



Seminole Community College Career Development Center

Making the Most of Career/Job Fairs

Job fairs are a great place to build your focused network. As the name implies, the job fair is the typically fair-like atmosphere in which employers assemble in rows of booths to speak to candidates about career options and possible employment opportunities with their organizations. With the fair-like atmosphere and so many employers contending for your attention, it would be easy to assume that employers are there for you, and all you have to do is show up. However, the reality is that you are competing with hundreds of individuals who are either seeking employment and/or career information. So how do you get the competitive edge? Try using some of the Career Fair Tips listed below.

Get the most out of your Career Fair experience by implementing the following tips:

- **Come prepared.** If your main objective in attending a job fair is to land a job or to learn about specific careers, do your homework before attending. Obtain a list of the expected employers. Identify the companies in which you are most interested and conduct advanced research. The Internet is a great source of information. This can provide you critical insight about the companies that will help you to make a great first impression with representatives. Whether you are seeking a job, career information, or professional contacts to expand your network, you only have one chance to make a good first impression.
- **Come with a resume that sells your skills.** Today's recruiters use an analytical approach to hiring. They put together a job description and hiring criteria for each position they are seeking to fill. To manage the volume of resumes they receive at a job fair, they screen each resume for an exact match to the defined job criteria and then sort them accordingly. A resume that is too general will fail to land the candidate in a specific position file. It will likely end up in a black hole with other resumes which are never forwarded to hiring managers for consideration. This is due to the résumé's failure to strongly focus the reader on the right employment match. Therefore, if you are seeking employment at the event, make a hypothesis about the criteria that a company might want in a candidate. During your Internet research check the company's job board. This could provide you with detailed job descriptions for specific openings. Based on your hypothesis and research, tailor your resume and target it specifically to the company needs. This will require creating several versions of your resume--each one focused to the specific criteria and needs of the various companies you plan to target. However, make sure all the versions of your resumes are short, sharp and digestible. The recruiter should be able to scan the resume in one minute to pick up key information. Finally, make multiple copies of each version of your resumes and organize them in a simple fashion that makes it easy for you to locate the correct version for each recruiter.
- **When you arrive at the job fair you should already know which companies you want to target.** Having a focused campaign to gather information, build your network, or to land a job will be a key factor to your success. Be sure to pick up a map showing vendor locations and then plan an organized campaign identifying the order in which you plan to visit the different booths. Take a look at where the crowds are gathered. Generally there tends to be excessive action at the first



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tables particularly at the beginning of the event. You might try working backwards and start at the last booths or working your way from the middle in one direction and then the other.

- **Dress professionally even if you are not seeking a position at the event.** Someone who gives the impression as extremely professional will stand out along with the individual who comes across as unprofessional. You want to stand out but only in the most positive light. It is almost impossible to recover from a negative first impression.
- **Show initiative and self-confidence by initiating conversations with company representatives.** This can be accomplished by simply introducing yourself and offering your hand. Engage the representative in conversation that demonstrates that you know something about their company and have a clear perspective of where you might fit now or in the future. From your research you should be prepared with questions for each company representative. **Don't** ask questions such as "What does your company do? What are you hiring for? How much does that position pay?"
- **Look the company representative in the eye when talking.** If you are distracted and looking around at other booths it can be interpreted as a lack of interest.
- **Do not try to win a place in the Guinness World Book of Records for distributing the most resumes at a single career fair.** It is much better to spend some quality time talking with only a few well-targeted employers.
- **Even if you are only seeking career information and the opportunity to expand your professional network, always go prepared with resumes.** An unexpected exceptional opportunity might surface and a recruiter might ask for a copy for future reference.
- **One of the most valuable sources of information at job fairs is other participants.** They may already be employed and able to offer information to you about their company's goals, organizational politics, future advancement, etc. The person you engage in conversation may be leaving a current position that is a perfect match for you.
- **Do not leave empty-handed.** Collect everything from recruiters' business cards to company narratives and annual reports. If a company decides to offer you an interview 6 months after the job fair, you will be glad to have an annual report or other company literature to assist you in preparing.
- **Within 24 hours, send a thank you note to each representative you spoke to telling them how much you appreciated the time they took to talk with you to answer your questions.** Mention the name or location of the career fair and position you discussed. Also be sure to reiterate your interest in their companies.
- **Be prepared with a list of three to four professional references should you be asked to provide them.**