

JOB FAIRS AND INTERVIEWS: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Why Attend a Job Fair?

1. You may land a job!
2. The Employers Want to Meet You: these employers will be prepared to conduct on-the-spot interviews with the candidates who offer the best value to their organizations.
3. You Gain Experience. The more employers you meet and interact with, the sharper your interviewing skills will become. Further, career fairs are very helpful tools in boosting your confidence in communicating with employers.
4. You May Be Interviewed. Employers are prepared to conduct on-the-spot interviews. It is unlikely that the interviewers may make immediate hiring decisions, but they will pave the way for some for subsequent hiring interviews.
5. Your resume will be provided to many employers. If you attend you will be asked to leave a copy of your resume at the registration table. That resume will become part of the final electronic resume book that will be used by many of the employers. In addition, you should have plenty of extra copies of your resume to give to the individual employers at their respective booths.

Research

Learn as much as you can about participating employers that interest you. Web pages are an excellent starting point to determine who they are, where they are, their mission, and organizational network. Formulate intelligent questions about their plans for growth, general employment opportunities, and benefits of working with them. Some questions to ask are:

1. Why is this position open?
2. What are some objectives you would like to see accomplished in this job?
3. What advancement opportunities are available for the person who is successful in this position, and within what time frame?
4. How is one evaluated in this position?
5. What accounts for success within the organization?
6. What type of support does this position receive in terms of people, finances, etc?

Dress

Look professional, neat, and clean. Dress as though you are going to a job interview. You may well be. If you wear a suit ensure that it fits. For the men a suit or sports jacket and tie are fine. For the women a suit and conservative jewelry and makeup are suggested.

Resume

Use a more generic "networking" resume unless you are going to target a specific profession (e.g. policy analyst, program manager, etc.) or available position in the organization. If you choose the latter, use more focused job specific resumes. You may consider bringing two or three versions of your resume and using the one you think most appropriate for each employer. We recommend that you bring more copies of your resume than the number of participating employers expected.

30-Second Sales Pitch

Before attending the Career Fair, develop a "30-second sales pitch" about you and your background. It helps break the ice with an employer and it gives the employer a quick and clear understanding of your general background. We recommend you make your pitch very conversational and informal but at the same time strong enough to get across your major points. While at the job fair employers will ask you questions to learn more about you. Some questions you may be asked are:

1. What do you look for in a job?
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. What are your career goals?
4. What are your strong points?
5. What are your weak points?
6. What interests you about our organization?
7. What experience do you have?

By practicing your responses to some of these questions, hopefully you will not be taken off guard if asked one of them. The most common question asked is "What are you looking for here at the job fair?" "A job" is not an acceptable answer; you should be able to give a clear and informative response of what exactly you are looking for.

General Tips

1. **Talk to as many people as possible.** Even if you are not that interested, you should also leave your resume because there might be an opportunity later on.
2. **Be prepared to ask questions.** Questions often are positive indicators of a job seeker's interest and research effort. Don't ask about salary or benefits unless the employer brings up the subject.
3. **Walkabout the employer.** Instead of just getting into line, approach the employer booth from the side and quietly pick up some of the slick glossies that are prominently displayed on the table. Then take a few steps back. The reason for this is twofold: first, you now have in your hands some extremely valuable pre-interview reading material; second, and most important; you have an opportunity to get a free preview of the employer and recruiter. How? By staying put four to six feet away and *listening*. You will be far enough away to be unobtrusive, yet still within earshot of the conversation that is taking place. Listen to what the recruiter asks. Be prepared to answer the same questions yourself. Listen to the responses. Did the recruiter respond positively or negatively? Listen to two or

- three different interviews to compare different responses. If there is more than one recruiter for the employer, note the different styles of each and choose the line behind the one who is the closest fit to your own personality range.
4. **Make the most of your time.** A good strategy to follow is to meet with the most popular employers early in the day, before the lines develop, and then talk with the "second-tier" employers during the main part of the day. Then before you leave, make one more contact with the employers you have an ongoing interest in. With proper planning and strategic timing, you can usually avoid the long lines and make your time more productive.
 5. **Stay fresh.** If you find yourself getting a bit tired bouncing from table to table, take a break. Re-energize and then get back onto the floor.
 6. **Focus on the moment** and the person when you talk to the employer. There will be a lot of people around, but once you engage with the employer, act like it is just the two of you in a room together with no one else around. Don't engage in other conversations or "lean in" to try and pick up the conversation an employer is having with someone else.
 7. **Close the loop.** Don't hesitate to ask employers who look at your resume and talk with you if they think they might get back to you. If so, ask when and/or if there is any problem if you call them back after a week or so if you have not heard from them.
 8. **Thank You.** Get business cards from those you talk with, and after the Career Fair, write brief thank-you note. In the note make sure you cover the following topics: thanks for taking the time to meet with me, here are the reasons why I would be an outstanding employee for your organization..., I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you further, I will call you next week to arrange a time when we can meet and further discuss how my skills can benefit your organization. Then make sure you do in fact call when you said you would. Very few follow through to this step, so you will be head and shoulders above the crowd at this point, and very likely the one they choose to go on to the next step
 9. **Don't be an onion.** Employers shouldn't have to peel off layers to find out about you. Help the employer out by being prepared to talk substantively and concisely about yourself. Take some initiative to help employers understand you and your background.
 10. **Leave a lasting impression.** Before you leave the job fair, return to the booth of any employer you have an interest in. Wait for a break in the action, then step up to the recruiter and thank them again for their time. Let them know that you will be in touch and look forward to speaking with them again. This lasting impression will help the recruiter to remember your name and face when you do make contact again. After all, there will be a stack of one hundred to two hundred resumes for the recruiter to filter through after the job fair is over.

THE INTERVIEW

Before you go through an actual interview, you should first go through a mock interview. Nearly every college campus offers access to a career counselor who can take you through a mock interview (also known as "interview coaching"). The mock interview is

more than just a chance to work out your interview jitters. It is an opportunity to practice your interviewing technique and answers live. It is also a chance to hear constructive feedback from someone who can guide you toward improving your interviewing style and presentation.

During the interview keep in mind nonverbal communication, often it is the nonverbal communication that we are least aware of, yet speaks the loudest. The following are the most important nonverbals ranked in order of importance:

1. Eye contact- Unequaled in importance! If you look away while listening, it shows lack of interest and a short attention span. If you fail to maintain eye contact while speaking, at a minimum it shows lack of confidence in what you are saying and at worst may send the subtle message that you are lying.
2. Facial expression- Eliminate any negative overall characteristics that might exist, then add a simple feature that nearly every interviewee forgets to include--a smile! A true and genuine smile that tells the interviewer that you are a happy person and delighted to be interviewing with the organization. You do not need to keep the smile plastered on for the full interview, but remember to keep coming back to it.
3. Posture- Posture sends out a signal of your confidence and power potential. Stand tall, walk tall, and most of all, sit tall
4. Gesture- Contrary to popular belief, gestures should be very limited during the interview. When you do use gestures, make sure they are natural and meaningful.
5. Space- Recognize the boundaries of your personal space and that of others.

The most important aspect of interviewing is your attitude. If you want to rise above others with better experience, better grades, or better anything, you will need to work on developing a highly positive work attitude. The way most employers differentiate at the entry level is by candidates' attitudes toward the job. Also differentiate yourself by showing your "competitive advantage", by telling the interviewer what uncommon strengths you have and what makes you unique.

To close the interview let the interviewer know you are interested in the position by saying something like: "I'm very impressed with what I've seen here today; your organization and the people I've met. I am confident I could do an excellent job in the position you've described to me." The interviewer will be impressed with your enthusiasm.

After the interview, call the interviewer to thank them for their time, and then immediately write the interviewer a short note, thanking them for their time and reemphasizing your interest in the position. If you want to make a lasting impression on a potential employer, ask the individuals who supplied you with letters of recommendation to either call or write to the employer, giving an additional

recommendation. This technique will instill confidence in the employer that they are making a wise decision in hiring you. Once the thank you letter has been sent, your role in the job search is to work toward an offer. By staying in close contact (at least once a week) with your primary company contact, you will be continually aware of the process, and the contact will be continually aware of your interest.