

Say This, Not That

Talking “career” can be scary. It’s tough to find the right words to say and the right way to say them especially when you’re put on the spot. And one thing I’ve learned from my clients’ experiences, and my own, is that it’s not what you say but how you say it. But don’t worry! With me on your side, we’ll get you through the maze of difficult conversations and on the path to the career that is perfect for you!

Because 80% of people find their jobs through people they know, it’s so important to communicate in a stress-free way that makes people want to help you in your career path. There are a few roadblocks that I see over and over again with eager and qualified candidates and I wanted to share a few gems of knowledge that I believe to be helpful when trying to get what you want (and DESERVE!).

Requesting an informational interview

Situation: You want to email a professional acquaintance and ask them for an informational interview as you explore your next career move in digital marketing. You are interested in the company they work for, ABC Marketing, and might even want to work there in the future.

Say this: I’m currently exploring a career paths in digital marketing and I wanted to ask you if you would meet with me so I can learn more about your career journey and how you got to where you are as a Sr. Digital Marketing Associate at ABC Marketing. It would be so helpful for me to hear about the obstacles you faced along the way and what decisions were key to your success.

Don't say: I’m looking to get a job in digital marketing, will you please give me an informational interview so I can get your advice?

Why this works: One of the subtleties of asking for an informational interview, is *not* to refer to the meeting as an informational interview. Not everyone is familiar with the term, but everyone can understand meeting to have coffee and chatting about career paths. Also, when busy people get a request for advice, it can feel very much like more work, it’s one more thing to add to your to-do list. However, when someone asks to hear your story of how you got to where you are, it’s both flattering, and it doesn’t feel like work. I can easily talk to you and tell you my story, that’s not a meeting I have to prepare for. Here’s the kicker – 95% of the time, when you ask to meet to hear their story, they will end up giving you advice! So you still get advice, but you ask in a way that makes it easier for them to say “yes” to the meeting.

Asking for referrals

Situation: You are conducting an informational interview with a professional acquaintance, and at the end of the meeting, you want to ask them for referrals to other people who work in the pharmaceutical industry so you can continue to network and get to know people who work in this field.

Say this: Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today, it was so helpful to hear about your journey! Is anyone else you know that works in this field that you think it would be helpful for me to talk to?

Don't say: Do you have any other contacts in the pharmaceutical industry that you can give me?

Why this works: It never feels good when someone asks for your “contacts.” We don't have rolodexes with contacts; we have relationships with other human beings. Using the term “contacts” can feel cold and transactional, whereas what you are really looking to do is develop relationships and to some extent, make new professional friends. By asking if they know anyone that you think it would be *helpful for you to talk to*, it shows that you are not just looking for a list of people, you are looking to learn more and build relationships.

Asking an internal contact for help with an application

Situation: A friend of a friend works at a company where you are applying to a job, and you want to ask them if they can send your resume to HR or help with the application process in some way, but you aren't sure exactly what to write or how to ask.

Say this: I'm interested in applying to the Sr. Financial Analyst position I saw posted on the company website. Do you think it's best if I apply on the company website or is there someone specific you recommend I reach out to?

Don't say: I want to apply for the Sr. Financial Analyst position that's posted, can you send my resume to HR or something?

Why this works: Unless it's a really good friend, it would be a bit presumptuous to assume that the person you are emailing is comfortable providing a personal referral for a job. You want to ask in a way that makes it easy and pleasant for them to say yes or no to helping you further.

By giving them two options when you ask (apply online – which *doesn't* involve their help, or reach out to someone directly – which *does involve their help*), it puts them in a comfortable place of choice. By leaving it open ended, you also allow them to answer with what works

best at their company. They may have you send your resume directly to the hiring manager, by providing you with their contact information, or they may have you send your resume and cover letter to them so they can personally deliver it to HR. Or they may have you apply online, but have you list you them as a referral in the application system. This gives them the option to help at whatever level they feel comfortable with.

Talking money in a first round interview

Situation: You are in a *first* round interview and the recruiter asks you how much money you are looking to make.

Say this: I have flexibility depending on the whole compensation package, but right now I'm just focused on learning more about the role to see if this is a good fit for you and a good fit for me.

Don't say: Uh, ah, I think about \$70,000? (Don't stress if you've said this before, I did too before I learned!)

Why this works: In the land of salary negotiation, it is not in your benefit to discuss money early on in the process. They don't know if they want to offer you the job yet, so you have no leverage. Ideally, you don't want to discuss money until a job offer is on the table, that's when the power dynamic shifts in your favor.

By saying you have flexibility depending on the compensation package, you show that you understand that each part of the package (base, bonus, vacation, health insurance, start date, signing bonus etc. all have a financial value, it's not just the base salary that matters). You also show that you have a top talent mindset by showing that your main focus is on if the role is a good "fit" for both of you because growth, not money, is your number one focus.