



Centers of Influence Interviews

What do I mean by Center of Influence? The people you will be interviewing will have the following in common:

- They are the "movers and shakers" in that part of the market and/or they are divine ideal clients for you.
- They understand the unique needs/challenges of the community.
- They know other COIs and key people in your niche, such as other professionals with whom you may be able to create Strategic Alliance or Joint Venture relationships.
- They know the venues where you could do your signature talk and/or know where you may be able to publish an article.
- They are willing to share all the above information with you.

People are almost always willing to say yes if you ask them for help. Remember this is NOT a thinly veiled sales technique.

When you call to ask for an interview (or email in some cases), if people seem skeptical and suggest that you want to meet about business development, correct them and say that is not your intention and that your intention is to gather research about your target niche.

Here is a sample script to ask COIs for an interview:

"Hello, my name is _____ and I am a (insert Title) here in (your town/region). I would really benefit from your help and insight. I really want to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that (my niche) faces and what I could do to better serve them so I am conducting research interviews with people like you who (are in; work with; are familiar with) the niche with whom I'm working (or with whom I am exploring working). I would love to take you to coffee (or have "virtual coffee" by phone) and spend 30 minutes with you to ask you some questions. This would be a huge benefit to me in 1) serving (this niche) more effectively. (Conversely you could say in exploring whether (this niche) could benefit from my skills/talents)). I plan on meeting with at least 10 other people like yourself and I am happy to share with you a summary of my findings when I'm done"

Note: if you are planning to create a signature talk/presentation, article or whitepaper, tell them that, too, but only if you know you will follow through with that! Offer to share the powerpoint for the presentation, the article or the whitepaper with them.



Tips for the Interviews and engaging with COIs:

- 1) Lay out your intention/objective of the meeting and that you will be walking through a series of questions with them.
- 2) Honor the time you committed to. If you are at the 25 minute mark, say “I want to honor the time commitment you made to me and keep our meeting to 30 minutes. I am able to stay longer if you’d like”. Often times in a good COI interview, people are willing to stay longer.
- 3) Make sure you leave time for the last two questions on the interview guide.
- 4) End the meeting by letting them know you will follow up with your “summary of findings” and ask their permission to circle back with them if you have additional questions.
- 5) Get their business card and make sure you have an address so you can send a handwritten thank-you if possible. (Email is a distant second on this).
- 6) Keep a spreadsheet with notes on who you met with, who they introduced you to, and the date you met. This spreadsheet will become your “pipeline” spreadsheet and you can add other information as you start to engage them further. If you meet with a lot of COIs, you may also want to consider segmenting them into A, B and C categories. “A”s are the ones you definitely want to engage on a regular basis. “B”s were good interviews that you want to maintain and build a relationship with. “C”s you will probably add to your mailing list for events or outcomes of your research only.
- 7) The key to building the network is to stay in meaningful dialogues with your “A” and “B” COIs. Sharing outlines with them and getting feedback from them, interviewing them again as needs arise, and inviting them to any events or talks you do that stem from the COI interviews, are key activities to keep them engaged with you.