

# HOW TO SUCCEED AT A JOB FAIR

### AT A JOB FAIR YOU GET A CHANCE TO SELL YOURSELF!

Job fairs are a popular way for company recruiters to find new candidates. The recruiters get a chance to meet many job seekers in a short amount of time, and you get a chance to sell yourself. Unlike more standard job-search approaches, job fairs guarantee face-to-face discussions. But you have to be presentable and well-prepared.

Succeeding at a job fair depends on making a good first impression. First impressions are very powerful at a job fair. It's likely the recruiter will decide whether he/she likes you in the first few minutes of your conversation, so the way you present yourself is very important. Use the suggestions below to create a positive, polished first impression, and turn your job fair experience into a successful job offer.

#### Getting Ready

**Register:** Most job fairs ask you to pre-register online or by calling ahead. Some will ask that you upload or email your résumé – make sure to follow the directions carefully so it is not lost or does not lose its formatting.

**Do some research:** Look at the list of companies participating in the job fair. Research who they are and what they do: what is their product or service? Who is their target audience? Do you know anyone who works there? Do some networking – an informational interview if possible — to help you learn about the work environment, values, and culture of the organization.

**Update your résumé:** Make sure your résumé is current, targeted, and error-free. Print several copies of each targeted résumé to bring to the job fair. Put them in a folder to keep them from wrinkling or getting dirty.

**Practice your “pitch”:** A “pitch” is a 60-second summary of your skills and abilities, along with a statement that entices the recruiter to ask for more. It should be personal, giving examples of your accomplishments. It should be conversational in tone. It should be comfortable — practice it in many variations that sound natural and not rehearsed. Use the Harvard Business School Pitch Builder ([alumni.hbs.edu/careers/pitch/](http://alumni.hbs.edu/careers/pitch/)) to create your pitch, and practice it with family, friends, neighbors – everyone you know.

**Prepare to answer questions:** Here are some of the common questions that you should be prepared to answer:

- “Tell me about yourself.” This will likely be the first question that a recruiter asks. Your answer should consist of a short introduction of yourself, then launch directly into your “pitch.”
- “What are your skills?” Count off four or five skills. The first three should be relevant to the job you are targeting. Give an example of how you have used each skill in the past, along with the results of your work. The last one or two skills should be essential for all jobs, such as reliable, team player, or hard working.

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- “Why did you decide to be a [occupation]?” Tell the story of how you decided to go into your chosen career. Keep your description brief, professional and appropriate, but make it personal and passionate.

**Prepare to ask questions:** Asking good questions shows the recruiter that you are serious about your job search and that you have prepared effectively. Here are some sample questions to ask:

- “What is a typical day like at your company?”
- “Can you describe the ideal person for this job?”
- “What is your timeframe for hiring?”
- “Will you take my résumé and call me for an interview if you think I might be a good fit?”

Do not ask questions about pay, benefits, or vacation time. Do not ask the recruiter to tell you about the company – you should have done some research before coming to the job fair.

**What to wear — and not:** Make sure your clothing is clean, wrinkle-free, and professional. Do not wear visible piercings (except conservative earrings for women), torn or revealing clothing, hats, or heavy make-up or perfume.

## At the Job Fair

On the day of the job fair, make sure you have had a good night’s sleep and eat a healthy breakfast. Job fairs require a lot of energy, and you don’t want to lose steam before you’re finished.

Arrive early or with plenty of time to explore all of the companies that interest you.

Review the list of companies that are participating, and highlight your top choices. Visit those companies first. They will see you at your freshest and you’ll be sure to have time for them.

Look recruiters in the eye and offer a firm handshake.

Take notes that include the company name, recruiter’s name, position, and answers to your questions. You will be talking with a lot of people at the job fair, so writing everything down will help you later on.

Tell the recruiters that you are very interested in their positions, and end the conversation with a request for a follow-up. Ask “How can I follow up with you and when?”

Get a business card from every company you visit. Make sure to follow up with a thank you card and a phone call.

**Remember to:**    *Prepare*   •   *Stay positive*   •   *Be confident*

Best of luck in turning your job fair experience into a successful job offer!

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