



NICA

Networking In Corporate America

Preparing for an Informational Phone Call
October 2006

Welcome to Mod 2! As you proceed further into your career search, you'll find that our alumni are a useful source of information. Leverage this rich database of company and industry information to help you make a better career decision. While our alumni host many company presentations at Kenan-Flagler, thereby giving you a good opportunity to speak to them directly, a vast majority of our alumni will not visit Chapel Hill. In the absence of a face-to-face conversation, a phone call may be your best option to learn more about the alumnus' industry and the company. This approach also gives you an opportunity to make a good first impression on the alumnus.

This guide covers basic steps that you could take to make the process smoother.

Before the Informational Phone Call

1. **Research alumni database:** Tap the KFBS alumni database at <http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/Alumni/> or the General Alumni Association database at <http://alumni.unc.edu/> for contact details. Additionally, some of our alumni have volunteered to be career advisers. You can search for career advisers at <http://www.alumnicconnections.com/olc/membersonly/UBS/olctransfer.cgi?auth=Y&gotourl=http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/alumniCareer/>
2. **Schedule your informational interview:** Once you have identified the alumni you want to contact, schedule a time for the informational interview via email. Some items to consider covering in the email include:
 - Brief introduction of yourself. Provide enough background about your experiences so that the alumnus can have a good idea of your interests. Make sure to state that you are a KFBS student and that you seek advice (not a job!) from them.
 - Explain that you are researching positions in a particular field and that you would like to learn more from them.
 - Arrange logistics: Who will call, at which phone number and what time?
 - Do not send your resume in the first email in order to avoid the perception that you are job-seeking rather than gathering information. Your email should not sound like a typical cover letter.

TIP: While you may have the alumnus' mobile number from the alumni directory, the alumnus may prefer to be called at another number. Please clarify who will call and at which number.

3. **Prepare, prepare, prepare:** Conduct in-depth research on the industry and the company. Prepare a list of questions specific to the industry as well as to the company for which the alumnus works. You should have at least five to six good questions ready prior to the interview. Insightful questions on the professional work and life of an employee are good options. Some of these include: a) "What is a typical day like?", and b) "Why did you make the decision to pursue your career with Company A?." Don't ask questions that are obvious (i.e., answers that you can find on the company website such as 'new hire training') unless you want to know details not specified on the website. You should also check out the resume of the alumnus at the CMC Library. Additionally, make use of web-based research tools (Google!) to find out more about the alumnus since he or she left KFBS.

TIP: While the purpose of your phone interview is only informational, please treat the session like a company interview and prepare yourself as much as you can. Alumni are, after all, company representatives, and your first impression on them definitely matters.

4. **Prepare an agenda:** Based on your research, prepare an agenda for the discussion and include your key questions.
5. **Practice with your classmates:** A phone conversation is very different from a one-on-one conversation. In the absence of visual expression, your words have to do all the talking. Practice a mock informational interview with your classmates over phone. Make it real by trying to mimic an actual informational phone call.

During the Informational Phone Call

1. **Be polite:** After exchanging pleasantries, walk through the agenda briefly. If you have an understanding of the industry, demonstrate your knowledge based on the type of questions you ask. Always give the alumni and the company the due respect that they deserve.

TIP: After greeting the alumnus, ask if now is a good time to talk even if you both agreed upon the time earlier.

To avoid the possibility of a dropped call, use a landline phone. You can sign one out, along with an interview suite, through the CMC. If you call on a cell phone, try to find a quiet place to avoid unnecessary noise during the conversation. Speak slowly and concisely.

2. **Jot down the points:** Take notes of the conversation on a note-pad. The information may be helpful for preparing your follow-ups and cover letters.
3. **Don't overtly sell yourself:** Make use of the opportunity to build a link with the alumnus. Do not go overboard on selling yourself to the company (as you would in an interview). As you ask your questions, try to highlight how your experience fits into the role, and/or what you are doing to learn the necessary skills. Do not ever end the phone call seeking a formal interview with recruiting staff.
4. **Keep in touch:** Near the end of the phone call, ask the alumnus if he or she would be available for further advice regarding your job search. You may also want to ask if he or she can recommend other contacts for you to speak with.

Follow-up

1. **Be prompt in sending a thank-you note:** Respond within 24 hours. Either emails or written notes are acceptable. Don't send generic thank-you notes. The alumnus might **not** remember who you are! Try to write something about your conversation.
2. **Keep them updated:** Alumni are generally very concerned about the School and the students. Make an effort to keep the alumnus updated on your career decisions. You may use online networking resources like www.linkedin.com to keep them up-to-date on your professional life.

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