Career Dialog Project

A structured conversation with a professional in your field of interest is a great way for you to explore a potential career and get the inside scoop on what it’s really like to do the work.

Project notes & reflections due 11/20

Getting Started

- Decide which occupations interest you.
- Choose potential interviewee(s)...perhaps someone from your fieldwork or someone they recommend...NOT a parent, sibling or family member.
- Make contact: email, phone, letter, face-to-face request (use correct grammar, spelling, etc).
- Introduce yourself; explain the purpose for the interview and the amount of time requested (approximately 20-30 minutes).
- Set the date and time. (Make sure you have 2 hours in your schedule.) Write it down! Set the alarm on your phone! Do something to GUARANTEE you won’t forget.

Preparing

- Learn as much as you can about the industry, company & person you’ll be interviewing.
- Decide what kind of information you need: about the job and/or company, preparation required, education & training, working conditions, career path and general advice.
- Get a thank you card and pre-stamp it so you can complete & mail it right after the interview.
- Create a list of at least 20 open-ended questions; include plenty of space to write down the answers and put the questions in logical order.
- Take 2 pens or pencils; practice your writing-while-listening skills.
- Plan what to wear: dress for this interview as would for a job – because it might become one!
- Arrive 5 minutes early & plan to be there for up to an hour, if the interview goes well it may take longer because you are getting lots of information.

During the Interview

- Introduce yourself & shake hands (if necessary/appropriate).
- Mention the purpose for your visit. For example: “Thank you for letting me ask you questions about your career for this assignment in my internship class.”
- Expect to begin the conversation, but invite them to elaborate. “I’ve prepared some questions, but I hope you’ll add anything that occurs to you as we go along.”
- Speak clearly.
- Behave professionally: be polite, don’t interrupt, and maintain eye contact.
- Be prepared to ask impromptu questions.
- Close with a handshake, make eye contact, and say ‘thank you’.

After the Interview

- Send a thank-you note within 24 hours; mention some specific and relevant information the person provided you, and how it helped you in your thinking about your own future.
- Complete the project reflection and attach your notes with questions asked and answers.
Potential Career Dialog Questions

Prepare meaningful questions to ask your interviewee. Below are many possible questions. You can't ask all of them, but the list will help you choose those you really want answered.

**General questions about your interviewee's career field:**
1. What are the various jobs available in this field?
2. What types of training do companies offer those who enter this field?
3. In what ways is your occupation changing?
4. How is the economy affecting this industry?
5. What is the employment outlook in your field? What’s the demand is for people in this career?
6. What are the growth areas of this field?
7. What parts of the country offer the best opportunities in this field?
8. What is the typical entry-level salary in this field?
9. What is the salary range for higher levels in this occupation?
10. Aside from money, fringe benefits, travel, etc., what kinds of job satisfaction does this career have?
11. What do you find unique about your career field?
12. In your experience, what problems have you found regarding working in this career?
13. What skills or personal characteristics do you feel most contribute to success in this industry?
14. What sacrifices have you had to make to succeed in this field? Were the sacrifices worth it?
15. When people leave this career, what are the usual reasons?
16. What are the typical entry-level job titles and functions?
17. What entry-level jobs offer the best opportunities for the greatest amount of learning?
18. What trends in the field would be most likely to affect someone just entering this career now?
19. What kinds of people experience the greatest success in this field?
20. What is the most important thing that someone planning to enter this career should know?

**All about your interviewee's job:**
1. What is your specific job title?
2. Do other people in your company with the same job title have the same responsibilities?
3. What was your title when you first started here?
4. What precisely do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
5. What is your job like?
6. To what extent is it what you expected it would be?
7. How much job security do you have in this position?
8. What is a typical day like?
9. What kind of hours do you normally work?
10. Do you have to put in much overtime or work on weekends?
11. Are the time demands of your job specific to this company, or is it the same for everyone in this career?
12. Do you ever take work home with you?
13. What kinds of problems do you deal with?
14. What do you do if you can’t solve a problem on your own?
15. Do you have to deal with a significant amount of conflict in your job?
16. What systems are in place for dealing with conflict?
17. What constraints, such as time and funding, make your job more difficult?
18. What kinds of decisions do you make?
19. Describe some of the toughest situations you’ve faced in this job.
20. To what extent do you interact with customers/clients?
21. What percentage of your time is spent doing each function?
22. How does your time vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
23. Which other departments, functional units, or levels do you regularly interact with?
24. How much flexibility do you have in determining how you perform your job?
25. Is your work primarily individual or predominately in groups or teams?
26. How are work teams or groups organized?
27. What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging?
28. What do you like and not like about working in this job?
29. Are there aspects to your job that are repetitious?
30. Is multi-tasking a skill that is required for this job?
31. What projects have you worked on that have been particularly interesting?
32. What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job?
33. How did you learn these skills?
34. What are the educational requirements for this job?
35. What other types of credentials or licenses are required?
36. Is graduate school recommended? An MBA? Some other graduate degree or certifications?
37. What obligations does your employer place on you outside of the ordinary work week?
38. What social obligations go along with a job in your occupation?
39. Are there organizations you are expected to join?
40. Are there other things you are expected to do outside work hours?
41. How has your job affected your lifestyle?
42. To what extent does this job present a challenge in terms of juggling work and family life?
43. What are the major frustrations of this job?
44. If you could change anything about your job, what would it be?
45. Is there a great deal of turnover in this job?
46. What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
47. If you ever left your job, what would most likely drive you away?

About preparing for this career:

1. Does your work relate to any experiences or studies you had in college?
2. How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?
3. What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work?
4. What courses do you wish you had taken that would have prepared you?
5. If you were a college student again, what would you do differently to prepare you for this job?
6. How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
7. What do you feel is the best educational preparation for this career?
8. How do you think [name of your college]'s reputation is viewed when it comes to hiring?
9. How did you prepare for this work?
10. If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way?

**About your interviewee's career path:**
1. In what way did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?
2. What was your major in college?
3. How did you get your job?
4. Did you enter this position through a formal training program?
5. What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
6. What kinds of things did you do before you entered this occupation?
7. Which aspects of your background have been most helpful?
8. What other jobs can you get with the same background?
9. What were the keys to your career advancement?
10. How did you get where you are and what are your long-range goals?
11. What is the job above your current job?
12. If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
13. Where do you see yourself in five years?
14. If your work were suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?
15. If you could start all over, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?

**About the culture of your interviewee's company or organization:**
1. Why did you decide to work for this company?
2. What do you like most about this company?
3. How does your company differ from its competitors?
4. Why do customers choose this company?
5. What is the company's relationship with its customers?
6. How optimistic are you about the company's future and your future with the company?
7. Has the company made any recent changes to improve its practices and profitability?
8. What does the company do to contribute to its employees' professional development?
9. What systems are in place for employees to give management feedback and suggestions?
10. How does the company make use of technology for internal communication and outside marketing? (Use of e-mail, Internet, intranets, World Wide Web, videoconferencing, etc.)?
11. What other technologies are integral to the company's operation?
12. How would you describe the atmosphere at the company? Is it formal or more laid-back?
13. Are people in your department self-directed, or do they require a lot of supervision?
14. How would you describe the morale level of people who work here?
15. Do you participate in many social activities with your coworkers?
16. Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people-, service- or product-oriented business?)
17. Is there flexibility in work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc.?
18. What's the dress code? Is it conservative or casual? Are there dress-down or casual days?
19. What values are most values in this company (security, high income, variety, independence)?
20. What kind of training programs are offered? Is it highly structured or more informal?
21. Does the company encourage and/or pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees? Is there a tuition reimbursement program?
22. Does the company offer an employee discount on the products it sells?
23. What's the best thing about the company?
24. How does the company evaluate your job performance?
25. How does the company recognize outstanding accomplishments of its employees?
26. What does the company reward?
27. Are there people within or outside the organization that the company holds up as heroes?
28. What is the typical job-interview process at the company? How many interviews do candidates generally go through before being offered a position?
29. What does the company do to foster innovation and creativity?

**About opportunities for advancement within this company and/or field:**
1. How does a person progress in your field?
2. What is the highest-level job one can hold in this career?
3. What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
4. What are the advancement opportunities?
5. What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold?
6. How rapidly do people move to the next level in this career?
7. What incentives or disincentives are there for staying in the same job?
8. Would someone in this field need to relocate to advance in his/her career?
9. If I performed well at this company, where could I expect to be in five years?

**Seeking general advice and referrals from your interviewee:**
1. Can you suggest ways a person could obtain the experience necessary to enter this field?
2. What is the best way to obtain a position that will get me started in this occupation?
3. What do you wish you'd known before you entered this field?
4. What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?
5. What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
6. What courses should I be taking?
7. How can I assess whether or not I have the skills needed for a position such as yours?
8. Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job?
9. What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage to pursue a career in this field?
10. Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills?
11. What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here?
12. If I can’t find a position in this field, what other fields would you recommend I consider?
13. What special advice do you have for a student seeking to qualify for this position?
14. Do you have any special word of warning or encouragement as a result of your experience?
15. What should I do to prepare myself for emerging trends and changes in this field?
16. How would you assess the experience I’ve had so far in terms of entering this field?
17. What qualifications would you be looking for if you were hiring for a position such as yours?
18. What qualifications do you look for when hiring for a position subordinate to yours?
19. Do you have any written job descriptions of positions in this field/company?
20. What areas of the company would be most interested in hiring people with my background?
21. If you were conducting a job search today, how would you go about it?
22. Would you be willing to answer more questions if I need additional advice in the future?
23. Would you mind taking a look at my resume to see if you have any suggestions?
24. How would you react if you received a resume like mine for a position with this company?