How to Reach the Unreachable, Get the Ungettable, and Dominate Your Inbox

By Ramit Sethi
How to set up an informational interview

An informational interview is an opportunity to meet someone who works in a position or industry you’d like to work in, or to know more about. It is a commitment-free chance to ask a person questions about his or her job and get the inside scoop. An informational interview can lead to additional referrals, an ongoing professional contact, and maybe even a job BUT…..

Never, ever directly ask for a job in an informational interview. That’s like going into a restaurant, eating all their food, crapping on the table, and then sashaying out wearing nothing but a top hat and cane. You are violating expectations and abusing the situation if you ask for a job in an informational interview. Just don’t do it.

You can turn an informational interview into a career launcher, but only if you approach it wisely. Here’s the first step of that process: The email introduction for an informational interview. By the way, the best place to tap for informational interviews is your alumni association. People who went to the same college have a bond with each other, even decades later. They are often willing to help out a fellow alumnus not only because they know the same football fight song but because helping graduates towards success boosts the value of their own degree.
To: Jane  
From: Samantha  
Subject: Kent State grad -- would love to chat about your work at Deloitte

Hi Jane,

My name is Samantha Kerritt. I’m a ’04 grad from Kent State and I came across your name on our alumni site.

I’d love to get your career advice for 15-20 minutes. I’m currently working at Acme Tech Company, but many of my friends work in consulting and each time they tell me how much they love their job, I get more interested.

Many of them have told me that if I’m interested in consulting, I should talk to someone at Deloitte. Do you think I could pick your brain on your job and how you came to Deloitte? I’d especially love to know how you made your choices after graduating from Kent.

I can meet you for coffee or at your office...or wherever it’s convenient. I can work around you!

Would it be possible for us to meet?

Thanks,

-Samantha
How to ask for recommendations for people to talk to

Email provides a great forum for building your professional network and getting inside access without putting your contact on the spot. Ideally, your contact should feel comfortable referring you to a colleague of his or hers.

Hello John,

Hope all is well.

If you recall, we spoke a few months ago when I was exploring new career opportunities in information security. (I was your student at the time). Thanks again for agreeing to be my reference!

I was browsing the Acme Career site the other day and the Research Scientist role caught my eye. I think it’d be perfect for me considering my work on insider threat-related projects at Current Company. From what I remember, it sounds pretty similar to the work you do at Acme. By any chance, do you know of anyone there who I should chat with? I’d love to learn more about the role so I can see if it’s the right fit for me.

If not, no problem — just wanted to keep you in the loop. Thanks again for all your help!

Take care,

Roger
How to cold email a stranger for advice

Hi Steve,
Greetings from a fellow UCLA alumni!
I was doing some research on Project Manager positions on LinkedIn, and I noticed you’re a Project Manager at Acme. I’m on a quest for my dream job and would love to ask you 3-5 questions about your experiences at Acme.

Would you be available for a quick chat by phone or over coffee this Thursday at 10am? I’m also free any time Friday.

If email is easier, I’d be happy to send you my questions.

Sincerely,
John Smith
How to write a pitch for a consulting gig or a job interview

When you are offering your services to someone who didn’t know she needed them, you want to keep your email short and sweet. Provide a highlight or two about what you can do for the person and then make it easy for her to take the next step with a specific call to action.

Subject: Hi from John - interested in chatting about Acme

Hi Kelly,

My name is John and I’m currently a Marketing Associate at Widget Corp. I’ve been following Acme for some time now -- I love AcmeProduct!

My guess is that right now, 3 of Acme’s biggest concerns are
1. Converting free members,
2. Increasing email sign-ups and
3. Hiring good people who know both the marketing and product side.

Recently, I blah blah blah.

I’d love to chat with you about the possibility of doing the same at Acme as a Marketing Manager.

Do you have 15 minutes to meet over coffee Thursday at 10am?

Sincerely,

John Smith
How to reach out to others in your company
to get to know them

It’s critically important to identify the key people in your organization and
to figure out how you can help them. In a New York Times “Corner Office”
profile, Linda Hudson, president of the land and armaments group for BAE
systems illustrated the importance of networking in her career.

“An early boss told me, spend the first couple of months in this job figuring out how things
really work around here, and then go and establish allies with the real movers and shakers in
the organization because that’s the way you will be the most successful. And I advise people
to do the same thing.

You can never succeed in a corporate culture on your own. It is all about how you fit, how you
know how to make things happen within the infrastructure and in a way that’s acceptable to
the norms and values of the corporation that you work in.

Once you catch on to who really pulls the strings and where the real power base is, who you
have to collaborate with, who you have to inform, who you have to seek for advice and agree-
ment, you can actually make these big, very, very lumbersome organizations work very, very well.
It’s all about the informal structure. It’s about the critical relationships, and it’s about fitting in,
in a constructive way, so that you really make your decisions that not only benefit yourself but
benefit the corporation as well.”
Here’s a script to begin building those relationships.

From: James
To: Serena
Subject: New marketing hire -- would love to pick your brain

Hi Serena,

My name is James Splint and I’m the new marketing associate in the competitive product group (CPG). I was speaking with my manager Greg and he mentioned you’re doing some interesting work in TPG, and I’d love to pick your brain. In particular, I’m curious to hear your thoughts on the new eRobot gizmo – is it for real or just hype?

Are you free for coffee or a quick meeting this week?

Thanks,

-James