Career Central™ Advice

Job Fairs: A Day at the Fair

"Success always comes when preparation meets opportunity" – Henry Hartman

Opportunity's knocking!

Job fairs can be crucial when it comes to finding employment opportunities. Where else can you interact one-on-one with recruiters, explore employment avenues, ask hiring questions, and present your résumés and credentials, all under one roof? Job fairs can be inroads for internships and employment opportunities, as well as sources for networking leads. Candidates can benefit from direct contact with companies of their choice, from international Fortune 500 corporations to local family operated businesses.

And while companies may conduct actual mini to full interviews on location, you should consider *any* interaction with a recruiter as an evaluation of your candidacy.

Prepare to answer the call.

First, obtain a list of exhibitors and research your companies of interest ahead of time. (When you don't have to ask what a company does, the recruiter knows you've done your homework!) Practice your interviewing skills and contact your career or employment center to schedule mock interviews. Pre-register. Get your résumé, cover letter, supporting documents, and portfolio in order; bring plenty of résumés so you don't run out. If you're interested in several career objectives, prepare multiple versions of your résumé. Bring a pad and pen for taking notes, and consider printing up business cards with your contact info.

Open the door and step on out.

Dress appropriately, wear comfortable shoes, and arrive early. Review the floor plan of exhibitors, and plan to devote the entire day to the event. This will allow you to take your time and speak to as many employers as needed. Nervous about approaching your top prospects? Warm up first with secondary choices. Take two copies when filling out applications; if you mess up on the first form, you'll have a back up. Take breaks to recharge and review your notes. Before leaving the fair, thank the recruiters again for their time; it helps make you more memorable.

Don't forget, recruiters are there to find people who can fill their employment needs; their primary interest is the value you bring to the company. Improve your chances for an interview: Focus on how your qualifications, personality, and performance will enhance the organization's operations. Make it about them.

Read the company literature at the booth. Listen to what other job seekers ask. Await your turn, and don't interrupt. When you do speak, be friendly, articulate, and enthusiastic. Focus on the recruiter. People skills are vital; employers want those who "play well with others."

Ask relevant questions that demonstrate your interest in and knowledge of the company itself:

-- What is the company culture?

-- What is involved in the hiring process?

-- Are internship or entry-level positions available? If so, whom should you contact? What's the best time to call?

-- What are some of the current projects and goals?

-- Why did the recruiter choose to work for this company?

Don't just drop off your résumé and leave. Take time to discuss your career goals and create a positive impression; you're trying to differentiate yourself from all the other candidates. Be clear about your objectives and prepared to answer the usual interview questions. Speak confidently of your skills, but don't be arrogant. Ask for and take the time to look at the recruiter's business card; don't just shove it in your pocket. Speak positively about the company and ask about the next step. Always be professional and respectful.

Take advantage of all that potential under one roof. Remember, on this day those recruiters are there just for you!

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in a nutshell:

Attend a job fair, and advance your job search success:

- **Check with your school's career center for upcoming events**
- **Research exhibitors, prepare relevant questions, and hone your interview skills**
- **Articulate how your abilities can contribute to the company**
- **Network, exchange business cards, and follow up**
- **Remember to reiterate your interest and restate your credentials**
- **Bring thank you notes and stamps to write and mail the same day**

This is an opportunity to gather details and leads firsthand. Grab it!