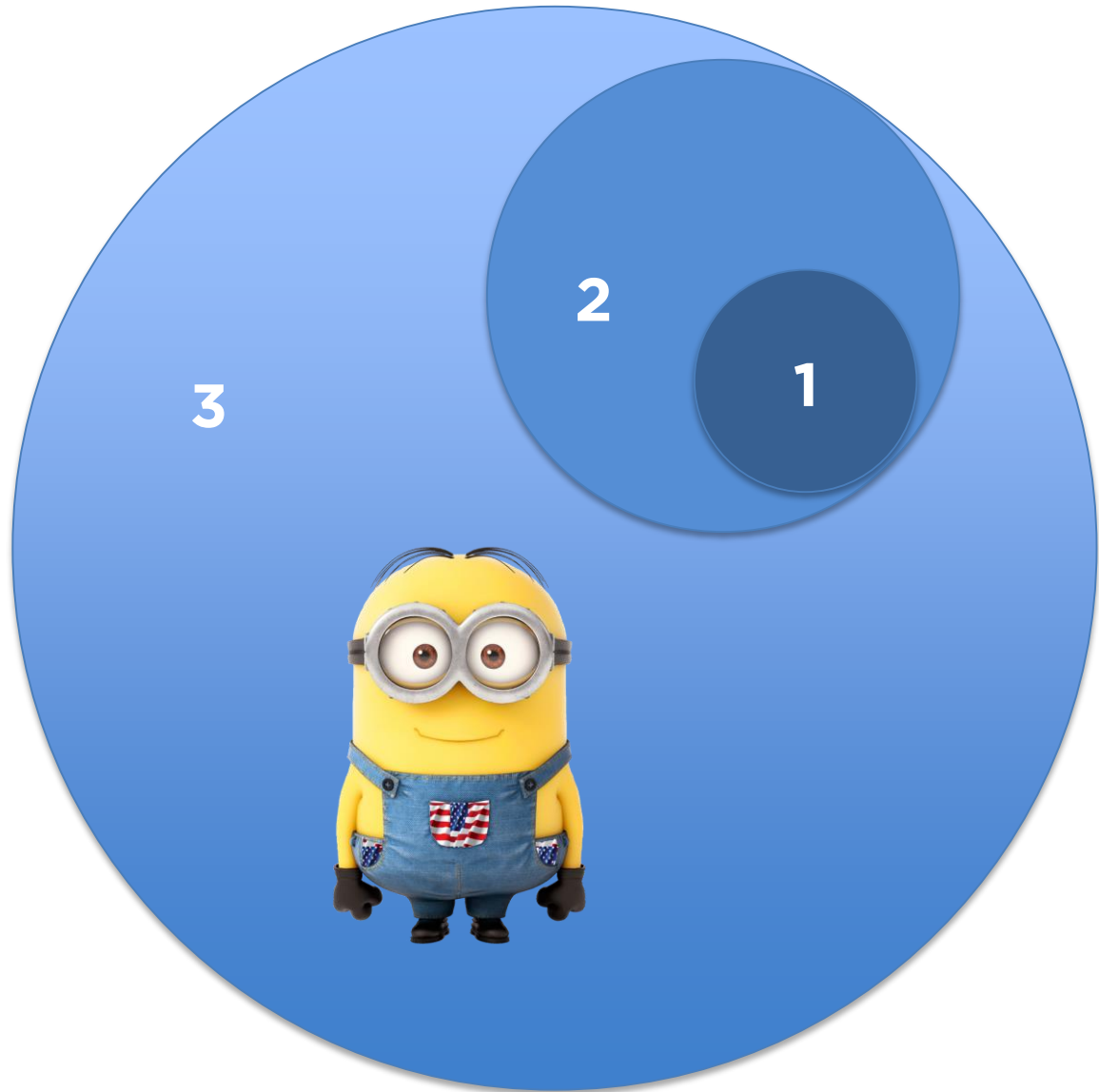
Informational Interviews

Who should I
interview?



Your Entire Network

1. Immediate network
 - Current and former colleagues
 - Current classmates
 - Close friends and family
 - People you met recently
2. Extended network
 - Contacts of people in immediate network
 - Former classmates
 - Dormant professional contacts
3. Potential network
 - Alumni
 - Shared interests or background
 - LinkedIn
 - Company websites



Some Considerations

Geographic preference

Stage of career

Previous jobs

Level of interest



Strength of connection

Career Satisfaction

Active Networking

Scheduling availability

Willingness to help



Informational Interviews

How do I
connect?



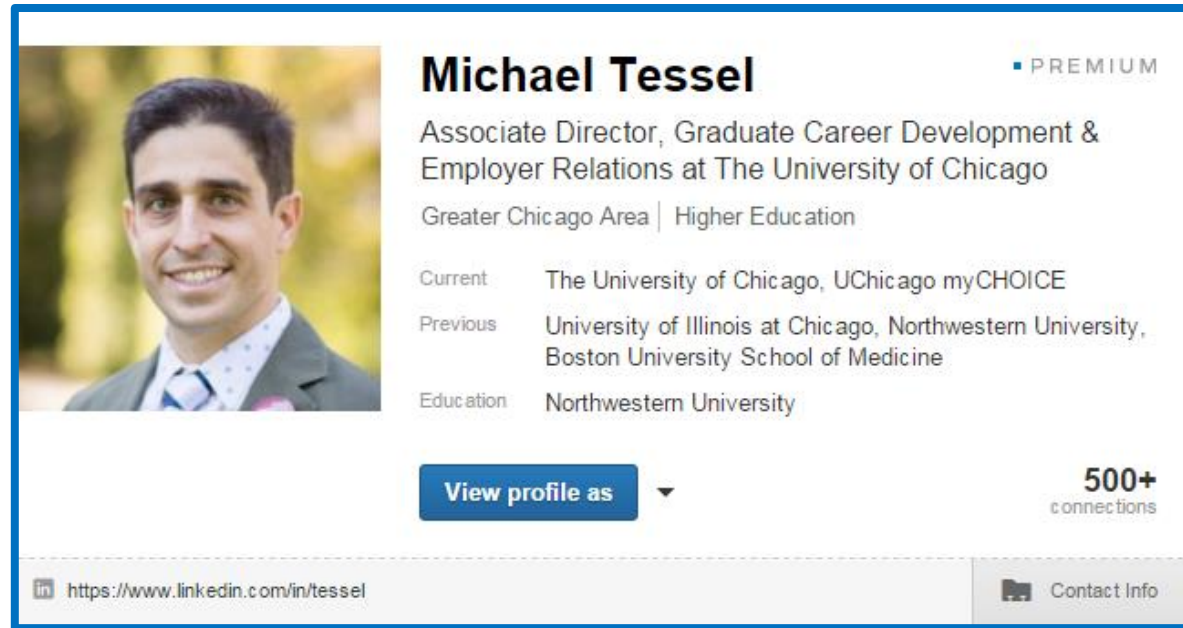
LinkedIn/uchicagoalumni.org

- Yes, you should use **LinkedIn**.
 - Include a photo, update profile add connections
 - Join UChicago LinkedIn alumni group
- All students, postdocs and alumni have access to uchicagoalumni.org
 - Search by program, graduation year, title, location, industry, company



LinkedIn/uchicagoalumni.org

LinkedIn
DEMO...



Michael Tessel PREMIUM

Associate Director, Graduate Career Development & Employer Relations at The University of Chicago
Greater Chicago Area | Higher Education

Current The University of Chicago, UChicago myCHOICE
Previous University of Illinois at Chicago, Northwestern University, Boston University School of Medicine
Education Northwestern University

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<https://www.linkedin.com/in/tessel> Contact Info



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New Connections: Do's & Don't's

DO:

- Send brief, 1 paragraph email
- Express interest in their personal career path
- Ask for 30 min of their time
- Prioritize in-person meetings when possible
- Follow up in 1 wk. if no reply

DO NOT

- Write an essay
- Seem desperate
- Attach resume
- Ask questions by email that negate the necessity to meet
- Send two emails in <1 week
- Ask for a job



Example Outreach Email

Subject: UChicago PhD Student Interested in Cyberdyne

Dear Miles,

First name usually appropriate

Identify things in common or person who referred you to them

I am a current physics PhD student at The University of Chicago and I noticed in the alumni directory that you work for Cyberdyne Systems Corporation. I plan to graduate in two years and I am now starting to explore career options. The Skynet initiative at CDI is fascinating and I would like to learn more about Cyberdyne as well as your personal career path. Would you be willing to speak with me over coffee or lunch sometime in the next two weeks? I look forward to speaking with you soon!

Substitute phone call if contact is not local

Sincerely,

John Connor

www.linkedin.com/in/johnconnor

Customize your LinkedIn url!



Informational Interviews

**Meeting set.
How do I
prepare?**



Preparing for the Interview

- Research person and the company thoroughly
- Prepare specific (and open ended) questions beforehand and have them written down
- Be prepared to organize flow of conversation but be flexible
- Practice elevator speech
- Dress professionally
- Respect their time
- (start & end on schedule)



Outline of Conversation

- Introduction
 - Thank them for agreeing to meet/speak
 - Small talk about how you found them
 - Elevator speech
- Questions about job/company/industry
 - Follow up questions demonstrate interest/attentiveness
- Questions about person
 - Opportunity to find out about possible career path
 - Allows person to open up and relate as human
- Make request
 - Introductions to additional people
 - Advice for someone in your position
 - Resume help
 - Opportunities



Typical Questions

- Could you tell me what a “typical” day is like for you?
- What do you like about your work? What are the most challenging parts?
- What skills did you gain from your MA/PhD/postdoc that have helped you in your career?
- Would you mind telling me about your career path and how you got to your current position?
- What advice do you have for someone with my background who wants to enter this field/company?
- Is there someone here or elsewhere that you’d recommend I speak with? (Goal: Gain 2 contacts from every interview)



Informational Interviews

Meeting
Complete...
now what?



Send Thank You Notes

- Always send one within 24 hours by email
- Follow up at least once, a few weeks later with a status update
- Consider sending a hand-written Thank You note a few days after your email



Sample Thank You Note

Dear Miles,

Thank you so much for speaking with me yesterday! It was fascinating to hear about your personal career path in addition to learning about the internal structure Cyberdyne Systems Corporation. It sounds like I am in a situation that similar to what you experienced when you were exploring careers, so it was both informative and encouraging to learn about your success. The innovative robotics programs like The Terminator will be key to ensuring our national security. I appreciate your willingness to speak with me and offer advice and I look forward to staying in touch.

Sincerely,

John Connor

www.linkedin.com/in/johnconnor



Staying in Touch

- Add contact on LinkedIn with personalized message
- Reply to original email
- Report back after following up with suggested contacts
- Send them articles of interest
- Offer to connect them with others
- Keep them updated on your job search
- Seek to develop mentoring relationship
- Look out for ways you can help them!



Next Steps...

- Speak with a career advisor
- Get business cards (if you don't have them already)
- Add me on LinkedIn and update your profile
- Set aside 1-2 hours/week to research contacts
- Send 1-5 outreach emails/week
- Schedule 1-4 informational interviews/month
- Keep track of emails and connections including notes on conversation and follow up dates

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