The goals of an informational interview are as follows:

1. Build rapport;
2. Learn about the contact’s personal career;
3. Learn about the general career path and possibly the firm;

Remember the goal is not to get a job. This is an informational interview only. While the informational interview usually only lasts 30-45 minutes, the complete process does take some time. They usually follow the following timeline:

A) Two-to-four weeks out – request the informational interview. How? Contact via email or phone depending on your comfort level. Be genuine, but you can use the following script as a guide:

Introduce Yourself:
My name is ________. I am a first year MBA student at the Foster School of Business at the University of Washington and I have quick question for you.

Make the Request
I saw on LinkedIn that you are an alum from the Foster MBA program and I’m interested in learning more about __________ (marketing, early-stage firms, banking etc.) and was hoping to set up a quick half hour meeting to pick your brain about your career path and what you do.

B) Prepare – In addition to preparing questions you should find out everything you can about the individual, the firm, and their team. Ideally, you should know all of the following BEFORE the informational interview:

1. What is the company’s basic history?
2. What are the company’s mission statement and business strategy?
3. Is there any major news about the company and how is it important?
4. Where are the company’s operations located?
5. What products/services does the company provide?
6. How is the company differentiated from its three closest competitors?
7. Who are the top executives?
8. What were the company’s revenues and net income for the past few years and what is the current stock price?

C) The day before – confirm with an email.

D) The day of – arrive 15 minutes early, dressed professionally, and prepared.

E) The day after (or immediately after) – follow-up with a brief thank you note detailing a specific point you discussed of interest.

F) Monthly – maintain contact with a brief email as appropriate. Send an article that might be interesting to them.

Remember that the post important piece is to build rapport. Questions should most importantly be those for which you are truly interested in hearing the answer. Treat this session not as a reporter might treat an interview, but as a dialogue between two colleagues who have met for the first time and may be working together. Remember that people like talking about themselves! Keep asking questions and maintain interest, but be respectful of the time limits you imposed.

Sample Questions:
(Remember much of their background can be found online… feel free to say “I saw on LinkedIn that you interned at _________ while in b-school. How similar/different was that from your role here at _________ “ etc.

1. What did you do before b-school?
2. How did you decide on UW?
3. Did you come to ______ (firm name) directly after business school?
4. Tell more about your role here? Who are your key stakeholders, clients etc.?
5. What are some of the major challenges your business faces? What solutions have been tried?
6. Which skills are most important to acquire? (i.e. - which skills do employers look for?)
7. What are the main or most important personal characteristics for success in the field?
8. How is success judged (at this firm, in your role)?
9. What is most satisfying about your role here?
10. What are the satisfying aspects of the advisor’s work?

At some point in the conversation the interviewee may ask about your career, goals etc. That is a great window to discuss your own career path. Otherwise, stay focused on the interviewee.