

11 Tips To Get Something Useful Out Of Job A Fair

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Plenty of people believe job fairs are obsolete, a thing of the past — but experts say they’re not dead, and they’re *certainly* not useless. Job seekers still use career fairs to network, make positive first impressions, and learn about companies and what it’s like to work for them. Meeting and interacting with recruiters face to face is still a critical part of the job search process, experts say — and career fairs offer job seekers a unique opportunity to make personal connections that are impossible when submitting a resume online.

Don't make the mistake of dismissing job fairs automatically. Here are 11 tips to get the most out of them:

1. **Devise a plan for the day.** Know which employers you want to connect with ahead of time, and prioritize them. But also leave some time for “wild cards,” says Manny Contomanolis, associate vice president and director of the [Office of Cooperative Education and Career Services](#) at Rochester Institute of Technology. “Show up with an ample supply of resumes, enthusiasm, energy, and a snack to keep you going.”
2. **Dress like you would for an interview.** What you wear is important. “Job fairs are typically large events with a lot of people, and you’ll stand out by your well-chosen wardrobe,” says Katharine S. Brooks, executive director of the [Office of Personal and Career Development](#) at Wake Forest University. “If you’re not dressed professionally, that’s just one more hurdle you’ll have to overcome. Employers notice details; some complain about wrinkled ties, scuffed shoes, or inappropriate jewelry.”
3. **Research the companies that will be there.** “The No. 1 complaint from employers is that candidates simply didn’t take the time to learn about the company and its opportunities in advance,” Brooks says. The more you know about an organization and the types of positions they hire for, the better you will come across to the employer. “And it’s not that hard — just review the list of companies attending the job fair (most announcements and advertisements list the participating companies) and read their websites. If you don’t have time to research every company, select the top five to 10 companies you’d like to work for and research those.” William Jones, a director in the [Rutgers University Career Services office](#), agrees. He says when you research the organizations that are expected to attend the fair beforehand, you may surprise them with your knowledge, and impress them with the initiative you took to research the company’s mission, purpose, and clients served.
4. **Don’t ask questions that you can find answers to online.** Jones says you should never ask: “What kind of positions are you hiring for?” or “What is your organization all about?” or any other question that can be answered with a quick Google search. Instead, ask recruiters to elaborate on information you’ve learned from your research. Mention something you read online about a new product or a new initiative.

“You can learn more about their positions by asking, ‘Who succeeds in the position you’re hiring for?’ or ‘What would you say is a key characteristic for success in your organization?’ Then, when the representative tells you, find a way to link your skills or background to what they say,” Brooks says.

5. **Remember that this is a networking opportunity.** As a job seeker, you should collect as many business cards as possible and make a good first impression. Then, when it's time to apply for an open position, you can stand out by referencing that connection in your cover letter or introduction email, Jones says.
6. **Be prepared to answer questions about yourself.** Many employers open the conversation with: "Tell me about yourself." "You don't want to stumble around on this," Brooks says. "Be prepared to state your name, a brief statement about yourself, and why you're interested in the organization you're talking to. Be concise; you don't have much time to make your impression before the recruiter is on to the next person." If an employer asks where you're currently working, and you're not, just say something like, "my most recent employment was with ..." and move on by describing your skills or what you learned in that job.
7. **Listen to everyone around you.** If you find yourself waiting in line to speak with an employer, make your time count, Jones says. "Listen to others' conversations and implement what you hear from the employer into your own exchange."
8. **Be enthusiastic.** This is not the time to be laid back, casual, and cool, Brooks says. Demonstrate your interest with a firm handshake, good eye contact, a smile, and a good conversation with the company representative. Always remember that a company recruiter is not a career counselor, so there's no need to discuss anything about your job search with them. Focus on your talents, and link them to the organization.
9. **Apply online after you meet with a company rep.** "Students struggle with this notion but even though an employer may take your paper resume at a job fair, that doesn't necessarily make you a candidate," Contomanolis says. "For the employers you target, don't just research the company website; also access the job listings page and apply online. This way, you can tell the employer at the fair that you have already applied online prior to speaking to them. This is a huge advantage." If you wait until after the job fair to apply for a job online, use the knowledge you gained from speaking with the recruiter at the fair to highlight what's really important from the organization's point of view, Jones says. "And don't forget to reference that conversation you had with the recruiter in your written materials."
10. **Make sure you have that wow factor.** "Each employer is meeting hundreds, maybe thousands, of candidates in a day," says Ryan Kahn, a career coach, founder of [The Hired Group](#), star of MTV's "Hired," and author of "[Hired! The Guide for the Recent Grad](#)." "Just saying 'hi' and dropping off your resume is not enough effort." Tell the employer your unique story, career accomplishments, and what sets you apart from and above all other potential candidates. "This extra effort is what will get you noticed."
11. **Follow up by email.** Be prepared to follow up with the recruiters soon after you meet them, Contomanolis says. Ask for a business card, and send thank you emails. Kahn says job fairs are all about the personal touch. "They get the candidate right in front of the company and, if executed correctly, that can get them far closer than just applying online. Job fairs are also a great way to discover new companies, ask questions, get career advice, and meet other candidates that are also on the job hunt." They can also help build a candidate's confidence, Contomanolis adds. "If you look at these events with an open mind, a sense of adventure, and as an opportunity to learn, you are maximizing your involvement."