

How to Make Career Networking Events Work For You



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THIS GUIDE CONTAINS INFORMATION ON HOW TO MAKE JOB EXPOS & CAREER FAIRS WORK FOR YOU. THE FOLLOWING TOPICS ARE COVERED:

- DEVELOP YOUR TWO-MINUTE COMMERCIAL
- BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE EMPLOYERS ATTENDING THE EVENT
- BRING SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS
- STUDY THE LAYOUT AND PLAN YOUR APPROACH
- ANTICIPATE BEING EVALUATED
- TAKE NOTES AS YOU GO ALONG
- USE FAIRS/EXPOS AS YOUR OWN SCREENING DEVICE
- COMMON PROBLEMS FOR CANDIDATES
- QUESTIONS TO ASK RECRUITERS
- FOLLOW UP AFTER A JOB FAIR/EXPO
- TIPS FOR DRESSING APPROPRIATELY

Job Fairs/Job Expos are more than just an opportunity for casual conversations with potential employers. They are an important part of the recruiting and job search process. Here are some tips to help make your experience an effective one.

DEVELOP YOUR TWO-MINUTE COMMERCIAL

Some of the most memorable commercials are seen during the Super Bowl. Much time, energy, and money are spent developing a very brief message, targeting the audience and creating a lasting impression. They are effective. The two-minute commercial is your opportunity to apply this concept to yourself. If you develop an effective message, it will provide strength to your job searches, interviews, and cover letters.

Your commercial needs to be enthusiastic, positive and make the listener want to ask you additional questions. Talking to a potential employer should be different from the more casual conversation you have with family and friends. An example of a casual comment is: "I'm not working right now and I really need a job." Here's how you might consider saying the same thing to an employer: "I'm currently seeking employment. It's really exciting to meet new people and hear about job opportunities!" An employer looks at a potential employee as an investment on their part. They will want to be sure they are making a good investment.

Here are some tips to help you prepare your *two-minute commercial*:

- Brainstorm a list of things you have participated in and accomplished.
- Identify the skills you have developed from the items on your list.
- Consider the personal qualities you possess.
- Link these qualities and skills to possible career fields.
- Write a script pulling this all together. Be sure to include details.
- Practice your script until it is memorized and flows easily. Say it in front of a mirror.
- Ask friends and family to give you feedback.

BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE EMPLOYERS ATTENDING THE EVENT

Call the venue or look on line to learn what organizations have registered for an event. The focus may be on technical jobs, government positions, sales or teaching opportunities. Sometimes events are restricted, such as Teacher Recruitment Days (TRD). Notice also that positions are not always directly related to a *major*. The *skills* you develop in college are often the basis for direct entry into an organization. Be sure to look carefully at the types of employers attending and the positions for which they are recruiting. Do your research before you attend. The Internet and your **Career Planning Office can help you with research.**

BRING SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Make sure you bring a sufficient supply of resumes to avoid running out. You may need to create more than one version of your resume if you are interested in a range of opportunities. Use a file folder to hold resumes. This will keep them organized and in crisp condition. You may also want to bring transcripts, copies of certifications, a portfolio, a self-marketing brochure, and/or networking cards to help present your qualifications.

STUDY THE LAYOUT AND PLAN YOUR APPROACH

When you enter the venue, notice how employers are organized. Don't begin with a visit to your first choice employer. "Warm up" by talking with a few other organizations first. Then, when you are more practiced, approach the employers that interested you the most.

ANTICIPATE BEING EVALUATED

Job Fairs/Job Expos are not just information sessions. Prospective employers may appear informative and conversational but they are also assessing you. Practice relaxation techniques for stressful situations. If you are interested in the organization, find out how to continue the employment process; ask the recruiter what your next step should be and follow it exactly.

TAKE NOTES AS YOU GO ALONG

After talking with several recruiters, it's easy to get them mixed up. Ask for business cards and as soon as you leave a table/booth, take a few minutes to jot some notes about the meeting. You can list questions you want to have clarified and add notes on things you might send them to help advance your candidacy.

USE FAIRS AS YOUR OWN SCREENING DEVICE

The best thing about job fairs is that you make contact with many employers in a few hours and obtain enough information about most of them to know if following up is worthwhile. Pick up literature on organizations of interest to study at your leisure.

COMMON PROBLEMS FOR CANDIDATES

- Answering, “I don’t know” when asked about interests/goals (shows a lack of focus).
- Admitting you will “take anything” (reflects uncertainty about the positions you want).
- Not dressing neatly or professionally (confusing social attire with business attire).
- Not bringing a resume or enough resumes.
- Lacking knowledge of a company.
- Confusing the company with the competitor.
- Lacking enthusiasm or interest in the company or job opportunities.
- Having a poor or unprofessional attitude (harsh tone of voice, negative comments, etc.).
- Lacking tact if asking about salary (better to avoid the topic at this stage).
- Not asking any questions.
- Grabbing free stuff.
- Not making eye contact.
- Lacking communication skills.
- Not willing to relocate.
- Not bringing a transcript.
- Not bringing a pen or paper.
- Not articulating specific experiences to support your strengths.

QUESTIONS TO ASK RECRUITERS

You should be prepared with specific questions to ask employers. Here are some examples:

- What kind of entry-level positions exist within your organization?
- How many employees are in ... (insert your area of interest)?
- Does your company hire on a continual basis or just at a certain time of the year?
- What does your organization consider to be “important qualities” in an employee?
- What personality traits are important for success in your company?
- If I was hired, what can I expect to be doing in 2 (or 5 or 10) years from now?
- What made you choose this company?
- How long have you been with the company?
- What should I do to further investigate or pursue a career in this industry?

FOLLOWING UP AFTER A JOB FAIR/JOB EXPO

Thank you notes are always appropriate and can set you apart from the others. Try to capture something from the event in your letter; or comment on something related that you recently learned; or write something you wish you said to the recruiter. A typed, business style letter, sent via the post office can make a favorable impression. An e-mail thank you is usually acceptable if there have already been e-mail exchanges. If you asked the recruiter what to do next, be sure to follow his/her instructions exactly as stated. Use the business cards you collected to identify names, titles and addresses. *It is essential to be accurate with details as well as spelling.*

TIPS FOR DRESSING APPROPRIATELY

Employers at Job Fairs/Job Expos always notice attire, especially if you're *not* dressed appropriately. Clothing is a way for employers to determine who has taken the event seriously and who has not. Since it can be difficult to know what individual organizations will accept for attire, clothing should be "business casual". Business casual has a crisp and neat look, not tight or baggy. Business casual has a classic look rather than reflecting the latest fashion. Do not confuse a business function with a social event: do not dress for a party, or a date, or in basic college attire (e.g. jeans, tee shirt, flip-flops/sneakers, etc).

Men & Women

- Style your hair so that it's clean, brushed and neat. Avoid unusual styles or colors.
- Use minimal cologne or perfume; wearing none is best, people may have allergies.
- Remove body piercings and cover body art (tattoos).
- Use breath mints before greeting recruiters.
- Neatly pressed khakis are appropriate for both men and women.
- Wearing a two-piece business suit; navy or other dark color, makes a positive impression.
- Avoid ill-fitting clothing (short, tight, clingy etc).
- Keep your look consistent; avoid wearing a business suit with sandals or sneakers.
- Matching your belt color to your shoes can reflect attention to details.
- Don't bring a backpack. Use a briefcase or portfolio.

Men

- Wear an oxford cloth shirt; white or light blue is most conservative.
- Wear a conservative necktie (solid color or muted pattern): avoid cartoon characters, less than serious graphics, or theme ties.
- Wear business-style leather shoes (athletic shoes are inappropriate) with high-fitting dark socks; avoid light colored socks if you wear dark pants.

Women

- Wear a neutral colored blouse with a conservative neckline.
- When wearing a skirt, it should be knee length when standing.
- Wear closed-toe leather pumps with low to medium heels. Avoid open-toe high heels, flip-flops, or shoes with decorations.
- Avoid carrying a handbag or purse.
- Wear minimal jewelry or understated classic accessories (e.g. gold chain, stud earrings vs. long, dangling, or oversized).
- If wearing nail polish, it should be conservative and avoid unusual colors or styles.
- Makeup should be understated.

Think ahead to avoid wearing athletic clothing, jeans, or soiled attire to an employer-related function. But, if you arrive at an event and realize you are not dressed appropriately, make a brief, sincere apology and focus on impressing recruiters with your communication skills and prepared questions. Use common sense: if you are rushing to get to an event after classes, and it isn't possible for you to change your clothing, people are likely to understand if you give a short and polite explanation.

Let the Career Planning Office help you prepare for a Job Fair.

Dress For Success

(What clothing combo should be avoided at Job Fairs/Expos and at Interviews?)

