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10 Tips to Get the Most Out Of On-Campus Career Fairs

Whether you're new to the game or not, on-campus career fairs can be pretty intimidating. There are often hundreds of employers seeking qualified candidates at these events. Where do you even start? A well-prepared career fair goer can really benefit from the experience, so it's important to do your research, have a plan, and follow through to landing a job.

Here are 10 tips for getting the most out of on-campus career fairs:

1. Do research ahead of time. It's extremely important to start by looking ahead of time at what companies will attend the fair. Many schools will provide a database of companies and what types of positions they're looking to fill. Determine what companies are hiring your major and the ones where you'd like to work. Then you should research those companies more to learn everything you can about it, just like you would for a job interview. A well-prepared attendee is most impressive to recruiters.

2. Prioritize the companies. Once you've researched the companies, you need to decide which ones you'd like to speak with the most. Make a list and rank them so you can make it to the most important ones on your list first.

3. Practice your elevator speech. When you meet recruiters, you will need to introduce yourself with a 60-second elevator speech. This should cover who you are, what your goals are, and what you have to offer. Before the fair, draft out your speech, practice it, perfect it, and memorize it.

4. Prepare some questions to ask. In addition to your elevator speech, you should also think of some questions to ask the recruiters. Some good questions to ask include what the company culture is like or what roles you might fit. If you're stuck, look for a list of suggested questions for candidates to ask in job interviews.

5. Bring plenty of copies of your resume. Print out about 10-20 copies of your resume. Bring them in a folder with a notepad. Yes, you will have specific companies in mind before you get there, but you might notice some others along the way so it's best to be over-prepared.

6. Dress for success. Career fairs are just like job interviews, so you need to dress professionally. Wear professional, business attire in neutral colors like black or gray. Also remember to wear comfortable shoes because you will be on your feet for a few hours and nothing looks worse than a candidate who is hobbling around in 4-inch heels.

7. Get there early. At the beginning of the day, you and the recruiters are both fresh and ready to go, so you'll make the best impression if you're one of the first candidates they meet. Arriving early with a positive attitude will benefit you tremendously.

8. Keep track of your conversations. Use your notepad, to keep track of the companies and recruiters with whom you spoke. Write down recruiters' names and your initial reactions so you can follow up when you get home.

9. Collect business cards. In the interest of efficiency, ask for recruiters' business cards so you can use accurate contact information. Whether you're asked to interview or not, you can contact recruiters to say, "thank you," after the fair.

10. Follow up within 24 hours. When you get home from career fairs, it's essential to send thank you emails to all of the recruiters you met. Remind them where you met, what you discussed, and the position that would suit you. Studies show more than 20 percent of recruiters won't hire a candidate who doesn't send a thank you note. Following up after career fairs can make or break your chance at landing a job.

Establishing a plan and covering all your bases before you arrive at a career fair can mean the difference between landing five interviews and leaving empty-handed. If you are extremely organized and know what you're getting into, you can be really successful at any career fair.