How to Work a Job Fair

Job Fairs are organized events at which a sponsor brings together employers and job candidates. They are usually held in a large auditorium, convention center, community center or large hotel. In recent years Job Fairs have become popular recruitment methods for employers. In a single day, an employer can obtain hundreds of résumés. As a job seeker, you need to know how to "work" a Job Fair; otherwise, it will be a waste of your time and effort.

What is a Job Fair?

A Job Fair is like a Flea Market. Rather than merchants, companies occupy the booths or stalls. A booth may be as simple as a table and two chairs or it may be elaborately decorated with posters and other display materials. Each participating company purports to have job openings and is interested in getting résumés and talking to prospective employees. Job Fairs have become a common method for companies to recruit and screen applicants. The job openings are primarily entry level jobs. The booths are usually staffed by trained Human Resource recruiters rather than by the persons who make hiring decisions.

Job Fairs are an excellent opportunity for savvy job seekers to identify potential employers. Some job seekers view a Job Fair as an opportunity to window shop the employers. Job seekers, however, should view each employer contact as a mini-interview. Even though the contact is brief, employers are evaluating each candidate based upon appearance, communication skills and first impressions. These 30-second encounters can result in rejection or can result in further interest by the employer. Your goal is to convince the recruiter that you are an ideal candidate and that they need to give you a complete interview.

Types of Job Fairs

When you see an announcement that a Job Fair is scheduled in your community, you need to determine what type of fair is scheduled. Attending a Job Fair where the employers represent industries that do not have your desired positions is a waste of your time. Explore in advance the companies who are scheduled to attend. Do they offer the type of jobs you seek?

Community Job Fairs

Community Job Fairs are usually sponsored by an organization in the community such as the local newspaper, Chamber of Commerce or American Job Center. These fairs are open to any local company and are usually large. Often the employers are recruited by the sponsor and may or may not have job openings. They may have a booth simply to give support to the sponsor and the fair.

Because these fairs are open to any type of employer, it is important that job seekers do their homework before stepping into the arena. You will find that most of the jobs are sales oriented and/or entry level. If you seek a more skilled job, you may find the fair a waste of your time.

Specialty Job Fairs

These fairs concentrate on jobs that are related to a specific field such as medical and computer technical jobs. Businesses that are opening a new locations often hold a Job Fair to recruit new employees. In this case the only employer is the sponsor and the only jobs are the jobs that the sponsor has. Retail establishments and hotel/motel properties often recruit using a Job Fair.

Savvy job seekers check to see if the sponsoring company also hires people in their field even though the job is not listed in the announcement. For example, although a Hospital is recruiting primarily nursing staff, the hospital also has maintenance personnel. When you approach the Job Fair recruiter, indicate that you are not seeking a nursing position, but rather you would like information on how you would apply for a maintenance position.

Professional Job Fairs

These Job Fairs are usually sponsored by a local professional association and often target professional jobs such as engineering, accounting or computer programming. There will be many employers. The jobs that are sought are usually high-level jobs and the employers are looking for people with training and experience.

If you are looking for a high level job in a professional field, this type of Job Fair is ideal. Your goal is to get names and numbers of people with whom you will make direct contact after the fair. Do not expect to be contacted by companies after the fair.

What to bring to a Job Fair

The following are items you need to bring to the Job Fair:

- **Résumés** Bring at least twenty copies. Make sure that your résumé stands out.
- **Briefcase** You need something to hold your résumés, pens and pencils and a place to store the materials and business cards that you will pick up.
- **Note Pad** Bring a pad of paper, pencils, pens and your business cards.
- **Checklist** Bring twenty copies of the **JobSearch Guide** *Post-Interview Checklist*.

Decatur Illinois workNet Center
757 W. Pershing Road
Decatur, IL 62526
217-875-8751
www.worknet19.org

ILLINOIS workNet® CENTER

A proud partner of the AmericanJobCenter network

©1998-2020 JobShop Publishing, LLC. Reproduction by any means without written permission from the publisher is prohibited by law.

Types of interviews

There are essentially three different types of interviews that take place at a Job Fair. Some employers will only conduct screening interviews. These interviews may be as short as 30 seconds or last up to ten minutes. Following the screening interview the recruiter may hand you to another person who will conduct a full interview. Be prepared for all three types of interviews.

Screening interview

Because of limited time and the large number of applicants, most interviews are extremely short, sometimes less than 30 seconds. The employer is interested in gathering résumés and getting a quick look at the candidate. As a candidate, you have to make your case quickly. Be prepared for the first question or a variation of this question, "What kind of position are you looking for?" Tell the interviewer what your goal is. Do not say, "I am looking for a job." If you have done your homework, you will have identified the positions for which the employer is recruiting. Only approach those employers whose positions match your employment goals.

Give recruiters a copy of your résumé and ask what the next step will be. Get business cards and other literature employers may have. Thank them for their time and immediately record on the business cards what you remember about the meeting.

Screening plus interview

If the initial screener wants to gather additional information from you, the screener may invite you to sit or may turn you over to another recruiter for a more in-depth interview. These mini-interviews last approximately 10 minutes. Be prepared to answer typical job interview questions and to expand on what you have written in your résumé.

Conclude the interview in the same way that you would a screening interview. Ask for a business card and literature on the company. Be sure to find out what happens next in the process. Immediately after the interview, complete a **JobSearch Guide** *Post-Interview Worksheet*.

Full Interview

Occasionally employers will have a private interview room somewhere in the building. Applicants who pass the screening and the screening plus interviews are invited to participate in a full job interview. Treat these interviews like any job interview. Often you will be asked the same or similar questions that were asked in the screening interview. Be prepared to give a similar response, because the recruiters will compare notes.

Because both you and the employer consider this type of contact a job interview, it is acceptable to ask them questions about the job and the company. Do not ask about salary or benefits, as these questions are reserved for an onsite interview. Conclude the interview in the same way that you concluded the screening plus interview.

How to work a Job Fair

Attending a Job Fair can be overwhelming. You will see long lines in front of each employer's booth and you will wonder how you can be noticed. Here are some suggestions to make the Job Fair work for you.

- When you first arrive at the Job Fair take at least the first hour to just walk around.
  - Note where each employer is located. If you were given a program by the sponsor, circle the employers who may have positions of interest to you.
  - As you pass by the booth of each employer, note which employers are conducting just screening interviews and which are conducting screening plus interviews. You may also be able to see if an employer has a separate interviewing room.
  - Rather than get in line for the employers that interest you, simply walk up, or approach from the side, and gather the literature that is on the table. Do not leave your résumé.
- Because the encounter between you and the recruiter is short, you need to leave a positive first impression. This impression will be based primarily on your appearance. Review the **JobSearch Guide** *How to Make a Good First Impression*.
- Many Job Fairs offer free seminars which are sometimes conducted by the recruiters. Look in your program and identify those seminars that either may be of interest to you or are being taught by a recruiter from one of the companies that interest you. Go to that seminar and, at the seminar's conclusion, make a point to say something to the instructor/recruiter.
- Armed with the information that you have, exit the Job Fair room and find a quiet place to sit and review your materials. Identify no more than five employers that interest you. Read the literature from each and make notes as to how you can benefit the company.
- It is best to return to the fair after lunch. Most of the applicants will have completed their trek around the hall and will have left.

  - Target the five employers of interest. Go ahead and get in line. As you stand in line note how the recruiter deals with the applicants in front of you.
  - Rehearse your opening line. Link it to something you read in the literature. For example, "Good afternoon. My name is John Doe. I am interested in seeing how my skills and experience in bookkeeping would fit into your new computer accounting system. When I read about it in your brochure, I wanted to learn more about it." Remember, like a TV commercial, you have 30 seconds to convince the recruiter to want to learn more about you.
  - If the recruiter appears to dismiss you, ask, "What is the next step in the process?" Often recruiters will say that they will review the résumés that they receive and get back in touch with those candidates that appear to match their company's requirements.
  - Without being pushy, say to the recruiter, "As you can see from my résumé I am looking for a position in bookkeeping. Who would you suggest that I talk to in your company who is knowledgeable about the bookkeeping positions?"
- Expect no more from a Job Fair than the opportunity to get a list of employers in your community who may have job openings. Add the names to your network list. Review the **JobSearch Guide** *Using Your Network to Locate Job Openings*.
- When you get home, take time to write each recruiter a thank you note. It may be the only one they receive. It may also be all that is needed to get them to review your résumé a second time.

Internet resources

www.collegegrad.com/jobsearch/job-fair-success/ -- Great information on how to work a Job Fair.
https://www.employmentguide.com/job-fairs/browse-- Get a list of Job Fairs in your area.
www.nationalcareerfairs.com/ – Listing of Job Fairs in your area.