Cold Calling

Many students conduct informational interviews to learn more about their field and also to get job search advice from professionals. Cold calling is a strategy that is often used to find professionals who can meet with you. To ease anxiety when making a cold call, you may want to follow these guidelines and tips when setting up an informational interview.

Prepare a Script

Prepare a short script roughly 4-8 sentences in length. The script should include:

- Your name.
- How you acquired their name and contact information.
- A brief background summary (educational background, experience, goals).
- A request to meet with the person at their workplace for 15-30 minutes so you can learn more about their field and organization as well as gain their advice on securing jobs or internships in the industry.

Example

“Hello Ms. Johnson, my name is Anita Future and I found your name on the Society for Human Resource Management web site. I am a student at the University of Minnesota majoring in Applied Economics. This summer, I am hoping to secure an internship that will help me build skills for the future. I am wondering if you would be open to meeting with me for 30 minutes so that I can learn more about your position and organization as well as get any advice from you on searching for internships in this industry.”

Additional Tips

- It is important that you sound polished and professional when you call, so practice your script with a friend, a mirror, or a career professional. Be sure your voice sounds energetic and confident!
- Prepare what you will say should you receive their voicemail.
- Try to schedule face-to-face meetings whenever possible. You will develop greater rapport with the person and you will get to see first-hand their work environment and organizational culture.
- Start with “warm” contacts…those individuals you have learned about through family, friends, professors and co-workers.
- Not every person will have time to meet with you; don’t take this personally. Instead ask if they know of someone else who might have the time to meet with you.
- Be sure to accommodate their schedule since they are doing you a favor and leave your phone number in case they need to reschedule.
Sample Scripts

If you do not have a “warm” contact within an organization, it is still appropriate to inquire about internships and/or attempt to conduct informational interviews with employees by calling an organization directly. Your goal should be to talk with someone in the organization doing the type of work you want or the supervisor of such positions. Below are some strategies for connecting with these individuals if all you have is the organization’s main telephone number.

E = Potential Employee (You)
R = Receptionist
HR = Human Resources Person
B = Potential Boss

Receptionist Answers
R   Good morning, XYZ company, may I help you?
E   Hello. Yes, I hope so. My name is ____ and I’m trying to figure out whom I should talk with. I am currently doing some research about _____ and I’d like to talk with whoever you think would be an appropriate contact in that area.
R   Well, I don’t know. Let me transfer you to Mary in Human Resources. She’ll be able to help you.
E   Wonderful, thank you. May I ask your name?
R   Peter.
E   Thanks, Peter.

Human Resources Answers
HR  Hi, this is Mary. Can I help you?
E   Hello. Yes, I hope so. My name is ____ and I’m trying to figure out whom I should talk with. I am currently doing some research about _____ and I’d like to talk with whoever you think would be an appropriate contact in that area.
HR  There are not any positions open in that division right now, but you can send us your resume and we will keep it on file.
E   Well, I am not exactly looking to talk with them about job openings. Instead I am trying to learn more about what it is like to work in the industry, what the day-to-day job tasks are like and to learn more about your organization.
HR  I see. If that is the case, you probably should talk with Jean Smith or Rob Peterson. However, neither of them is in today. Do you want one of their voice mails?
E   That would be great. In fact, could I get both of their telephone numbers so that I can call them back and leave them each a message?
HR  Sure, Jean’s number is 555-5555 and Rob’s number is 777-7777.
E   Thank you very much for your help Mary. I really appreciate your time.

Once you have contact names of real people, utilize your prepared script developed on page 1 to call this new contact directly! Be persistent and patient when using this approach. You may get transferred to several people before you find the right person to speak with.