

Keys to Success:

Navigating a Career Fair

1. **Research.** Many job-seekers go to fairs to "see the sights" and are not prepared to interview. You can get a huge jump on the competition by getting a list of the companies attending the fair and doing some research on each of the companies you want to interview with; don't waste time with companies that do not interest you. With so much information about companies on the Web, there is no excuse not to do your homework.
2. **Resumes.** Bring them to the fair -- at least for each company for which you have an interest. If you have multiple interests or job objectives, make sure you bring enough of each version of your resume.
3. **Attire.** Business attire is essential, even for those Spring Break beachside career fairs because image and first impressions are critical. Know what is the expected attire of your profession and dress accordingly. It is always better to be overdressed than underdressed.
4. **Strategy.** You need to devise a strategy or plan of attack for the fair. You've already done the first step by researching the companies you are interested in. The second step is seeing if any new companies have registered when you arrive at the fair. The third step is surveying the layout of the fair and determining an order of interviewing. Some experts suggest meeting with your top choices first thing in the morning, interviewing with your other choices in the middle of the day, and returning to your top choices at the end of the day to thank them again for their time. But remember to stay flexible as your top choices may be the top choices of many, creating long lines that you may wish to avoid.
5. **Interviewing.** You may only have two to five minutes to market yourself and protect yourself from being screened out, thus you need to make the most of your time. Many experts suggest that you develop a one-minute "commercial" that highlights the key benefits that you can offer the organization -- and then use it at the beginning of the interview. Also remember the three keys to all interviews: make eye contact, offer a firm handshake, and show enthusiasm. You should also prepare answers to interview questions just as you would any employment interview. The most common question you will face is something along the lines of "what are you here for today?" Seems like an easy question to answer, especially if you've done your homework and can tailor your answer to your interests and the company's interests, thereby marketing yourself. Make sure you also have some [questions ready to ask the interviewer](#). A great concluding question for you to ask is, "What do I need to do to obtain an interview with your firm?" Finally, make sure to avoid poor communication bad habits, such as fidgeting, rocking, chewing gum, etc.
6. **Intangibles.** There are several other things you can do to help make your career fair experience a success. First, don't waste your time interviewing with companies you have no desire to work for; do make sure to interview with all the companies you do want to work for. Try eavesdropping on several of the interviews ahead of you so you can better prepare. Don't be upset if the recruiter has to take a break before your interview. Fourth, if your ideal company is hiring computer technicians and you want to work in accounting, do still interview with the company at the fair, being sure to leave the interview with the contact information of the person responsible for hiring in that area; don't be discouraged and walk away.
7. **Networking.** Career fairs are all about networking. Of course, you are building a network with the recruiters -- this task is your most vital. However, you can also network with your fellow job-seekers in terms of sharing information about job leads, companies, and their recruiting strategies and styles. There may also be professional organizations or employment agencies on hand at the fair, which are also good sources for networking.
8. **Follow-up.** Don't take the order of this key to mean it to be the least important; in fact, some would say it is one of the most important. You would be surprised at how few job-seekers actually take the time to follow-up their career fair interviews, thus when you do it, you will get an edge over the many others who do not. There are two main methods of follow-up. A traditional method is to write a thank you note and mail it the next day to the address on the recruiter's business card. In the letter, thank the recruiter for his/her time, restate your interest and qualifications for the position, reiterate your interest in an interview. You probably should enclose another copy of your resume to be sure.

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