

5 Things You MUST Do Before Attending a Job Fair

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Most job fairs run between January and May. When Spring rolls around, things usually ramp up because most employers want job openings filled before summer kicks off.

If you are among the job seekers attending job fairs, then take down these tips to preparing for it and making the most of your time there.

Many employers have a presence at job fairs to increase brand awareness, but also to save time in the screening process. Job fairs offer an opportunity for employers to conduct initial screenings on potential candidates on the spot.

Employers have an idea of what they are looking for in a candidate for each job opening, so anyone who appears to make the cut can be interviewed to advance the process along right then and there.

Job seekers who come prepared will strike up opportunities quickly, so here are five things you MUST do before attending a job fair!

1. Research ahead of time

There can be hundreds of companies to talk to at each job fair, but that doesn't mean you'll have the time to reach out to all of them. Research ahead of time which ones you want to get to so you make the most of your time there.

When you know your targets, you can also start to customize your materials. It'll help to look at the company's website so you see what job openings they have and the requirements for each position.

This information can help you tailor your materials and what you communicate when you meet with the individuals at the job fair.

2. Plan to approach the employer (even if they aren't recruiting for the job you want!)

Job fairs are great for networking -- it's not about simply dropping off the resume. You want to start conversation with the right contacts.

If there is an employer you desire to work with, but they are not recruiting for the job you want, it's important to still go over and talk to them. You never know when things may suddenly open up.

The contacts there may also direct you to information in regards to who's leading the department you want to work in so that you can make follow-up with that individual directly.

The key is to engage in conversation. Ask insightful questions! Be someone they will remember at the end of the day or use it as an opportunity to open the door to more conversation.

3. Have your elevator pitch ready

Employers are looking to hear what you can do for them, so come prepared with a quick pitch on your skills and experience, as well as how it can help solve their problems.

For more tips on preparing an elevator pitch, read: "4 Steps to Developing a Winning Elevator Pitch."

4. Dress like you're going for an interview

On-the-spot interviews happen at job fairs, so come dressed the part and be ready with copies of your resume in hand. As you introduce yourself, be mindful of your body language, including your handshake, eye contact, facial expression, and voice.

Employers take notice of job candidates who exhibit a smile and enthusiasm. They want to see a candidate with a strong desire to work with them, not someone who's simply swinging by randomly. Some may also screen your interest level by asking typical interview questions like: "What do you know about us?" and "Why do you want to work for us?" So, be prepared!

5. Plan to follow up

Like a job interview, you should plan to send a follow-up note to the contacts you meet. It's a chance to help keep you top of mind and it gives you a chance to reiterate why you have what they are looking for.

Before ending each conversation, be sure to collect business cards from the people you speak with and take good notes so you know how best to personalize the follow-up note. Approached the right way, job fairs can open many conversations and doors to job opportunities.

If you do these five things, you'll be well-prepared for any job fair -- and you'll definitely stick out from the crowd!