

How to Work a Job Fair

Why Job Fairs Are Important

Attending your university's job fair is an important step in getting on the radar screen of recruiters. The recruiters at fairs often are the same recruiters who do the campus interviews. Recruiters are there looking for either interns or permanent new hires. Many are looking for both. For many companies, students who attend job fairs or interview on campus are considered first for openings.

The Recruiters

Typically, the job fair recruiters are from human resources (some may be actual hiring managers or recent new hires) Hopefully, there will be new hires at the career fair. New hires have just gone through what you're soon to go through with the interview and hiring process. They can have valuable information on what the company is looking for in a candidate and can share the details of that employer's hiring process.

Students Who Should Attend Job Fairs

Most universities do not restrict attendance to job fairs other than to their own students or alumni. The most likely attendees are juniors and seniors. However, undergrads should also consider job fairs. Some employers will hire sophomores for internships and co-ops. A rare few will consider freshmen.

Common Pitfalls of Students

- Being sarcastic or arrogant
 - Leaving the career fair too quickly
 - Trying to talk money
 - Being unprepared with questions about employers
 - Being unfocused in goals and unable to articulate good answers to questions about goals.
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What Not to Expect at Job Fairs

Recruiters are not there to do job interviews. It's more like a meet-and-greet and information exchange. Recruiters want to share information about their employers so be prepared to receive brochures and business cards.

On your part, you should attend to gain information about what employers have to offer and if/how you can fit into that organization. You will need to bring resumes; although not all recruiters will be collecting resumes, that's not a sign they're not hiring.

What to Glean from Talking to Recruiters

Recruiters are anxious to talk to you about their company. It's best to have at least some cursory knowledge of the employers. Your career service center can help. Get a list of recruiters before the career fair and do some research. One of the first questions recruiters will ask is, "What do you know about our company?" The career center's library can help with research. Also try the internet.

An extra boost to you is to use the brief meeting with recruiters to get information about the company AND its hiring process. For instance, if you ask, recruiters can tell you what skills or coursework the company wants in a new hire.

That gives you an edge on how to mold and present yourself in the actual interview. If you're a junior or undergraduate, such knowledge helps you in deciding any changes to your coursework to make yourself more attractive to recruiters when you become a senior and are interviewing for jobs.

In addition, new hires can provide some insight into the employer's hiring process and into its the corporate culture.

What You Should Do Before Job Fairs

Though you might expect to attend career fairs just to see what's out there and that recruiters wouldn't expect you to know much about their company at a job fair as opposed to a campus interview. In reality, recruiters expect students at job fairs to have some background knowledge of their companies. So you'll need to start researching sooner than most students expect.

- Research. Try the career center's Vault Insider Guide, Hoover's, or Career Search or go online.
 - Think about what interests you and what you do well. If you admit to a recruiter that you have no idea what your strengths and interests are, there's little of substance for your discussion.
 - Make a reference sheet of quick facts about employers before talking to recruiters.
 - Know enough about yourself and the company's needs to relate your background to the company's needs.
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Some Don'ts

Don't expect to have lengthy or in-depth discussions with recruiters. Job fairs are often treated as screening tools by recruiters. They are often interested in your grades and coursework primarily. Always have resumes handy.

Don't snub recruiters of companies that do not interest them. That's rude and a professional mistake.

Avoid gang behavior with well-known companies. Too often, students will cluster around booths of well-known companies.

Quick Do's

If you're nervous about talking to recruiters. Make a point to talk to other students or career center staff before entering the career fair. It helps to alleviate nervousness.

Take time to make the rounds, talking to as many recruiters as possible.

Collect business cards and company brochures. Have a bag or briefcase handy for material as you collect them as you'll need a free hand to shake hands with the next recruiter.

Have a pen handy to write down your contact information for the recruiter, if necessary.

Express appreciation to the recruiter. Thank the recruiter for his/her time before moving on.

The Job Outlook 2005 Survey

Source:
Christian Science Monitor
December 9, 2004.

The Survey of more than 200 employers found that cleanliness and conservative attire are noticed and desired in interviews. The National Association of Colleges and Employers survey found the following as influential:

1. Grooming 70%
2. Nontraditional attire 49%
3. Nontraditional hair color (tie) Body piercing 32%
5. Handshake (tie) Obvious tattoos 28%

Some Additional Advice

Pay attention to the recruiters and how they communicate. Since these are often the people who will do the real interviews, notice how they communicate and what their communication style is. Some ask many questions; others hold back and let you do the talking. The recruiters at job fairs are often the recruiters who do campus interviews. You'll have an idea of how to pace yourself in the interview if you know the conversation style of the interviewer.

Tip for Job Fairs from Career Service Experts

Be ready with a one minute commercial about yourself.

When you introduce yourself, use your first and last names and mention your major and classification (junior, senior, etc).

Carry breath mints.

Don't chew gum while talking to recruiters.

Dress appropriately and comfortably for temperature changes and for standing long periods.

Bring resumes.

Turn off your cellphone.

Leave your bookbag in your car or locker; check your outerwear if possible.

Carry a portfolio or small tote. Luckily among the freebies at career fairs are tote bags so that makes it easy to carry all the great free information around.

Follow-up Pointers

If you need to get back with a recruiter remember a few points. Some recruiters are on the road for weeks at a time, going from one school's job fair to the next. If you need to contact a recruiter after a job fair, have reasonable expectation for getting in touch with the person. Also, you may remember the person vividly but the recruiter may not do the same. A recruiter meets hundreds of students at each university and visits a few universities in a given month. In your phone call or e-mail, you may need to jog the recruiter's mind with a sentence or two of how you met and why you're contacting him/her. Always say thank you.

For more information, contact an advisor at your university's career center or visit the website www.victoriapilate.com.

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