

— HOW TO — **NAVIGATE CAREER CONVERSATIONS**

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Career Planning Service
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CAREER CONVERSATIONS

What are they? Also called information interviews, career conversations involve contacting and speaking with someone in a position, company or industry you are curious about.

Why would I do this? Career conversations can help you fine-tune your future goals, discover additional possibilities or areas of interest, develop your network, and find potential mentors. The idea is to increase your knowledge of the field and receive advice and information from someone with concrete experience.

Who can I talk to? You can interview anyone who knows about the work you would like to do or learn about, ideally someone employed in your field of interest or in a related organization or industry.

- Start with people you already know
- Ask for referrals to professionals in your field or company of interest
- Research organizations to find current employees in relevant positions
- Approach new contacts (i.e. people you meet at career fairs or speakers from career panels or other related McGill events)
- Reach out to McGill alumni through LinkedIn and McGill Connect

What should I say? Once you have a professional's contact information, asking them for a career conversation is the next step. Here are some key elements to include, all depending on the type of information / advice you're looking for.

1. Introduce yourself and mention why you are contacting them
"As a recent McGill graduate with a strong interest in...I would like to get your advice on..."
2. Why you chose them
"I am interested in connecting with you/your organization because..."
3. Who you are
"I have a background in... and would like to use my experience in..."
4. Ask to meet
"Thank you for connecting with me....I am following up to see if we could arrange a meeting virtually or in person..."

Communication tips:

- Be genuine and authentic
- Be specific about how much time you are asking for: 15 minutes is a reasonable ask
- Be understanding and flexible if they cannot meet with you right away
- Be grateful: point out that they'd be a great help to you, and explain why

INITIAL CONNECTION REQUEST ON LINKEDIN (300 CHARACTERS MAX)

Keep your request brief and to the point: introduce yourself, establish a point of connection (something you have in common or how you came across their profile) and let them know you are happy to become part of their network.

For an alum:

Hello X, I see you graduated from McGill a few years back! I am a X major exploring career paths in X. I'm excited to join your network and to connect. Have a great day!

For someone in a field of interest or working at a company you are interested in:

Hello X, I'm finishing up my degree at McGill and am interested in career paths in X. I'd love to connect with you!

Dear X, I'm interested in (field), and I am enjoying your posts. I thought your post yesterday on (topic) was interesting. I'd love to add you to my network and keep in touch!

For someone you met at an in-person networking event and/or a speaker at a conference or webinar:

Hi X, it was wonderful meeting you at X event last night, I really enjoyed hearing about X-Y-Z. I'm happy to connect with you on LinkedIn. Have a great week!

Hi X, I heard you speak at the Ceric webinar yesterday. It was fantastic! Thanks again!

For a recruiter or hiring manager:

Dear Recruiter X,

As a soon-to-be graduate of X program with strong skills in X, I am particularly interested in roles related to X and Y. I came across your profile while researching opportunities in X. I'm excited to connect and would love to hear about any roles you are currently recruiting for.

FOLLOW UP MESSAGE ON LINKEDIN

Dear Anne, thank you for connecting! I am finishing my BA in Political Science at McGill, and I am exploring possible career paths. I've been interested in careers in public policy, particularly in think tanks and policy analysis, and I am curious to hear more about how you got into this field after you finished your degree in Political Science. I can imagine things are extremely busy on your end these days, but if you have a free 15 minutes in the next week or two, I'd really appreciate an opportunity to set up a zoom meeting or coffee with you to ask you a few questions about your experience in policy work. If you'd prefer to talk at a later date, please let me know, I'd be happy to connect, regardless. Thank you in advance and be well.

Hi Mary, thank you for accepting my connection. I hope this message finds you well. I'm doing a B.Sc. in Computer Science at McGill University. I'm trying to decide what to do next, and your career path seems to have been really interesting. I'm curious about your work with IBM and how it aligns with the skills needed to enter the field. Would you be willing to have a virtual coffee and tell me a bit about the work you're doing? I would appreciate any time you could give me in the coming weeks. I look forward to speaking with you! Thank you.

Hi Jared, thank you for accepting my connection. I'm a graduate student at McGill University. We've never met, but I see that we have some mutual connections. If you are willing, I'd really love to hear about the work you're doing in immigrant settlement for the government. I would be grateful if you could spare any free time for a brief conversation in the coming weeks. I look forward to hearing from you.

Dear Sebastian, thank you for accepting my invitation to connect. I am a recent McGill graduate in Biology and have been doing some career exploration. I'm considering applying to do a master's degree, which I see you have done. I am enjoying your LinkedIn posts on biostatistics and found your recent post on data science in health care fascinating, and I'm reaching out to ask if you think it might be possible to have a Zoom meeting for a quick chat about your experience working in the field. If you have any free time, I can make myself flexible to accommodate your busy schedule. Really looking forward to connecting.

During a career conversation

Your enthusiasm, preparation and ability to communicate clearly are key to having a meaningful conversation. Prior to the meeting, think about the type of information that would be helpful to you and come up with some questions that will help you determine if the industry/company/position aligns with your interests, skills and values.

The following list is meant to help you get the conversation started. Focus on the areas of most interest to you and respect anything your interviewee does not want to, or is not able to, talk about. Always remember to thank them for their time and ask if there is anyone else they would recommend you speak with.

Take notes only sparingly so that you can listen attentively. You can review and expand on your points following the conversation.

Questions to ask

About their career path/training:

- How did you get into this field?
- What has your career path been like to date? Is it representative of most people in this kind of position? What education/training do you have?
- Are you a member of any professional orders or associations? Which ones do you feel are the most important to belong to?
- What trends do you see developing over the next few years?
- What impact, if any, has the pandemic had in your work? In the industry?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself and why?

About their current position and responsibilities:

- What does a typical day/week in your job look like?
- What do you enjoy the most about your job? The least?
- What skills have you found essential for success in this occupation?
- Could you tell me about one of the main challenges you face in this position?

About working conditions:

- How many hours do you work in a typical week?
- How much autonomy do you have in terms of what you focus on at work?
- What kind of supervision did you have when you were starting out? And now?
- How is your performance evaluated?
- What kind of professional development opportunities are available?
- Is remote work a possibility in this field?

Additional Questions:

- What advice would have helped you when you were starting out?
- How would you recommend I “try out” this line of work (i.e. through a summer job, internship, volunteering, shadowing...)?
- What other fields or jobs would you suggest I research?
- Is there anyone you would recommend I talk to next? May I mention that you referred me?

Follow-Up

- Send an email within a day or two of your meeting, thanking them for their time and advice
- Mention something you found interesting about what they shared, or something new you learned from them
- Ask if you can stay in touch and perhaps follow up with them at some point in the future

Examples:

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me. I learned a lot from our conversation, especially about how important soft skills and communication skills are to the job. It was great to meet you and to hear more about your story.

I'd like to stay in touch. I look forward to reading more of your posts on LinkedIn!

If they've mentioned a contact:

I would also like to connect with Steve, who you mentioned worked on the development team. How would you suggest I get in touch with him?

If they haven't mentioned anyone in particular:

If you have a moment, I wonder if you might be able to think of someone else that I might benefit from speaking with, as I continue to explore the field.



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