A Guide for Job Seekers

How to Conduct a Successful CareerCafe Chat

Welcome!

Welcome to the LiftHER Career community! We are thrilled to be supporting your career journey. You are now part of a collective dedicated to bridging the gap between the classroom and the professional world by building the skills, experience and connections vital for launching your career.

By engaging with our LiftHER mentors, you aren't just "networking"—you are building the foundation of your professional identity. This guide and the associated templates are designed to help you navigate these CareerCafe Chats and any networking conversation with confidence.

Who is LiftHER Career

LiftHER Career is a career launcher designed to help soon-to-be and recent college graduates build the skills, experience and connections vital for career advancement. Whether through our signature Grad2Hire program or our holistic, personalized career coaching, we aspire to give all young talent the lift they need to launch their careers with confidence.

What We Offer

Grad2Hire Fellowship

Soon-to-be or recent grads learn essential career skills, explore careers in high-demand sectors / professions and gain meaningful work experience.

Career Coaching

Personalized career coaching to help you master the fundamentals to effectively manage your career.

CareerCafe for Networking

CareerCafe connects students to LiftHER mentors who are ready to share their insights and experiences. Consider this LinkedIn without worrying about being ghosted.

Community

Our supportive community of peers and LiftHERs are there to support each other through it all.

CareerCafe & Cafe Chats

CareerCafe, a core feature of our programs, provides students with an opportunity to connect with working professionals in fields or companies of interest to them via Cafe Chats.

These informational interviews are informal, one-on-one meetings where a student (or mentee) can learn more about a specific career, industry, or company. **These are not job interviews.** Instead, they are strategic opportunities to gain "insider" knowledge about a specific industry or career path.

Your goal is to gather high-level advice, clarify your professional options, and build a network of validated professionalism that will support you throughout your career. While these meetings can often lead to future referrals or job leads, the primary focus is on learning, curiosity, and establishing a lasting professional bridge. Connect first!

Why are Informational Interviews Important?

- *Real-World Insights*: You can gain practical knowledge about industries, roles, and workplace culture that they won't find in textbooks.
- *Networking Opportunities*: These conversations are a chance to build relationships, which may help you later in their job search or career development.
- *Personalized Advice*: You can receive tailored guidance based on the career journey and experiences of those who have come before you.
- *Confidence Building*: By engaging with experienced professionals, you will become more confident in your ability to navigate your own career path.

Before

PREPARING FOR THE CAFE CHAT

Your mentor is a volunteer giving you their most valuable asset: time. Respecting that time starts before you even log on.

Research Your LiftHER
Look up your mentor on LinkedIn. Understand their career trajectory, their current role, and any common ground you might share (such as alma mater or specific interests).

You get what you put in. Looking them up 5 minutes before your call is not enough. Take time to get to know their public profile so you can ask thoughtful questions.

Help Them Prepare
Your mentors are as curious about you as you are about them. Ahead of the conversation, don't be shy about sharing your resume or your LinkedIn profile so they can get a sense of who are you before the conversation.

Define Your Goal
Be clear on what your goal is. Don't expect your mentor to know what you're looking for. Are you looking for a "day in the life" perspective, advice on a specific skill set, or tips on breaking into a particular company? Know your ask so you can integrate it into the conversation.

At the same time, be mindful of what you are asking your mentor to do. A "low-lift" request, such as an introduction to a colleague or a recommendation for a professional resource, is often easy for a mentor to grant. A "high-lift" request, like asking them to find you an open role, can be overwhelming for a first meeting.

If in doubt, pose the ask as advice (e.g., I'm very interested in XYZ role at ABC company, what advice would you give someone applying for that role)?

Have Your Elevator Pitch Ready
Be ready to introduce yourself in ~60 seconds. Focus on the stage that you're in (e.g., just graduated), what you're studying, what you're passionate about, and what you hope to achieve next.

This is also your chance to practice in a low-stakes environment!

During

CONDUCTING THE CAFE CHAT

The goal is to learn from mentor, ask insightful questions, and make a connection. Here are some best practices

The Chit Chat (1-3min)
Your mentor volunteered for this so they are already eager to get to know you. However, you asked for this opportunity. It is your responsibility to lead the conversation and set a positive, friendly tone from the get-go. Ask them how their day is going and share something about how your day is going to inspire conversation.

The Opening (1-2min)
Express Gratitude: Start by thanking them for meeting with you.

Set the Stage: Tell them who you are (this is your elevator pitch!). Briefly state your goal for the call so the mentor knows how they can best help you (e.g., I'm really interested in a career in Data Science and would to learn from your experience to get my foot in the door).

Be prepared with questions or topics to discuss (~10 mins)
You have a unique opportunity to get an insider's perspective. Try to ask questions that get at their unique perspective rather than something you can Google or ask ChatGPT.

- Can you tell me about your career path and how you got to where you are?
- What is one thing about this industry (or career) that surprised you when you first started?
- What skills (technical and soft) do you find are most critical for success in your current team?
- If you were in my shoes, where would you focus your networking efforts?
- What is a challenge your department (or your industry) is currently facing?
- What advice would you give someone starting out in this field?

The Wrap-Up
20 minutes goes by very quickly so be sure to keep an eye on the clock. At the 16-minute mark, say *"I want to be mindful of your time. This has been incredibly helpful."* They may say they have more time, in which case, you can keep going.

Your wrap up questions should ideally tie back to what you've already spoken about, but be sure to leave time for **The Golden Question**: Is there anyone else whom you think I should speak with, or a resource you recommend I look into?

Closing: Be sure to close the conversation by asking how you can support them or their work. Always express gratitude and thank them for their time.

The Follow-Up

THIS IS NOT JUST A TRANSACTION

The Cafe Chat doesn't end when the call hangs up. The follow-up is where the relationship is actually built.

The 24-Hour Thank You

Send a personalized LinkedIn message or email within one business day.

Be sure to also mention a specific takeway so they know that you were listening. For example: *I especially appreciated your advice on [Specific Topic]; I've already started looking into the resource you mentioned.*

The Update

Mentors always appreciate updates on what happened. Send them a brief update in a week or 2, especially if you took their advice (like applying for a role they suggested or utilizing a resource they recommended). It shows you are coachable and proactive.

If there are roles that come up from their company and you want to reach out, you don't have to wait a few weeks. That is more circumstantial. You might want to acknowledge that it hasn't been very long, but that you looked into the roles they recommended and saw one that could be a fit. Ask for their insights on the role/department and advice on how best to pursue the opportunity.

Maintaining the Relationship

Be sure to connect with your mentor on LinkedIn, if they agree. Keep tabs on what they're posting. Like or engage with their posts. If they announce something (e.g., a promotion), be sure to reach out and congratulate them.

Final Tips for a Successful Informational Interview

- **Be Genuine**: This is a conversation, not a performance or a high stakes interview. Be yourself; mentors want to meet the future colleague behind the resume.
- **Focus on "Soft Skills"**: Your technical skills might come up, but your "soft skills" are what to focus on. Build a human connection by practicing active listening, maintaining eye contact, and showing genuine interest in your mentor's journey.
- **Practice Reciprocity**: Networking is a two-way street and even early in your career, you have things to contribute. If you find an article relevant to their work, share it with them. They may be visiting the city that you're living in. Offer to give them some recommendations on places to visit. The possibilities are endless.

Sample Communication Templates

Note that these are just examples. Feel free to use your own voice and make these your own!

The Initial Outreach

You may use this to schedule the session once you've been matched. We will typically provide a warm introduction.

Subject: Cafe Chat Request – [Your Name]

Hi [Mentor Name],

It's a pleasure to e-meet you and I'm thrilled to be matched with you for a Cafe Chat. I've been following your work at [Company Name] and would love to hear your perspective on [Specific Topic/Skill].
Do any of these times work for a 20-minute conversation in the coming days/weeks?

- [Date] at [Time]
- [Date] at [Time]
- [Date] at [Time]

I look forward to connecting!
Sincerely,

The 24-hour Thank You Note

Send this via email or LinkedIn within one business day.

Subject: Thank You

Hi [Mentor Name],
Thank you for your time today. I especially valued your advice on [Specific Takeaway]; it gave me a much clearer sense of the skills required for success in this industry.

I've already started looking into the [Resource/Link] you mentioned and will keep you updated on my progress.

Sincerely,

The Follow-Up

Send this 2–4 weeks later to turn a chat into a relationship.

Subject: Update from [Your Name]

Hi [Mentor Name],

I hope this note finds you well. Thank you again for taking time to meet with me a couple weeks ago. I wanted to share a quick update since our chat.

Following your advice to [Specific Advice], I have successfully [Result, e.g., reached out to your contact / refined my portfolio].

Your insight was a huge catalyst for this progress. Thank you again for the guidance!

Sincerely,

Know Someone Who Would Be Interested In Working With Us? Refer them to us!

LiftHER Career