

Job Fair Success

By: Brian Krueger

Job fairs are becoming a common means of entry level recruiting. For the corporate recruiter, it offers an opportunity to reach interviewing terminal velocity--the highest possible number of prospects in the shortest amount of time. And for many students, job fairs offer a "freebie" opportunity to meet with additional hiring companies.

However, unless you do your homework ahead of time, you'll end up wasting your time at a job fair. Want to see a real meat market? Job fairs are the meat markets of the entry level job market. The format dictates a set of unique rules and protocols-- and if you understand how to effectively work within this system, you can easily double or triple your productivity and effectiveness.

Usually a full 50% or more of the students attending a job fair are "window shoppers" who are browsing through to see what's available. While this approach may seem valid, take note that job fairs are not a "get acquainted session" for you to meet companies. They are multiple interview sessions where the plain vanilla candidates are stepped on and over by those who are targeted and prepared. Yes, even the two to three minute greeting and exchange of sound bites is considered a true interview. You're being evaluated, whether it's for 30 seconds or 30 minutes. If you're to succeed at a job fair, you have to take a very aggressive, yet structured approach.

But most students make a major error at job fairs--they get in line. If there's a reality of life that college provides excellent training for, it's standing in lines. Behold the line, should you stand in it? No! There is a better way--

The Walkabout Technique - instead of passively getting in the first line you see, you should use the Walkabout Technique. There are two steps:

Walkabout the Job Fair - When you first arrive at the job fair, walkabout the entire room to get a feel for the layout and where each employer is located. Most job fair rooms are laid out in a "maze format" which requires walking through the maze to see what is on the other side. Survey the area as a military general would in planning a strategy of attack. Know specifically whom you want to talk to and in what order. But be ready to change your plan if long lines suddenly appear in your planned corridor of attack.

Walkabout the Employer - Instead of just getting into line, approach the company booth from the side and quietly pick up one of the slick glossies that are prominently displayed on the table, and then step back a few steps. The reason for this is two-fold: first, you now have in your hands some extremely valuable pre-interview reading material; second, and most important, you have an opportunity to get a free preview of the employer and the recruiter. How? By staying put four to six feet away and listening. You will be far enough away to be unobtrusive, yet still have access to the conversation that is taking place. Listen to what the recruiter asks. Be prepared to answer the same questions yourself. Listen to the responses. Did the recruiter react positively? Or negatively? Listen to two or three different interviews to compare different responses. If there is more than one recruiter representing the employer, note the styles of each and take your pick of the line behind the one who is the closest fit to your own personality range.

If you have done your homework properly, you should be able to determine what the company's needs are and what they are specifically looking for in filling those needs. Ask yourself two questions: (1) "Is this something I'm interested in?" and (2) "Am I able to show that I am qualified for the position(s) they are offering?" If your answer to either question is "No," then don't waste your time standing in that particular line. Very few sights in life are sadder than the look on the face of the engineering student who spent over an hour in line to meet with Xerox, only to find out that Xerox is only interested in hiring Sales Reps.

If you have an interest in what the company has to offer and you can meet its basic needs, it's time to get in line yourself. Line time is the time to really soak up the information contained in the materials you just snagged from their table. Remember, most people do not get this information until after they have met with the company, so you have a distinct advantage from the start.

Congrats--you've just taken a simple step that will put you a giant step ahead of your peers. Why? Because you've already learned "from the inside" what they are looking for and have pre-read all of their company propaganda. You are fully prepared while your competition is wandering aimlessly about, staring blankly into space.

When your turn arrives, step up with confidence, introduce yourself, and state succinctly your specific career statement and how it fits in with their needs as an employer. You will truly stand apart from the crowd.

* Source: CollegeGrad.com

* Further information on this news story, including access to the original survey form, as well as additional quotes from employers and college career center directors, may be obtained from the Web site at: www.collegegrad.com/press