



Networking by Zoom: How to Identify Your Network and Conduct Informational Interviews



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Networking is an important facet of any job search, and is especially valuable in our current, virtual recruitment landscape. Whether you have a job, or are currently looking, focusing on your network now will pay dividends as your career progresses.

In this presentation you will learn how to:

- Identify your network
- Tier your contacts and create an outreach plan
- Expand your network with virtual informational interviews
- You can apply these steps using the **Virtual Networking Plan Template**, also available on Law Lion Careers



Identify Your Network

- Create a list of all your primary, secondary and “additional” contacts.
- A broad and thoughtful approach to this list will simplify the creation of your outreach plan.



Identify Your Primary Contacts

- These are people you know well enough to call on the phone and not have to provide a lengthy explanation of who you are.
- They do not need to be people you see every day, nor do they have to be lawyers. It is a common mistake to assume that only lawyers have information about legal jobs.



Identify Your Primary Contacts: Examples

- Family, friends & neighbors
- Classmates, former classmates & professors
- Social & religious organizations, including sorority/fraternity, other student organizations, gym, & sports teams
- Service providers you see regularly, including doctors, dentists, & hair stylists
- Former employers & coworkers
- Friends of parents and relatives
- Mentors



Identify Your Secondary Contacts

(Those who share an academic connection)

- Evaluate your geographic, employer-type and practice area preferences
- Identify Penn State Law alumni, Penn State Lawyers and lawyers who graduated from your undergraduate university who align with your preferences.
 - For attorneys at firms, request a list from the CSO.
 - For other types of employers, use LinkedIn as well.



Identify Additional Contacts

(Random Acquaintances)

- Examples:
 - The hiring partner you sat next to on a plane
 - An attorney you met at a bar association event



Tier your Contacts & Create an Outreach Plan

- Different contacts can help you attain different goals.
- Identify and prioritize your main goals. For example:
 - Find a current job opening
 - Learn about and/or make contacts in a particular practice area
 - Learn about and/or make contacts in a particular geographic area, find a mentor, etc.)
- Match your contacts to each goal.



Tier your Contacts & Create an Outreach Plan

- Start by reaching out to the contacts listed under your primary goal, and work down the list.
- If your main goal is to find an immediate job opening, focus on those personal contacts with whom you feel comfortable being direct (family, parents' friends, college roommates, etc.)
- For other goals, start with an **informational interview**.
- Set realistic outreach goals, and record your progress to stay on track.



Expand Your Network

The Virtual Informational Interview



What is an Informational Interview?

- An informational interview is:
 - A virtual meeting or phone call to gain insights about someone's field/employer.
 - An informal discussion in which you gather information on areas of law, types of practice, employer culture, legal trends, career options, and other topics.
 - A way to build your network of contacts while your contact also increases theirs.
 - An entry into the hidden job market.
- An informational interview is not:
 - A job interview! People are more likely to help you if you come seeking information, not focused on a job.



Why Should I Conduct Informational Interviews?

- To obtain information you need to make your best job choice and context to enhance your application materials.
- To build valuable connections in your chosen geographic location or practice area.
- Both you and the person you interview receive benefits!



Why Should I Conduct Informational Interviews?

- You benefit because you:
 - Meet new people and explore different career paths.
 - Find out what people do, day to day, in their jobs.
 - Gather first-hand information on particular employers, practice areas, industries or geographic markets.
 - Make contacts that could result in a job or internship lead.



Why Should I Conduct Informational Interviews?

- The people you interview benefit because they:
 - Talk about themselves. You might be surprised how much people enjoy doing this!
 - Mentor someone starting out.
 - Increase their network and meet people who potentially could fill future openings.



How Do I Set Up Informational Interviews?

- Make the initial ask by email.
 - Most attorneys are working remotely right now and will appreciate the ability to respond when it's convenient for them.
- Introduce yourself.
- State how you got their name.
- Ask if they have 15-20 minutes to discuss the topic that best aligns with your goal.



Setting up the Informational Interview: Introduce Yourself

- Provide your **name**, **school**, **year in law school**, any **particular interest** you have, and additional information which would pertain to why you are reaching out.
- For example, speaking to a criminal defense attorney, you might say:
 - I'm interested in criminal defense because I want to be a litigator and I'm concerned about protection of individual rights.
 - I've taken Criminal Procedure and Evidence and I'm planning on participating in the Indigent Criminal Justice Practicum next semester.
 - I clerked for the Centre County Public Defender's office last summer.
 - I worked as a Counselor for homeless youth prior to law school.



Setting up the Informational Interview: State How You Got Their Name

- If it is a cold call:
 - State how you found them: alumni search, career services office, news article, etc.
- If it is a referral:
 - Name the person who referred you.



Setting up the Informational Interview: Ask For Their Time

- Ask if they have 15-20 minutes to discuss the topic that best aligns with your goal:
 - Their area of law, employer, job, geographic legal market, and how they got there
 - Legal or industry trends
 - The state/nature of the legal market in your field/city
 - Career planning advice during law school and after
- ❖ Make it clear that you are seeking information and advice (*and not a job*).



Setting up the Informational Interview: Additional Tips

- If they respond seeming busy but friendly, ask for names of others they might refer you to and if you can use their name as a referral source.
- If you have a good rapport, you can offer to email your resume before the meeting so they know something about you and you can get their feedback on it. Make it clear you are seeking feedback on the resume (not submitting it for consideration for a job.)
- Have a list of questions prepared in advance, but do not include them in the initial email. It is inconsiderate of the person's time to expect them to respond thoughtfully to multiple questions over email.



How do I Conduct Informational Interviews?

- Prepare ahead of time.
- Have a suggested format in mind.
- Organize a list of possible questions.



Conducting the Informational Interview: Preparation

- Research your contact, their organization and practice.
- Join the call or virtual meeting promptly at the agreed upon start time.
- Dress professionally for virtual meetings.
- Have a copy of your resume ready to send them (if you haven't already). Offer it only if:
 - They request it.
 - You establish a rapport and feel comfortable asking for advice about it.
- Have your list of questions and skills summary ready. Be prepared to take notes, but don't let your note taking detract from the natural flow of the conversation.



Conducting the Informational Interview: Suggested Format

- **Thank your contact** for meeting with you!
- If a **Referral**: Begin the meeting by mentioning the person who referred you or the mutual connection and your reason for setting up the meeting.
- Give a brief **overview** of yourself and your areas of interest.
- Ask your **questions**. Have a list of questions ready, but keep the conversation going by asking follow-up questions.
- **Listen!** This is not a job interview, so the focus is on the person with whom you are meeting. For the most part, you should be listening rather than speaking.
- **Watch the time**. If time is running out, mention this. If they say they can continue past the scheduled time, it is fine to do so.
- **Ask for referrals!** Get names of other people in the field, practice area, organization or city with whom you might speak. Ask who else you can talk to.
- Ask to **stay in touch** and **thank the person** for their time and advice.



Possible Questions to Ask

Ask open-ended questions to encourage conversation. These sample questions should help you formulate your own questions.

- How did you obtain your job? What career track did you follow?
- What career paths have you seen other people follow to this particular practice area?
- In your opinion, what areas of law are experiencing the most growth?
- What are the legal trends in your area of law?
- How do you expect your area of law to be affected by the current global health crisis?
- What changes do you anticipate in your practice area in the next five years?
- What is your employer/job like? What is a typical day/week/month like for you?
- What project(s) are you working on right now?
- When you first started out (with this employer), how long did it take for you to have the opportunity to conduct a deposition? Argue a motion? Conduct a trial? Handle a closing?



Possible Questions to Ask (Continued)

- What type of training is necessary to enter this practice area/field? How did you obtain specialized training?
- What type of skills does your office look for when you hire people in this field?
- What professional associations or groups are advantageous to join this field?
- What type of person succeeds in this field? What are the skills necessary?
- What problems or issues are facing this employer/practice/area of law?
- What opportunities exist for growth, professional development and client development?
- What are the major rewards/frustrations of your job?
- If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?
- What do you wish you had known when entering this field?
- Do you have any advice on the best way to market oneself to enter this field?



Possible Questions to Ask (Continued)

- Do you have any tips on interviewing successfully?
- Would you mind taking a look at my resume and giving me any advice or suggestions you might have for improvement? (Ask for this near the end of the informational interview because you don't want to cut the conversation short)
- What professional materials/publications should I be reading in this field?
- ❖ If you have salary concerns, this is a great time to get that information by asking about salary ranges for given jobs or levels.



After the Interview

- Review your notes, formulate new questions, ask yourself how you feel about the field/work/employer.
- Send a thank-you note within 24-48 hours.
 - **By Email:** During this period of remote work and learning, all correspondence should be sent via email. Once things get back to normal, it's still generally fine to do this via email (as long as you avoid casual email format/spelling/grammar), but use your judgment based on the rapport between you and your contact.
 - **By Mail:** When lawyers have returned to their offices, a hard copy thank you note or letter is preferable for attorneys who are more formal ("old school").
 - Mention the topics you discussed and whether or not you utilized their referrals.
- Most Importantly, keep in touch with the practitioner.
 - Send links to articles they might be interested in, holiday cards, or notes updating your progress.
 - Follow up on suggestions and update them that you did so.



The Importance of Good Record-Keeping

Keeping good records while searching for a job is very important. For example, you will want to remember that you left a voicemail message for someone who calls you two months later.

- Organize a file folder, notebook, or an electronic cross-referencing system. For instance, if Abby Attorney gives you a referral to Joe Corporate, note it on both Abby's and Joe's files or cards.
- Cross-reference by name of organization, type of law, name of individual.
- Note the dates you called, met with, or wrote to individuals. Also note whether you said that you would take a certain action by a specific date to ensure follow-through.
- Keep copies of all your correspondence.

