

The Life Recon Guide

From Uncertainty to Clarity: A 5-Step Process for
Figuring Out Your Next Move

The 5 Steps

1. Identify Who You're Curious About

Using envy as data to find lives worth exploring.

2. Reach Out and Start Conversations

Simple scripts to contact people and ask for career insight

3. Conduct Informational Interviews

What to ask, how to listen, and how to evaluate what you learn

4. Job Shadow In The Real World

Observing the day-to-day to see if a career actually fits

5. Test Through Internships

Longer-term experience to confirm what energizes (or drains) you



Completing this guide could take 3-6 months.

Read it all the way through before you get started and then take action!

Step 1: Identify Who You're Curious About

Figuring out what you hate is just as useful as figuring out what you love. Every no gets you closer to a yes.

You do not need a passion, you need a direction.

The Envy Exercise

Pay attention to who you're jealous of. Not influencer-jealous, real life jealous. Think: "I want their Tuesday." "I like how they spend their time." "Their life feels interesting to me." "I want to have the same level of impact they are having."

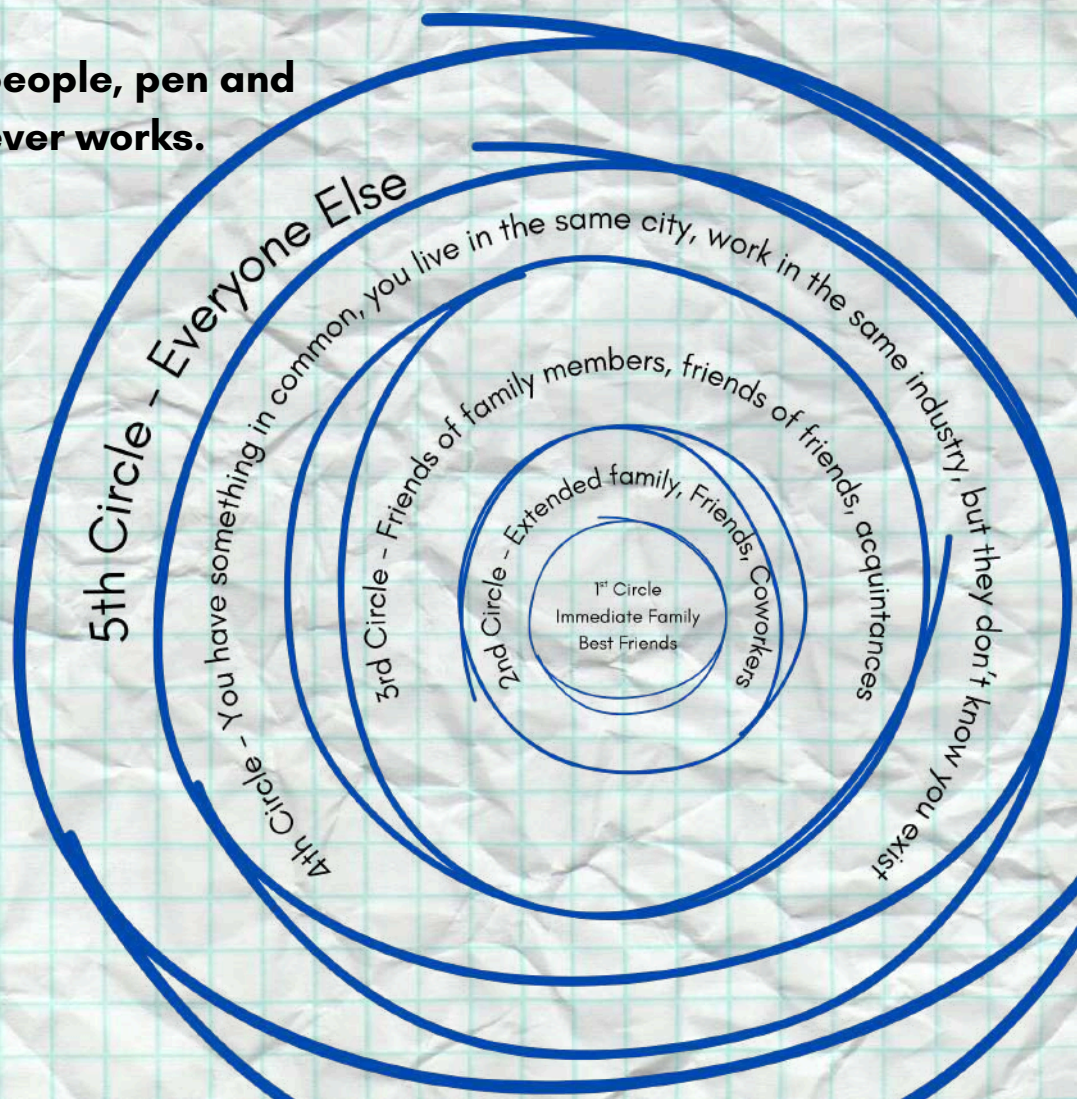
Rule: These people must be 2nd or 3rd circle to you. Not celebrities, not influencers, someone you could realistically talk to. Classmates, alumni, family friends or supervisors are all good options.

Write down 10 of these people, pen and paper, notes app, whatever works.

If You're Stuck

Think about the last time you thought "I wish I were doing that instead."

Ask someone close to you what they thought you would be when you grow up.



Step 2: Reach Out and Start Conversations

This is maybe the hardest part of the whole process. Reaching out and asking people for help can be really scary. But there's no way through it but to do it. Most people will be flattered you want to hear about them. Pro tip - schedule to send things. I don't know why but it cuts down on the anxiety surrounding this process by about 100%.

Who to Contact

This approach is tailored, you're trying to reach people that are reasonably close to you and whose life you can imagine living.

- 1st Circle: People you already know and interact with.
- 2nd Circle: People you have access to but know that well.
- 3rd Circle: People you know tangentially, you know people they know.
- 4th Circle: People you have something in common with, but no direct connections.
- 5th Circle: Everyone else.

Eight of the ten people you reach out to should be no further than your 3rd circle. 2 people should be your 4th or 5th circle. Take some moonshots, it's free.

What To Say

Before starting this take some time to decide what identifiers you want to use. You can and should change them up depending on who you are contacting. If you're a current student it's easy - your identifier is your student status, if you have a part time job or full time job you can use that as an identifier too. If you're not a current student you can use your alumni status. The goal isn't to sound impressive, the goal is to give your reader context.



1st Circle

Hey! I'm in the process of figuring out what I want to do with my life, and I'm trying to learn from the people around me. Would you be open to sitting down with me for about an hour to talk about how you got where you are?

New message

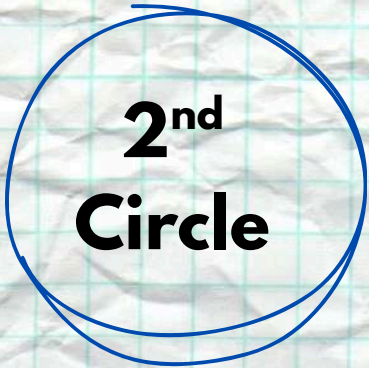
← → ↺ 🔍 ☆ ☰

To... personiadmire@gmail.com

Subject... Career/Life Advice

Hey!
I'm in the process of figuring out what I want to do with my life, and I'm hoping to learn from people I admire. I'd love to hear more about what you do and how you got there? Would you be open with meeting me for about an hour?
Thanks!
(Your Name)

SEND



2nd
Circle

**If You're
Stuck**

Ask a friend or family member for an intro. Write the email for them to make it easy!

New message

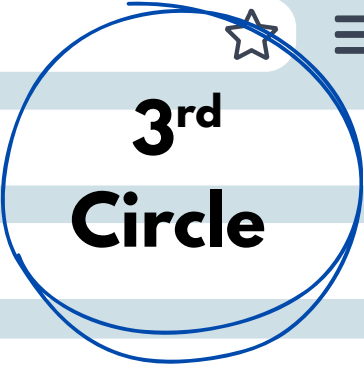
← → ↺ 🔍 ☆ ☰

To... personiadmire@gmail.com

Subject... Career/Life Advice

Hey!
My name is (Your Name), and I'm currently a (insert identifier). I'm reaching out because I'm in the process of figuring out what I might want to do next, and I'm really interested in learning more about your work in (their role or industry).
I'm especially interested in (something specific about them - career path, company, transition they made).
I would really appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you for about an hour to ask a few questions about your experience and how you got to where you are. If you're open to this, I'm happy to work around your schedule.
Thanks so much,
(Your Name)

SEND



3rd
Circle

Step 3: Conduct Informational Interviews

These conversations are often labeled “Informational Interviews”, think of them more like “Intel Gathering”. By the time you’re done with these conversations you should be able to say with conviction if you’d like living that persons life or not.

They can happen:

- In real life
- Virtually

If You’re
Stuck

Schedule your first one with someone you know well.
Bring something to fidget with

Before You Meet

Pro tips about scheduling and preparation:

- Offer 3-5 time/day options based on your availability
- Send your calendar invites like this (Your Name)<>(Their Name) - Career Advice @ (Location), if it is virtual put the meeting platform in the location parentheses
- Arrive early (5 minutes in person, 1 minute online)
- If meeting in person, plan for parking
- If coffee is involved, wait until the other person arrives to order, offer to pay but don’t insist
- Have questions printed out and something to take notes that is ideally not a phone, tablet or computer

Questions to Ask

These are great starter questions, add more that are specific to their field.

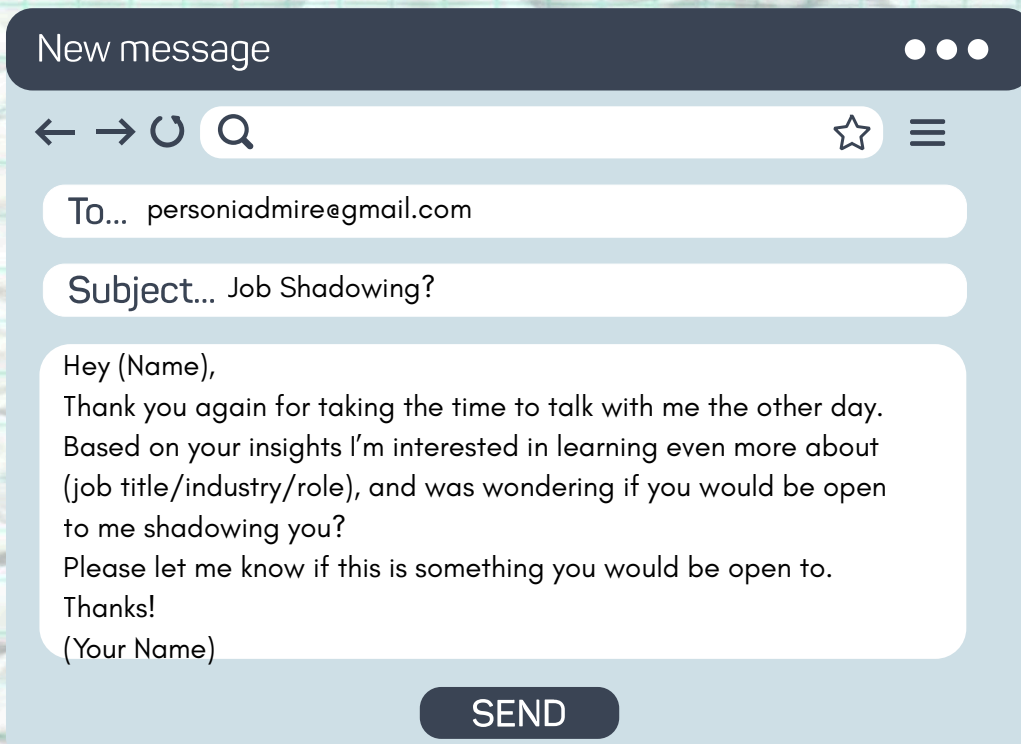
1. What does your day-to-day actually look like?
2. Take me on the journey of how you got here.
3. If you had to start over, what would you do differently?
4. What makes someone successful in your field?
5. What surprised people about your job?

Step 4: Job Shadow In The Real World

Having a bunch of intel gathering sessions is great, but you will learn more of the nitty gritty by job shadowing. Job shadowing can be anywhere from an afternoon to to a week long. Your goal is to be a fly on the wall and observe as much as possible.

How to Schedule Them

E-mail is your friend! If you scheduled an intel gathering session with someone over text, text them to get their email.

A screenshot of an email composition interface. At the top, it says "New message" with three dots to the right. Below that is a toolbar with back, forward, refresh, search, star, and menu icons. The "To..." field contains "personiadmire@gmail.com". The "Subject..." field contains "Job Shadowing?". The main body of the email contains the following text: "Hey (Name), Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me the other day. Based on your insights I'm interested in learning even more about (job title/industry/role), and was wondering if you would be open to me shadowing you? Please let me know if this is something you would be open to. Thanks! (Your Name)". At the bottom right, there is a "SEND" button.

New message

← → ↺ 🔍 ☆ ☰

To... personiadmire@gmail.com

Subject... Job Shadowing?

Hey (Name),
Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me the other day. Based on your insights I'm interested in learning even more about (job title/industry/role), and was wondering if you would be open to me shadowing you?
Please let me know if this is something you would be open to.
Thanks!
(Your Name)

SEND

If You're Stuck

Start with what you were most excited about. If nothing clicks, that's okay! Go back to step 1.

How To Act

Job shadows can vary! In some roles, you might jump in and assist with tasks, while in others you'll follow strict observation-only guidelines. Both are normal.

While shadowing:

- Observe how people communicate
- Notice the pace of the day
- Pay attention to what feels energizing vs draining
- Introduce yourself when appropriate
- Imagine yourself doing this work day-to-day

Step 5: Test Through Internships

Now it's time to commit to a little more. If a job shadow is a first date then an internship is talking about moving in together. You're considering the possibility of this being a long term thing.

How To Approach them

Internships can look wildly different depending on the company size and industry.

- If internships are posted online: read the posting first, then ask your contact if there's anything specific you should highlight on your application.
- If nothing is posted: ask directly whether internships exist.

New message

To...personiadmire@gmail.com

Subject... Internship Opportunity?

Hey (Name),

Thank you for the opportunity to job shadow you, I learned a lot and really enjoyed the experience. Based on what I observed, I'm very interested in continuing to explore this field and was wondering if (company name) ever offers internship opportunities.

If so, I'd love to know the best next steps or anything specific I should include when applying.

Thanks!

(Your Name)

SEND

If You're Stuck

Take some time between internships to reflect on what you did and didn't like. It's okay to do multiple internships, even if it means just finding something you don't like!

- Always leverage internal contacts, even if they aren't involved in internships.
- At worst, they'll say no. At best, they'll open a door that wasn't visible from the outside.
- Paid is ideal. If it's unpaid, you get to decide what works for you.

Final Thoughts

You don't need a perfect plan, you need momentum.

By the end of this process you will have:

- Real world experience
- A solid network
- Confidence in what you do and don't want

If you ever feel lost again, know that it is normal. Your priorities will change over time, you can always come back to this guide and try again.

You don't have to do this alone, if you're still feeling unsure please reach out Maxine Denis directly via email (max@barnco.co) to schedule a one-on-one conversation and gain clarity on next steps.