

## Job Fair Success

Job fairs are a win-win situation for both employers and job seekers. For employers, they offer an opportunity to generate a large number of prospects in a short period of time. They also provide a mechanism for conducting initial screening of those prospects. For job seekers, a job fair is an opportunity to meet with multiple employers on the same day.

Job fairs should not be considered “window shopping” for a job seeker. They require research, preparation, and a strategic plan to maximize the full potential of this recruitment event. Whether its thirty seconds or thirty minutes, contact with a recruiter at a job fair will determine your hiring prospects with that organization.

### Types of Job Fairs

There are different types of job fairs, including the following six:

- **College Job Fair** – Many colleges and universities sponsor job fairs on campus as a way of helping to connect students and alumni with employers. They are usually sponsored by the Career Services office, although some could be sponsored by a specific academic department or student organization on campus. Some colleges and universities open their job fairs to students from other institutions, as a professional courtesy. Check with Clarkson University Career Services about any upcoming job fairs they may be aware of.
- **Professional Job Fair** – These are events geared towards professional careers – accounting, finance, law, engineering, management information systems, and more. They offer a mix of professional-level employers, and openings in professional-level careers. The competition is typically “ramped up” at these job fairs, based on the nature of the positions and the candidates attending.
- **Professional Specialty Job Fair** – These events are targeting a specific professional group – human resources, engineering, K-12 educators, and more. If you fall into a specific group (e.g. human resources), this is a prime opportunity to meet multiple employers in your field of interest.

- **Community Job Fair** – These are typically large job fairs open to the general public. They cover a wide range of employers, with everything from entry-level to management-level positions available. These events require a “sifting through” process, to see who will be there and to target who you want to specifically speak with.
- **Employer Job Fair** – Some employers will hold job fairs onsite to attract large number of prospects for multiple openings. This is a good way for an employer to build their applicant pool in times of need.
- **Digital Job Fair** – These are online job fairs. In some cases, job seekers will gain access to a variety of online “booths” organized by company name. Each booth will link job seekers to information about – and applications for – positions available with employers. In other cases, job seekers are asked to complete an online applicant profile. Profiles are then fed to hundreds of participating employers. In the age of technology, digital job fairs are gaining in popularity.

### How to Find a Job Fair

Most job fairs are free, but always check to be sure before attending. Some sources for job fairs include:

- **Your College or University** – As mentioned, check with Clarkson University Career Services and/or other colleges you graduated from about upcoming job fairs.
- **Professional Associations** – Sometimes, professional associations will sponsor job fairs for their members. It’s one of the many reasons to join a professional association in your field. Not a member of a professional association? Go to a site like Weddles (<http://weddles.com/associations/index.cfm>) and find an appropriate one to join.
- **Your Local Newspaper** – In many cases, job fairs will be advertised in your local newspapers. So check your local newspapers, or the newspapers in the areas where you’re interested in relocating to, for an upcoming job fair.
- **Career One-Stop Offices** – Sponsored by the United States Department of Labor, these regional offices are designed to help job seekers find jobs. Check out their resources, and find the nearest office to you, at the following site: [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org). They’re usually aware of job fairs in your area.
- **LinkedIn** – This online networking site provides connections to other professionals who can give you information, resources, guidance and advice. Your connections may be able to help connect you with upcoming job fairs in an area of interest. LinkedIn also has a large number of groups related to job fairs, groups that promote job fairs in your area and field.
- **The Internet** – The Worldwide Web provides us with a rich resource on a variety of topics, including job fairs. Check out some of these job fair resources: Career Fairs

([www.careerfairs.com](http://www.careerfairs.com)), Career Fairs Global (<http://cfg-inc.com>), Diversity Career Group ([www.diversitycareergroup.com/fairs/](http://www.diversitycareergroup.com/fairs/)), Job Expo ([www.jobexpo.com](http://www.jobexpo.com)) and Women For Hire (<http://womenforhire.com/online-career-fairs/>). Or just “Google” job fairs in your area.

## **The Work Before the Job Fair**

### **Have Well-Established Career Goals**

It may sound obvious, but it’s important to enter a job fair with well-established career goals. Through a process of thoughtful self-assessment and comprehensive career exploration, you should be able to clearly and confidently communicate realistic career goals to a recruiter.

Need some help in this area? Contact Clarkson University Career Services for more information.

### **Familiarize Yourself with Employers That Will Be There**

Most job fairs will provide a list of employers who will be in attendance. Research these employers to find out if they have positions that match your career goals, and if the mission, vision and values of the organization appear to be a good fit for you. For help with researching employers go to the following site: [www.rileyguide.com/research.html](http://www.rileyguide.com/research.html).

Even if the employer may not be recruiting for specific positions of interest to you at the job fair, you still may want to put them on your list. Visit the booth and inquire about the name of the hiring manager for positions of interest to you (even though there’s no opening at present). Then take the time to send your resume to this individual, after the job fair, for future reference. Mention your contact with the recruiter at the job fair as a way of introduction.

### **Develop Your Target List**

Then it’s time to create your “target list” of the employers you wish to speak with at the job fair. Prioritize this list, from most important to least important. At the job fair, talk with your most important employers when you’re “fresh” and when they’re “fresh” as well. Then meet with the rest of the employers on your list. Swing back around to your top choices before you leave to thank them once again for their time and consideration.

As previously mentioned, a job fair should not be viewed as “window shopping.” You should go in with a defined target list, strong intent, and a sense of purpose. Do not waste time on organizations that do not interest you, and/or have nothing to offer you related to your career goals.

### **Dig Deeper Regarding Your Target List**

Once you have your target list, conduct more in-depth research about those organizations. One of the biggest complaints that employers have about job candidates is that they don't know enough about the organization they're interviewing with. Conduct this like you would any other research project, with a comprehensive and thorough approach.

### **Pre-Register For the Job Fair**

Some job fairs allow job-seekers to pre-register, which may include submitting pertinent information about your career goals and qualifications. Pre-registration allows employers an opportunity to get a sense of the applicant pool and to do some prescreening. If pre-registration is offered, take advantage of this opportunity.

### **Know About the People at the Booths**

In most cases, the people at the booths will be recruiters. Their job is typically not to hire – it's to screen candidates in or out of the interview process. Think of them as the "gatekeeper."

Those who are screened in will usually be referred to another level of human resources and/or the hiring manager for a more in-depth interview. So it is critical to make your best impression, in an abbreviated period of time, to make it to the next round.

### **Understand What Recruiters are Looking For**

Recruiters primarily look for two things:

- Your unique qualifications for the position – Are you a viable candidate for the job?
- Your organizational fit – Will you fit the personality of the team and the culture of the organization?

### **Be Able To Answer Three Key Questions**

Consider these three key questions on the minds of recruiters at a job fair:

- Why this position? – An assessment of your career goals and path.
- Why here? – An assessment of your organizational fit.
- Why you? – An assessment of your unique qualifications.

All questions a recruiter will ask you at a job fair will come back to one of these three key questions.

### **Prepare Your Accomplishment-Based Resume**

You seldom get a second chance to make a first impression, and your resume is often your first impression. The primary purpose of a resume is to get you a job interview. The resume also serves as the talking point during the interview – and in some cases your conversation with a recruiter at a job fair. A resume should be designed in such a way to clearly show your unique qualifications for your chosen career, and to set yourself apart from the competition.

Keep these things in mind regarding your resume:

- There is no one way to write a resume. Although there are some basic rules, much of it has to do with style. Your resume should express your unique skills and personality in a professional manner.
- Employers spend seconds scanning your resume. It needs to be concise, customized and compelling to get their attention.
- Your resume is a “marketing” document. Out of all of the candidates applying for a position, why would I choose you for an interview? You need to “stand out” vs. “blend in.”
- Employers predict future success through past performance. You need to transform your resume from a “job description” to a “performance summary.”
- Consider different versions of your resume, if you have several different career goals and will be talking to employers regarding a specific career path.

If you haven’t done so already, schedule an appointment with Clarkson University Career Services to get your resume critiqued. We can help you polish your resume for upcoming job fairs.

Bring multiple copies of your resume (more than you think you will need) – on professional resume paper. Keep them in a folder to avoid any creases or marks. Your resume should have excellent visual appeal.

You may also want to consider bringing a scannable version of your resume. Many recruiters are bringing resumes back to their office and scanning them into a database. For more information on developing a scannable version of your resume go to:

[www.quintcareers.com/scannable\\_resumes.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/scannable_resumes.html).

## **Create a Compelling “Elevator Speech”**

A key element of career branding is the “elevator speech.” Imagine you just stepped into an elevator with one other person. This other person just happened to be an employer who was hiring for a job of great interest to you. In the time it will take to get from the first to the tenth floor what would you say to that employer to convince them that you may be the best candidate for the position; or at least worthy of a formal interview for the position.

Simply put, the elevator speech is a brief (30 - 60 second), dynamic and customized branding statement that focuses on what sets you apart from others. When companies are marketing a product, they focus on their unique selling proposition – the one or two things that make that product different from any other. The elevator speech is your unique selling proposition.

An elevator speech is very useful at a job fair. It can be perfect when you first meet a recruiter and they ask “Can you tell me about yourself?” or “What brings you to our booth?”

If you haven’t done so already, start to develop your elevator speech before the next job fair. Check out our handout on elevator speeches for guidance and advice.

Remember, your objective at the event is to secure an interview after the event. A dynamic and compelling elevator speech will go a long way in getting to the next level of hiring.

## **Prepare for Your Conversation with the Recruiter**

Besides having a compelling elevator speech, it is also important to get very familiar with your resume. You will need to be prepared to explain and talk about anything and everything on it. In some cases, it may become the primary talking point.

In addition, write answers to commonly asked questions (but don’t memorize or over rehearse your answers), and have stories to tell about your qualifications and skills. Some commonly asked questions you may encounter are as follows:

- **Can you tell me about yourself?**

An open-ended question typically used at the beginning of the interview. Keep your focus on your career goals, your qualifications for the position, and your fit for the company.

- **Why did you choose your major? Why this position?**

The employer wants to know more about your short term career goals. They want to know if you are knowledgeable about the career you have chosen, and if you have made an informed decision.

- **What do you see yourself doing five to seven years from now?**  
The employer is probing about your long term career goals. They want to know that you're serious enough about your career that you've taken the time to think long-term, and that you have a plan for achieving your realistic goals.
- **Why are you interested in working for our company?**  
Always research the employer to get to know them, and find something that connects with you. This is about your organizational fit.
- **What are your strengths?**  
Have at least three ready to talk about, and make sure the strengths you talk about are related to the qualifications for the position.
- **What are your weaknesses?**  
We all have them, so have at least three you can talk about. The key to this question is being able to tell the employer what you're doing right now to improve in those areas.
- **Can you tell me about a time when ...?**  
The classic behavioral-based question. Employers predict future success based on past performance, so they're looking for you to tell stories about your past experiences. Have stories ready for any key words you use to describe yourself, as well as key words the employer uses to describe the position. When telling the story use SAR statements – describe the **S**ituation, tell what **A**ction you took and then close with a **R**esult (positive and quantifiable – when possible).
- **Why should I hire you?**  
This is your opportunity to tell the employer why you're uniquely qualified for the position. Don't talk in generalities here. Leave them with something that will make them remember you when you walk out the door.

For help with other commonly asked interview questions, along with sample excellent responses, check out our handout on common and difficult interview questions.

### **Gather What You Will Need to Bring to the Job Fair**

Be prepared to bring these things to the job and career fair:

- As mentioned, print multiple copies of your resume on a heavier stock resume paper. Print more copies than you think you will need. Keep them in a protective folder.
- Prepare and print lists of three to five references (along with appropriate contact information), from most important to least important. Use references who can speak to the quality of your work, as well as your skills and positive qualities/characteristics. Print your references on the same paper you print your resumes on, and keep them in a protective folder as well.

- Consider having some samples of your best work (highlights of your portfolio). Although most job fair interviews are brief in length, an employer may take a particular interest and the opportunity may present itself to use pieces of your portfolio.
- Develop a list of questions to ask the recruiter (more on this later).
- Have a professional looking pad folio (with a fresh pad of paper) and several pens for taking notes.
- You may also want to consider bringing a briefcase, where you can put all of the above items and organizational literature that you get from your target list of employers.

One additional note, it is not necessary to bring a cover letter. At a job fair, you are the cover letter.

### **Plan to Dress Professionally**

Layout and prepare your professional attire for the job fair. Make sure it is appropriate for the job, organization and industry. Go to [www.quintcareers.com/dress\\_for\\_success.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/dress_for_success.html) for more information.

In addition, it is important to note that it is always better to be overdressed than underdressed. When it comes to job fairs, think more along the lines of conservative business attire.

### **Remember These Seven Things As Well**

In addition, remember these seven things in making a professional appearance:

1. Go easy on perfume, cologne, makeup and jewelry, and cover any tattoos.
2. For women with long hair – put your hair back or up. Don't let it be a distraction during the interview.
3. For men – be cleanly shaven, or have your mustache and/or beard neatly trimmed.
4. If you smoke, don't smoke in the car on the way to the job and career fair.
5. Leave your cell phone in the car, or turned off during the job fair. You don't want this as a distraction during your time at the event.
6. If you're chewing gum dispense of it before entering the building.
7. Use the restroom before entering the job fair. This is one last chance to check your general appearance.

## **At the Job Fair**

### **Arrive Early To Maximize Results**

Make sure to attend the job fair early, before recruiters become bored, tired of talking (and listening) and hungry. The typical “rush time” at these fairs is Noon to 4:00 p.m.; so avoid this rush. Also keep in mind that some recruiters start to pack up before the job fair ends, particularly if the crowds start to dwindle. So arrive early for maximum impact.

### **Conduct A “Scouting Trip” When You Arrive**

Your first reaction may be to jump right in when you arrive and start talking with employers on your target list. Be patient and do a “scouting trip” first. Walk around the room to locate your target employers. When they’re speaking with other candidates, make sure to do two things:

- Pick up any literature they may have about available positions and/or the organization. These are additional research materials, and can provide information useful in your conversation with the recruiter.
- Stay near their booth (within earshot) and start to glance at the literature. As you glance at the literature, listen to (and make note of) the questions the recruiter is asking the job candidate at the booth and how he/she is responding to the job candidate’s answers. Recruiters tend to ask the same questions, so this will give you an opportunity to mentally prepare for those questions when you go to meet the recruiter.

When you’ve done this find a space, such as a job candidate lounge or gathering place, where you can read the literature and prepare for questions you may be asked. Now you’re ready to speak with the recruiter.

### **Be Conscious of Non-Verbal Cues**

Remember the power of your non-verbal cues. These cues are things you communicate without even saying a word. For example, when you walk up to a recruiter at a booth make good eye contact, provide a firm handshake and be ready to smile. All of these things will project interest, enthusiasm and confidence.

Go to <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewsnetworking/a/nonverbalcomm.htm> for more information about the power of your non-verbal cues.

### **Avoid Doing These Things**

Avoid telling jokes, using poor language or slang, talking about controversial topics, speaking negatively about a present or former employer, talking about personal issues or family problems or acting desperate for a job. None of these will be well received by the recruiter.

## **Don't Monopolize a Recruiter's Time**

At many job fairs there can be long lines of applicants waiting to see one recruiter. Be sensitive to these lines, and the limited amount of time a recruiter may have to speak with you. So don't try to monopolize a recruiter's time to try to make a positive impression.

Your sensitivity, common courtesy and professionalism will relieve pressure on the recruiter, and reflect positively on you. In addition, you can always come back when there's a "break in the action" at the booth to continue your conversation without the pressure of a line.

## **Go Easy on the "Freebies"**

A number of recruiters will have "give-a-ways" at their booth – Frisbees, pens, mini-flashlights, and more. Some may even have free food. These are designed to attract you to the booth, and to help market the organization (as many of these goodies have their company name and logo on them)

Don't collect them as if they're going out of style. Your primary goal at the job fair is to make the best impression you can regarding a position of interest, not to fill your goodie bag.

## **Have Questions Ready to Ask the Recruiter**

You should always have a few key questions to ask a recruiter at a job fair. This is your opportunity to assess if you're the right person for the position and the organization. It's also your opportunity to impress the recruiter with your interest, research and preparation.

Asking good questions will go a long way in gaining insight about the position and organization, and positively influencing the recruiter. Check out our handout on questions to ask at an interview to provide some ideas in creating your list for the job fair.

## **Closing the Conversation**

As your conversation draws to a close, remember to do these final things:

- Take this opportunity to ask a couple of key questions for the recruiter.
- Reinforce your interest in the position and the organization.
- Inquire about the timeline or next steps in the interviewing/hiring process.
- Request the recruiter's business card. You'll need this for your thank you letters and any follow-up.
- Immediately write down notes after the conversation concludes so you don't forget important details.
- Remember to circle around before you leave, if this is truly an employer of interest, to thank them once again for their time and consideration.

## After the Job Fair

Once your time at the job fair has come to a close, it is important to do these four things:

- Write a thank you note within 24 hours. For some sample thank you letters go to: [http://www.quintcareers.com/sample\\_thank-you\\_letters.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/sample_thank-you_letters.html).
- Call the recruiter's business phone after the job fair. You will most likely get their voicemail. Because most recruiters will be checking their messages that evening or the next morning, leave a message that thanks them for their time and reinforces your interest in the position (and a subsequent interview).
- Request to connect with the recruiter on LinkedIn. Recruiters are building their followings – the average recruiter has 616 connections on LinkedIn. This will be a great way to stay connected, and follow up with the recruiter.
- Continue to follow up in a professionally persistent manner.

## Final Thoughts

Job fairs are one of the few places where employers come to find you. Don't be intimidated by the recruiters, the crowds or the maze. Be prepared, confident and strategic in your approach. If you are, you will surely increase your chances of job fair success.

## Other Job Fair Resources

For more information about job fairs, check out these resources:

CollegeGrad.com – Job Fair Success

[www.collegegrad.com/jobsearch/Job-Fair-Success/](http://www.collegegrad.com/jobsearch/Job-Fair-Success/)

Quintessential Careers – Career Fair Resources

[www.quintcareers.com/career\\_fair\\_resources.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/career_fair_resources.html)