



## **EPISODE 135 7 Steps To Rock Your Informational Interviews**

### **With Heather Fork**

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HF: Welcome to The Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. If you're questioning your career in medicine, you've come to the right place. I'm Heather Fork, a former dermatologist and founder of The Doctor's Crossing. As a master certified coach, I've helped hundreds of physicians find greater happiness in their career, whether in medicine, a nonclinical job, or something else. I started this podcast to help you discover the career path that's best for you and give you some resources and encouragement to make it happen. You don't need to get stuck at the white coat crossroads. So, pull up a chair, my friend, and let's carpe that diem.

Hello and welcome back to the Doctor's Crossing Carpe Diem podcast. You're listening to episode number 135. I've been wanting to do some more solo episodes. I like talking to you and sharing whatever helpful information I can. This may sound a little weird to say this, but I miss having my one-on-one time with you, so to speak. Even though I'm not there actually in person with you, I like the connection and feeling as if we are just chatting together.

Today I'm going to be diving into the topic of doing informational interviews. Informational interviews are a great way to learn from someone who is doing something that is of interest to you. The most common type of informational interviews revolve around learning about what it's like to work in a specific job or at a particular company. However, the conversation could really be about anything you want to learn from someone such as how they started their business, what their MBA program was like, or how they were able to do a fellowship later in life.

As part of the coaching process, my clients do informational interviews and I see firsthand how helpful these conversations are and how they can lead not only to greater clarity on career direction, but also can lead to potential job opportunities. Because we call these informational interviews and they typically are informal, there can be the tendency to treat them casually and

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not prepare in advance as we would for a formal job interview. While just winging it can work out, it's best to be well prepared to get the most out of these conversations. You never know how the person you are talking to could help you out if you make a great impression on him or her.

To this end, I'd love to share with you seven steps to rock your informational interviews. Let's do this.

Step number one, start with the end in mind. Because you might only have 15 to 20 minutes with this person and never speak with them again. It's really important to think about what are your goals for this specific conversation and what kind of impression do you want to leave this person with about you.

I'd like to use a recent podcast guest, Dr. Alec Jacobson here as an example. Alec is a fourth year pathology resident who decided he did not want to go on to a clinical career. He was at a crossroad and had no idea what he was going to do next. So, he started doing informational interviews and his goal with these initial interviews was to simply learn about a wide variety of jobs and talk to as many different people as possible.

Sometimes he even wondered if it was helpful to have some of these conversations like, "Why am I talking to this person?" But he said he learned something from each person he spoke with. At that point it was really just to gather information, gauge his interest level and make connections.

Then through these conversations and the coaching work that we were doing, he determined that he wanted to focus on the area of medical communications. His next step was to talk with people in medical communications and medical writing jobs. He spoke with a number of different individuals and he said after these conversations he was able to determine that he was really excited by this area. He also assessed that he was a good fit and eligible for these jobs and that this sounded like something that would really keep him challenged and engaged in this field.

And what's more is in one of these conversations he happened to be speaking with an individual who was looking to hire someone to fill a position and he was really impressed with Alec. So, they hit it off and Alec ended up doing a writing test and then was interviewed and got that job.

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Now we never go into an informational interview asking for a job or thinking that that person is going to make a connection so we get a job. You never want to do that. However, when you do make a great impression on someone, they might be in a company where they can refer you to the hiring manager. They may know someone in a different company who's hiring. They may connect you with someone who could be very helpful to you, and that is why we really want to prepare in advance to make the best impression possible.

Step number two, be able to articulate where you are at and what you want from the conversation. Now, I know it's hard when we don't have clarity ourselves and we're looking for it to be able to articulate to someone what we're thinking and what we're wanting. What can happen is we might say something such as, "Well, I'm a burnt out physician and I'm exploring options and I want to hear your transition story."

Okay, there's nothing super wrong with that, but to the person hearing that it can feel like heavy lifting. "Oh gosh, this doctor's burned out and yeah, there's someone else who wants to hear my story. I just don't have time for that. It can really feel like heavy lifting."

However, if you, on the other hand, reach out to someone and say, "I've looked at your LinkedIn profile, I'm really impressed with your transition." You can say something specific that you saw on their profile. "And I am interested in this area of becoming a physician advisor. I've listened to some podcasts, I've read about this role, and I would be interested in speaking with you for 15 to 20 minutes to learn more about what I can do to increase my candidacy for this type of position. If you have time, this is when I'm most available. I understand that you're busy and if this is not something you can do, I completely understand and thank you for reading this message."

So, even if you have a lot of questions, you're not even sure what area you're interested in, you can find some way to be clear about what you want from the conversation, and it might be some steps to take. It might be if you're eligible for this area, it might be you would like someone to look at your resume or give you some suggestions if there's some courses you could take. It's helpful to think of something specific that you can ask for.

Step number three, let go of any attachment to how people respond to your request. Now we are very good at helping other people and giving, but when it comes to asking someone who



could be a perfect stranger to help us when we may not even really know what we want to ask and we're thinking we might look stupid or dumb or waste their time, there can be a big wall of resistance to reaching out and we don't like to be rejected.

We want to reframe what's happening here because we can always ask when we ask respectfully and also give someone an out. And it's up to them to just say yes or no. That's not our responsibility to manage that part of this equation. They can say no, they can ignore us. They can do whatever they want, but you don't want to let these thoughts about bothering someone else stop you from trying to reach out.

What I see happens sometimes is someone will send a message, say on LinkedIn to someone and it's a nice message. Then 24, 48 hours go by and they don't get a response. And they're like, "Oh wow, that person doesn't like me or they don't think I'm a good fit for this or I'm bothering them." And often this person hasn't even seen the message. They may be away on vacation, their kid may be sick, they may not check their LinkedIn messages.

And it's also true, they may get a lot of requests from people for these kinds of interviews and they just don't have time to do them. So they just don't respond and that's totally okay. And one thing that can happen is when I have guests on my podcast, they give up their time to be on the podcast. They talk about their situation and their story, but they're not able to speak individually to people who reach out and they love to and they want to and they feel bad not maybe responding to you if you reach out, but they often just don't have the time. But never take that personally.

If you reach out to enough people, you're going to get the yeses. In general, if you're reaching out to perfect strangers, there's usually about a 15% success rate. It really just depends on where you might have some commonalities with that person.

But if you just keep going and don't worry about the nos or the lack of response, you will get people to speak with you. Trust me, I see it happen every single time. So, just don't give up and don't worry about it.

Step number four, research your person. Before you reach out to someone to even ask them for an informational interview, it's great to get some information about them so that you can customize your message. Obviously if it's someone you already know, then that's different. But

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if it's a complete stranger, you can look at their website, read on the internet about them, you can look at their LinkedIn profile and that way you can mention some new specific things in your message.

You can also determine “Is this a good person for me to talk to and what specifically might they be able to help me with?” It's really great if you do get to do that informational interview that you're not asking them questions that you could have read on the internet. For example, if they told their story on a podcast or maybe they've even written a book is if you come into that interview and say something that shows that you already know this information about them, it's going to be impressive. You're going to have more time in this informational interview to ask other questions. So, it's really great to research your person before you reach out.

Step number five is to make a list of questions. Now, you may only have 15 minutes or so with this person and you don't know whether they might be wanting to talk a lot of the time. So knowing exactly what you want to ask and prioritizing the most important questions at the top of your list can help ensure that you get the most out of this conversation.

You can also ask the person if they'd like to have a list of your questions ahead of time. You can ask if you can send your CV or resume. Now, obviously, depending on what you want to get out of this call that's going to guide your questions, but common ones for someone wanting to transition into a job might be, “How did you decide to make this transition? How do you like your job? What are some of the challenges?”

You can ask about a typical day. You might want to ask too about the work-life balance. “How many hours are you working? How often do you have to work in the evening or on weekends?” Because this can be hard to determine if you're in a formal job interview and it's such an important thing to know. You can also ask the person if they're looking at your CV or resume, if you're a good candidate, what might you need to do to fill in any gaps or improve your candidacy? Getting this kind of insider feedback can be very helpful, so don't hesitate to ask those kinds of questions.

I want to take a moment here to mention a resource that I have. In my LinkedIn for Physician's course, the bonus is on doing your informational interviews. I have a list of sample questions that you can ask and also some dos and don'ts to make the best impression possible. So, this is the bonus in my LinkedIn course for physicians.

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For the month of June, 2023, there is a 10% discount off of my LinkedIn course. This course can be really helpful if you don't have a LinkedIn profile or you want to optimize it for a specific job sector. I also show you how to reach out and network with people, send messages for informational interviews as well as search for jobs and apply.

If you'd like some more information about the LinkedIn course, you can go to the show notes or simply go to [doctorscrossing.com](https://doctorscrossing.com), hit the products tab at the top of the page and you can learn more about this course. The discount code is going to be LINKEDIN10. And I'll also have the code in the show notes. Again, it's good until the end of June 2023.

Step number six, treat the informational interview like a formal interview. I cannot stress this enough. Now this doesn't mean you have to put on a suit or a dress and fix your hair and makeup, but from the moment you contact someone, I really want you to think that this is like a formal interview in the sense that you're being evaluated. What this means is when you email or message that person, make sure it's a nice message and that you proofed it. You don't have to spend hours on it, but just give it your best shot and then always show up well.

That means if someone responds to you, respond back within 24 hours. Be considerate, be respectful of that person. And this whole part about preparing well, having your questions, knowing the person, doing your research. All of these things are things that we do when we do formal interviews. Why? Because they want the person to want us. And doing all these steps, these little things are actually big things and they can make a person go, "Wow, I like this guy or this gal, and I'm going to help them out and I'm going to recommend them to someone else." Because think about it, if this person has sort of a lukewarm feeling about how you interacted with them, they're not going to refer you to someone else. They're not going to tell their hiring manager, "Hey, this is a great doctor. I want you to talk to this doctor and push for them."

But on the other hand, I've really seen it happen where my client has made a really good impression on someone. And then there's an individual who can help with hiring in some way and they will go to bat for that individual. I've absolutely seen it and they haven't even met that person, they haven't done a formal interview, but they just like how they show up on email and maybe they're having a short conversation with them. It's huge.



They say that 85% of jobs are given to people through informal connections and informational interviews is a likely source of getting a job. Again, take this really seriously because this is where I see more people getting hired from these conversations and applying on platforms.

All right, now we are at our last step, step number seven, follow up with a thank you within 24 hours. This is easy, but a lot of people forget to do it or don't do it. And again, this person has taken time to speak with you and it will really go a long way if you write a short thank you message. You can also ask them if there's anyone else they would recommend you speak with. This could be one of your questions under step number five, but if you've forgotten to ask that in your chat, you could ask that in that thank you email.

And you can also offer to help them out if there's something you could do for them that would be useful or beneficial. It's always nice to make that offer. So, let me quickly review the seven steps. Step number one is to start with the end in mind. What's your goal for the informational interview? Step number two, be able to articulate where you are at and what you want from the conversation.

Step number three, let go of any attachment to how people respond to your requests. It's not personal. Step number four, research your person. Step number five, make a list of questions in advance. Step number six, treat this like a formal interview. Step number seven, follow up with a thank you within 24 hours.

And that is the end of our episode on informational interviews. Thanks so much for being here with me. I really enjoyed the time with you. And again, if you're interested in the LinkedIn course, you can find it at [doctorscrossing.com](http://doctorscrossing.com) in the products tab at the top of the page.

Well this completes our episode on informational interviews, thanks so much for being here. I really enjoyed spending the time with you. And as always, don't forget to carpe that diem and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye for now.

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Podcast details

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