

Reprinted from the June/July 2014 issue of BIC

Career fair success: How to be a standout

First impressions, lasting impact” should be the motto of your game plan. Arrive at the career fair prepared and with a positive attitude that will enable you to stand out and become a recruiter’s top choice — someone he would hire on the spot. How can you do that you ask? Well, let’s take a look at 10 tips that should lead you down the path to career fair success.

1. Do your research. This strategy should be the first step of your game plan. Identify, whenever possible, the companies that will be at the career fair. Decide on several to target and then do your homework. In order to present to the recruiters your knowledge and interest in the company, be aware of their industry, major products/services, key players, competitors, issues and trends.

2. Prepare/rehearse your “30/60 second sell.” This is your marketing pitch, your branding statement — the response to the “tell me about yourself” question. Be able to sum up who you are, what you do and the value you bring to the organization. It’s also a good idea to review potential interview questions. You want to continue to reinforce your positive first impression as you continue the conversation with the recruiter.

3. Dress professionally. Proper business attire is essential because your overall appearance — dress and grooming — will be the first element noticed. First impressions are critical, so plan ahead what you will wear that day. Make sure your clothing is clean and pressed, with shoes polished and in good repair.

Your grooming is the support system of your image, so pay attention to details.

4. Bring résumés. Make sure your résumé is up to date and printed on quality paper, preferably 24-32 pound and ivory or off-white in color. Have a portfolio with a notepad so you can professionally carry your résumé copies, take notes and store company material you pick up. Another strategy in this realm is to have networking cards printed to leave with the recruiter and others in situations where a résumé is not needed.

5. Arrive early. You avoid having to stand in long lines. Plus, you give yourself time to survey the layout of the fair, and determine the order in which you plan to visit with the companies.

6. Gain rapport with the recruiter. When introducing yourself, make eye contact, smile, have a firm handshake and address the recruiter as “Ms.” or “Mr.” Using the basics of etiquette will definitely add to your ability to stand out. Although the atmosphere of the event may be casual, the recruiters will be closely screening you.

7. Be time efficient. Keep in mind there are lots of people wanting to talk with the recruiters, so avoid monopolizing their time. Prepare some key questions in advance to ask that can be used within the framework of most companies with whom you will be speaking.

8. Obtain recruiters’ business cards. This strategy is for follow-up purposes. On the back of the card,

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note the name of the career fair, relevant points of your discussion and something you felt stood out about the interaction.

9. Follow up. Keep your name fresh with the recruiters by sending a follow-up note thanking them for their time and information, as well as indicating your interest, qualifications, a few details of the conversation and your desire for a second interview, as appropriate. It’s best to email/mail the note within 24 hours.

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Consider a follow-up call within three to five days after you’ve sent your note.

10. Create a “continuity” plan. Organize your business cards. Develop a networking system to keep track of names and titles, contact information and dates, important comments, planned actions and company responses.

The bottom line is that you must go to the career fair with a plan of attack. Whether the interaction with the company recruiter is 30 seconds or 30 minutes, you are being evaluated. To make sure you have a productive experience, give each opportunity your best shot.

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