Informational Interviewing is a great way to ask nuanced or more personal questions. Here are some of my favorite prompts for digging into the details – see if there are any here that you want to borrow for your next career conversation.” - Lillian Zwemer 5 July 2016

1. How does the work you do now compare to the work you thought you wanted to do 2 years ago, 5 years ago, or 10 years ago?
2. Why did you choose this position as opposed to one of the other career paths you had considered?
3. What sorts of questions did you yourself ask about this type of job before you took it?
4. What is the biggest misconception about your profession/field?
5. Do you have any thoughts on the practical knowledge/skills students wanting to enter your field would benefit knowing a bit about ahead of time?
6. What did you yourself have to learn to get the job? What did you teach yourself that was outside the scope of your PhD but was essential to your success in getting the job and/or doing the job?
7. Were there things you realize in retrospect you did right even though you only knew how to do them because you went out of your way to learn ahead of time? Are there moments you messed up because of coming from a different work culture? Similarly, are there issues you see in other PhDs now working in your field and you think “Come on! This isn’t the lab! You should know this by now!”
8. What part of your job surprised you or wasn’t what you expected when you started?
9. Do you remember what challenged you when you first started either in terms of work culture or specific intellectual concepts?
10. How do you use your PhD in your current job?

11. What does your organization look for in a new hire?
12. Given my training, which of my skills are strongest compared to the typical applicant?
13. What advice/remediation do new PhD hires need during their first week/month?
14. Are there currently too many or too few people entering this profession?
15. How frequently do layoffs occur and with how much warning? How would you rate job security?

16. What is the structure and focus of your days in a given week?
17. Is your work team-based or individual?
18. How do you measure progress and success in your work?
19. What gives you the most satisfaction about your work?
20. How does your current job differ from another job you have had?

21. Does your employer explicitly value mentorship and professional development?
22. How often do you work past 6 pm and on the weekends?
23. Does this job affect your life-style (frequent travel, after-hours events, constant contact via text)?
24. How can I find out what my earnings potential would be if I entered this field?

25. What is the education/professional background of most senior-level employees/managers?
26. What sorts of careers have folks transitioned into after leaving this job?
27. What do you see as the future of this company/field?
28. Who else should I talk to? May I mention your name?