

Working the Job Fair for Success

Let's look at how to "work" that job fair to your advantage. Preparation is a key part in success. At least a full week before the event, research the employers that will be at the fair. Identify employers that match your career goals and prepare targeted resumes for those companies. Be able to discuss what that company does and how the positions you are looking for fit in with their plans for success. Identify one or two employers as practice stops to get settled into a rhythm before approaching your primary subjects. Prepare and practice a 30 second to one minute sound bite or "elevator speech" that introduces yourself in such a way that it is relevant to their company's needs. The goal is to have them want to learn more about you. Remember to have someone you trust review your resumes and listen to your elevator speech. Prioritize which employers you want to meet and have a plan to make sure you visit them. Plan to visit a couple of employers before you start your list. That way you have planned for some time to get over any nervousness. Prepare your wardrobe a week before the fair. That way you have time to get to the dry cleaners, polish shoes, and get a new shirt or accessories if needed. Plan for child care. Employers do not want to deal with children during a discussion with you or have them running from booth to booth scooping up the company advertising materials like Halloween candy. The key here is to prepare enough in advance to eliminate undo stress.

On the day of the job fair make sure the image you present is the best it can be. It's not just what you say but how you present the whole picture. From the time you enter the parking lot, people are watching you...your interview has already started. Dress for success is not just a saying. You want to project a clean, professional appearance that a prospective employer would think they could put you out in front of customers as a positive image for their company. Allow enough travel time to freshen up once you arrive at the job fair. Try not to rely on carrying a backpack. Instead, have a briefcase or portfolio type folder to hold your resumes. It's a lot easier to use when handing out your resume and makes for a more business like image. Have your resumes in folders to keep them from getting damaged and have a business card attached to the folder. This not only protects your resume but also makes it easier for the employer to find it after the job fair. Have small breath mints with you but *NO GUM*. You need to have fresh breath but do not have anything in your mouth when talking with a prospective employer. Unless you are applying for a position with a sports team, leave the ball caps, logo shirts, hunting vests, skateboards, etc. in the car or better yet, at home. After hours party clothes and sports outfits have their place but not at a job fair. Don't wear any colognes or perfumes. Your prospective employer may be allergic or just really dislike the scent you're using.

Once inside, walk around to get familiar with the layout of the fair. Start with those employers you identified to practice on. This will get you in the swing of things and help get the nervousness under control. Introduce yourself with confidence (here's the time for that "elevator speech"). Establish good eye contact and have a good firm (but not crushing) handshake. Make sure you remember their name and use Mr. or Ms. unless they tell you to use first names. Showing respect is a sign of a professional. Be able to ask them questions that are relevant to the company's purpose and goals. Don't ask about money or vacation benefits. That comes later in the hiring process. Get points of contact and business cards from everyone you talk with. Thank them for their time, ask to leave a resume and your business card and about being able to follow-up with them. Always remember, you are in the interview mode until you physically leave the job fair. You don't want to be the one people talk about, and they do, for inappropriate behavior or unprofessional attire.

After the fair, follow-up with mailed thank you notes to those employers who took time with you. The vast majority of job seekers do not and quickly melt into the background. Those who take the extra effort to do a professional closing to the fair do get remembered in a good way. If you are fortunate to have an on the spot hire, immediately follow-up with an e-mail rather than a hand written note.

These are just a few tips for you. Please contact me if you have questions or would like any assistance. Good luck!

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