

Career/Job Fair Success

I AM HAPPY to share some thoughts with you on effective ways to work a job or career fair. We have just completed our fall 2009 Career Fair at the University and I've presented at two hotel-site events in the Las Vegas Valley.

No matter how much technology we invent and employ, nothing takes the place of that personal touch. Career fairs may offer opportunities not available online. Also, the networking is a valuable benefit. However, an effective face-to-face talk can ultimately differentiate you from other job applicants for the position. Here are some ways to get a maximum return on your time investment at a job or career fair:

Remember, it's ALWAYS Professional appearance.

It is critical to always maintain a professional appearance at a job/career fair. You are being evaluated from the time of the handshake/eye contact, until you leave the event. Recruiters will note every aspect of your professionalism, appearance and behavior. Choose a conservative outfit and be sure to cover up any tattoos. Don't carry a backpack or shopping bag to collect employer "promotional items."

You're not at a flea market or yard sale. Greet employers with a smile and firm handshake, along with good eye contact. Introduce yourself to them and give them some brief background information about your career, education and goals. Be clear about what you are looking for and be flexible about considering other opportunities that the employer thinks might be a good fit for you.

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Do Your Homework...research, Research, RESEARCH.

Research in advance the employers attending the event that you plan to visit. Thoroughly review their jobs Web site and apply in advance of the event for any jobs you are well-suited for. Prepare what you know about and admire about the company/organization. Know who is on the Executive team. Learn about their growth, success, recent acquisitions and history. Most of all, prepare why you are the best candidate for the position that you have already applied for. Know about the employer's needs and how you can bring value to the organization. When you apply in advance of the event, you make the recruiter's job so much easier. It really impresses them! It could move you immediately to the "top of the list." By all means, never, never walk up to an employer and ask, "So, what do you do?"

Family and Friends?

Although you may want to have family or friends with you at a career/job fair for "moral support," it is best to attend alone. Bringing a friend or spouse could distract you from your goals and objectives. Their goal might be to collect as many "chotchkes" as possible, which is contrary to your goal of landing a job interview. Also, be sure to turn your cell phone off when you arrive at the event and leave it off until you leave the venue. Never, never, never take or make a call/text while speaking with a recruiter.

Put on Your Marketing Hat and Sell!

Your presence at a career/job fair is all about selling your personality, skills and talents to the potential employer. Your job is to communicate how you will help the organization solve their problems, grow their business or meet current goals and objectives. It is all about how you “fit” in the company and how you will execute positive change. Your goal is to land the interview, not get a job offer while standing in the convention space of a hotel. Don’t take it as a negative when the recruiter tells you to apply online or to visit their Web site. That is the standard procedure these days. Be clear and concise regarding your talents and strengths. You must prepare in advance and use the few minutes of time with the recruiter to sell, sell, sell. Before you meet with employers, ask yourself, “How will I make them remember me when I apply or seek an interview?”

The Follow-up.

Be sure to give a copy of your professionally prepared resume to the recruiter. Notice, I said “Professionally Prepared Resume.” If you have not had a professional in career services/consulting review it, I would not submit it to any employer. When we need our shoes fixed, we go to a shoemaker, not the Internet. So, do it right and have a career services professional review your cover letter/résumé, before you attend a job fair or apply for a position. It’s a small investment in your future. Be sure to get a business card from every recruiter that you speak with and follow-up with a phone call, thank-you note or thank-you email in a few days. These days, a hand-written personalized note can really differentiate you from the other candidates. Take a few extra minutes to create communications that stand out from the rest.

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