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How to make a great impression at a job fair

Career fairs are one of the best ways to network when you're looking for a new job. So how do you stand out from the crowd in a room full of people all looking for the same thing as you? Read on for tips on how to make a great first impression and score the coveted goal of career fairs: an interview.

Do your research beforehand

Your first step begins before the actual job fair itself. Look into the participating companies that are most relevant and appealing to you...and research, research, research. What exactly does each company do? What are they looking for? What position is most desirable to you? What skill set do you have to offer in terms of that role?

Think of this along the same lines of the research you would do before an actual interview with the company—because that's essentially what a career fair is: a microcosm of the interview process you'll encounter if and when you get the call. Once you

have a healthy understanding of what the company does, you'll feel more confident speaking with the organization's representatives about any of its present or future goals or needs.

Compile a list of questions

According to National Career Fairs, another pre-fair ritual you should employ is writing down questions—both ones you want to ask and the answers to ones you think you'll be asked. This helps solidify your thoughts about the company and identify any possible weak points in either your research or your resume. Anticipating the types of questions you'll be asked (because you will be asked questions) and forming responses (even the basic gist of a response) will help you feel more composed when the time comes. And remember: asking questions, either of recruiters or interviewers, is a very good thing!

Dress for success and have your elevator pitch ready

Once you've actually arrived at the career fair, it's time to showcase everything you've got. Arrive in the type of outfit you'd wear to an interview because, again, this is basically a mini version of the actual thing. Introduce yourself to the recruiter, and deliver your "elevator pitch." This common industry trick begs the question: "If you were on an elevator with a top executive for the company you want to work for, what would you say to leave a good impression?"

This leaves you about fifteen to twenty seconds to make your case. It's a useful way to convey the relevant information about you while keeping everything concise. Obviously, this is something you want to think about beforehand but that, once memorized, can be easily tweaked no matter what company you come into contact with.

Have a current resume in hand

Be sure your resume is current and free of mis-



takes, and hand one out to each and every recruiter with whom you speak. LinkedIn suggests that, if the recruiter takes a look at your resume and mentions you're qualified for a certain position based on your paper credentials, you should make the extremely bold move of directly asking for an interview with the company.

This isn't necessarily common practice at a career fair, but it will certainly get you noticed and best-case scenario, could land you an interview on the spot. After all, that's what you're there for—and the worst-case scenario is they say "no." If you're not quite ready to take the leap, try asking what it would take to get an interview. There's no harm in being straightforward about

what you want, as long as you remain polite.

With a little preparation and forethought, you can make a lasting impression on career fair recruiters. Whether you're just out of college and looking for your first job, or you've been around the career track a few times and are looking for a fresh start, job fairs provide a concentrated market teeming with potential new employers who in most cases, are ready to hire now.

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