

Job Fair Success Strategies

Job fairs are a great opportunity to network and be proactive in the employment process. In order to make the most of these opportunities, set realistic expectations for what you hope to achieve. Prepare for the job fair like you would for an interview, have a plan for when you arrive, make a good impression with the recruiters and be sure to follow up with any connections you make.

Prepare

- **Research.** The week prior to a job fair, find out which companies are participating and learn more about them. What are some interesting things the company is currently working on? Does the company have new leadership or a new product? These tidbits can be used as conversation starters that will impress a recruiter and possibly open the door to a new opportunity for you.
- **Dress for an interview.** Job fairs typically involve on-the-spot interviews, so present yourself as you would for any other kind of interview. A suit is most appropriate, even if you're applying for a technical job. It's always better to be overdressed than underdressed.
- **Prepare.** For your top employment choices, consider preparing folders that include your resume, cover letter, recommendations and appropriate work samples.
- **Carry plenty of business cards.** Give the business cards to recruiters and other job seekers you meet. They need not be expensive or fancy. A simple design will do. Make sure they contain your name and contact information: phone number, email and address.
- **Organize.** You may want to carry a portfolio or clipboard to easily manage and collect information. Be sure to have a pen for taking notes.
- **Relax, breathe and smile.** Do your best to make a strong first impression.
- **Walk around.** Get the lay of the land, see where your top companies are located and plan your connection strategy.
- **Network.** Talk to other job seekers and ask questions. Find out what types of positions they're seeking, and tell them a little about yourself. You never know who they might know, or if you might be able to help them with an introduction. Don't hesitate to exchange information if you make a connection.
- **Visit booths.** You may want to start by practicing your personal pitch with recruiters who represent companies where you may not want to work. Have a list of top companies you really want to visit and check them off as you go. This will keep you from introducing yourself to the same recruiter twice by accident. Listen to the "interviews" in front of you to get an idea what to expect and develop questions based on what you hear.

Speaking to recruiters

- **Connect.** Make eye contact, smile, state your name and shake her or his hand. Use a prepared elevator speech - a 10-second summary of your bio, your skills and your achievements. Make sure to rehearse the speech until it becomes comfortable.

- **Listen.** Pay attention, respond to questions and ask for more information. When appropriate, hand your resume to the recruiter and pause for them to do a quick review. Be prepared for questions about specific examples of your experience.
- **Keep it brief.** Recruiters are typically swamped, so be mindful that your conversation may be limited to a few minutes. If appropriate, ask questions about next steps, applicant qualifications or any suggestions they may have for you.
- **Get recruiter contact information.** Request a business card, and if one is not available, ask the recruiter for their email address. Conclude the conversation by thanking them for their time.
- **Step aside.** Make time to write conversation notes before you move on to the next recruiter. If the previous recruiter mentioned she went to Florida State, capture that information. If she told you the company will hire for your desired position soon, write it down. Summarize your job fair experiences immediately in order to take full advantage of the event.

Follow up

- **Call or email.** After a few days, call or send an email, thanking the recruiters for their time and the information they provided. If you send an email to the recruiter who mentioned she went to Florida State, it is appropriate to write, "I'm the administrative assistant at the job fair who discussed Florida State with you." That reminder could help her recall the conversation. Just taking the time to follow up will separate you from many job fair attendees.
- **Stay in contact.** If the recruiter responds back to you, stay in contact. Keep an eye open for articles about their organization or industry and don't hesitate to forward them on with a note. If you see the perfect job for you in their organization, and you're qualified, apply for the position and then email the recruiter and let him or her know you applied.
- **Build your network.** If you connected with other job seekers and traded contact information, you should follow up with them as well. You never know when they might have a job prospect for you, or vice versa.