

10 TIPS ON NAVIGATING JOB FAIRS

Job fairs are nerve-wracking: huge crowds of people, harried employers, and the expectation that you'll walk up to a stranger and start talking about yourself. But if you know how to navigate them, you can take a lot of the anxiety out of the experience, and impress prospective employers.

Here are 10 tips for navigating a job fair effectively, *by Alison Green*

- 1. Research companies beforehand.** This will help you know who you're interested in and why, so that you can make sure you're approaching the right employers—and target your pitch when you do.
- 2. Don't be afraid to walk right up to an employer's booth and launch into your spiel.** It might feel weird to just approach to a stranger and starting pitching yourself, but at a job fair it's normal. Everyone there is doing this, and you shouldn't feel shy about it at all. Knowing that cold pitching is normal may help you feel more comfortable.
- 3. Be able to briefly explain yourself and what you do (or want to do) in 20 seconds.** For instance, you might say something like, "Hi, I'm Michelle Smith. I'm looking for design work at a nonprofit, and I read on your website that you have a position open that combines design and online marketing, which is exactly what I specialize in. I'm very interested in learning more about what you're looking for."
- 4. Hand out your resume, AND a business card.** After talking to hundreds of people at the event, if an employer only has your business card at the end of the day, they're not likely to remember details about you. A resume will flesh you out far more. Creating your own business card is easy using the templates found on Microsoft Word or Publisher.
- 5. Make sure your resume is organized and ready.** If you have to go digging through your bag trying to find a resume copy, you'll look unprepared and disorganized; assume it'll be requested and have it easily accessible.
- 6. Have a good handshake.** After an employer has spent hours shaking hand after hand, it matters more than you might think. A firm handshake stands out, and a limp one is slightly off-putting. No reasonable employer is going to turn down a great candidate for having a limp handshake, of course, but it does contribute to a larger overall picture of you. And in an environment where employers are talking to hundreds, if not thousands, of candidates, anything you can do to maximize that impression matters.
- 7. Energy matters too.** You might only have 60 seconds in front of an employer; in that short time, if you seem crazy, or low-energy, or rote, that'll be the overriding impression you leave behind. Instead, you want to come across as engaged and interested.
- 8. Don't talk only to the employers at the job fair; talk to other job-seekers too.** By asking what they're looking for and what their impressions have been so far, you may get valuable information about an opening they heard about, or a recruiter to avoid, or a recruiter you definitely should talk to.
- 9. When you find an employer that you're interested in pursuing further, ask for a card so that you can follow up later.** And make sure you really do follow up later. At the last job fair I attended, I'd estimate that at least half of the job-seekers who told me they'd follow up with me later never did.
- 10. If there's one particular employer you're especially interested in, try to stop by their booth right before the job fair ends.** Often the crowds have died down at that point, and you'll have less competition for their attention. In fact, don't be afraid to stop by at the end of the fair even if you've already spoken with them that day. A second visit can be a great way to reiterate your interest and make a stronger impression.