Steps to Job Fair Success

By Nick Schaefer

Job fairs offer great opportunities to network and potentially find a job. However, it takes more than just showing up. A successful experience takes planning, preparation and the confidence to sell yourself. To increase your chances of succeeding at a job fair, follow these tips, offered by Chet Rispoli, Director of Career Services at Gwynedd-Mercy College, Gwynedd Valley, PA.

BEFORE THE FAIR

There are three main areas of preparation.

1. **Put your tools together:** This includes your resume, reference sheet and portfolio. Be sure to check everything for typos. “These documents need to be perfect,” Rispoli said. “If they contain mistakes, the employer is going to think you are careless. And that isn’t an appealing trait to have if you want a job.” To avoid error, Rispoli said job candidates should have their resume and other materials reviewed by friends, family and professionals. Be sure to bring plenty of copies of your resume to pass out to potential employers.

2. **Research:** Review the companies attending the fair by going to the career fair Web site to see an exhibitor list. Then gather information on each employer by reviewing their Web site and doing an Internet search to see if any new articles appear. “This will give the candidates a better idea of who they want to talk to at the job fair,” said Rispoli. “It also avoids wasting time by trying to learn this stuff at the job fair.” Last, organize a list of employers with whom you wish to speak and rank them according to your top choices.

3. **Know yourself and practice:** Be familiar with your strengths and weaknesses, values and interests. Also, think about what you have to contribute to the organization. “This will enable you to be well-spoken when the recruiter asks you questions related to your goals and interests,” said Rispoli. Create a 30-60 second speech of what you can contribute to their organization, highlighting what makes you unique and the benefits you can provide.

DURING THE FAIR

A job fair is your chance to make a good impression with a potential new employer. Make sure to dress and act professionally at all times. Here are some suggestions to follow during the job fair:

- Wear clothing that will represent you well to a potential employer. When in doubt, dress conservatively, Rispoli said. Avoid a lot of accessories, makeup, cologne or perfume.
- You never know when a recruiter may be nearby. Be sure to act professionally at all times, even when you’re not interacting directly with a recruiter.
- Be patient. Job fairs can be tiring and frustrating. Take your time and wait it out.
- Start with a few employers who may not be your top choice, to build your confidence. When you feel more comfortable, approach your top choices. Don’t leave your top choices until the end of the day though; you want to be fresh when speaking with them.
- If you need a break, take it. If you feel yourself becoming frustrated, step outside to collect your thoughts. Don’t forget to collect business cards, be sure to get all the contact information of each person.
- Use the day to network. Make connections with everyone- not just the recruiters but with fellow job-seekers. The more people in your network, the stronger it becomes, Rispoli said.
AFTER THE FAIR
You still have work to do after the job fair is over. “This part of the job fair execution is often forgotten,” said Rispoli. “It is essential candidates treat this step with the same importance as the other steps.”

- Send thank you notes to each recruiter you spoke with. Thank them for their time and make them aware of your continued interest in their organization.
- Plan to follow up with each recruiter about 2 weeks after the job fair. Contact them and express your continued interest with their organization and get more information about the next steps in the process.
- Analyze and reflect upon your job fair experience. Make plans for improvements before the next career fair.