

Jump Start Micro-Enterprise Credential: Student Guidelines for Interacting with Mentors

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As you earn your Micro-Enterprise Credential you will interact with a number of industry mentors. These experts may travel to your classroom where they will make a presentation and you'll have the opportunity for a question and answer (or Q&A) session. Sometimes you'll be interacting virtually with the industry mentor via Nepris. Other times you might be fortunate enough to visit a workplace and interact with the industry mentor where they perform their job.

There are three steps you can take to prepare for industry mentor interactions in order to make these interactions most valuable for you and most rewarding for the industry expert:

1) Prepare by learning about the mentor's industry and company – experts will be impressed if the quality of your questions show that you've taken the time to learn at least a little about their industry. Before you're scheduled to interact with an industry mentor, go online to research his/her industry and (if possible) his/her organization. Try to learn what the industry does and what the most important current trends in the industry are. If the expert's company has a website it would be most sensible to visit that website and learn about the company's background, mission and product / service offerings.

2) Develop "engaging questions" – "engaging questions" are those that pose a thoughtful question to the expert that require more than a "Yes" or "No" response.

For example, the question: "Are you happy on your job?" is *not* an engaging question. The logical answer is "Yes" (or maybe "No"), but there's nowhere else for the expert to go.

An engaging question that addresses the same issue would be: "What aspects of your job do you find the most rewarding?" This question asks the mentor to reflect on his/her job, determine what creates the most job satisfaction, and provide you with an illuminating answer.

Even more impressive would be an engaging question that reflects your understanding of that mentor's company: "Do you find that your small business can compete against the national chains that are popular in your local market?" Industry experts will be most enthusiastic about answering your questions if they believe you're an informed audience.

3) Ask for opinions as well as facts – industry experts have a wealth of personal experience and industry expertise. It's O.K. for you to ask them for their opinions, as long as the opinions are relevant to their industry and their function. An example would be: "In your opinion, what are the career prospects for a young person who wants to work in your industry?" or "In your opinion, what makes your small business more effective than the national chain stores you compete against?"

You and your classmates should send every mentor a thank you communication. Your follow-up communication (or "Thank You Note") doesn't have to be long, but it should cover three points: 1) an expression of gratitude; 2) an indication of one or more key points that you learned as a result of your interaction; and 3) a closing that indicates one or more ways the presentation has shaped your future understanding of or interest in the expert's industry.

Here's a guarantee: if you get into the habit of writing Thank You Notes to adults you interact with in the workplace, you will earn a very positive reputation among these adults, a reputation that will certainly result (somewhere, somehow) in very positive career and life opportunities.