How to get the most out of your Career Fair Experience

Pre-Conference Preparation

- Connect and speak with a student who has been to a major career fair for advice and suggestions

- **Design a Career portfolio**
  - The Career Portfolio should include copies of your resume(s), copies of Reference Names, detail information on previous jobs (to assist with preparation of company employment applications), samples of your best work, testimonials, evaluations, information on awards, accomplishments, special training, certificates, special licenses and educational degrees

- **Perform a self-assessment on what your job search focus will be**
  - Industry type
  - Market type
  - Specific Job functions
  - Skill sets
  - Entry level: Entry, Mid Manager, Professional, Executive Level
  - Geographic location: Need to relocate, willingness to relocate, Headquarters, business unit locations, etc.

- **Review the Career Fair Website**
  - Obtain the list of Companies/Sponsors who will be attending the Career Fair
  - Identify specific sponsors who meet the Industry type you are interested in
  - Visit Sponsor Website and evaluate company, its products, services, locations,
  - Visit Sponsor Job listing to identify specific jobs that meet your self assessment

- **Visit the Career Fair “Career Center” Page of the website**
  - Post your resume and search for the jobs that have been posted by the companies attending the event
  - Apply to jobs that interest you; companies do conduct job interviews on-site

- **Establish Job Lists: Target, Focus, Alternative, and Basic (your A,B,C list)**
  - **Target List**
    - This list should be very narrow
    - Specific to meet 100% of your self-assessment needs
    - Companies have the job you want
    - Conduct very thorough research about the company.
    - Prepare specific Resume that focus on the Company needs
  - **Focus List**
    - This list should be narrow
    - Specific to meet 85% of your self-assessment needs
    - Companies have the job you want, but may require some relocation, additional training, etc.
    - Conduct thorough research about the company
    - Prepare a specific Resume that focuses on the “general” Company needs
Alternative List
   ❖ This list should include companies that have a similar job, yet may be outside your target industry
   ❖ Specific to meet at least 75% of your self-assessment needs
   ❖ Company has jobs that complement your skill set
   ❖ Conduct preliminary review and research of company
   ❖ Use general resume for introduction

Basic List
   ❖ This list should include all companies that have basic jobs, yet transition of skill set, and or undesirable relocation, or entry level does not meet needs.
   ❖ Meets at least 50% of self-assessment needs

- Prepare more resume copies than you think you will need
  o Keep resume files on flash-drives for quick download and access

- Prepare the Elevator Speech
  o This is a thirty-second to two-minute introductory sales pitch
   *(The amount of time you have with any recruiter will only be around 30 seconds)*

Conference Preparation

- Register Early and online
- Remember to bring more resumes than you think you will need (flash-drive?)
- Bring your career portfolio (if you have one)
- Student Business Cards; bring them if you have them
- Carry a professional tote bag, brief case, and or backpack to keep your printed material neat and clean. Avoid rabbit ears on handouts. Stay professional at all times
- Dress professionally, as if you would for an interview
- Wear comfortable shoes.
- Eat a hearty Breakfast for energy and stamina
- Have your Elevator speech ready… practice and practice

When You Arrive

- Arrive early, check-in, and review directory
- Get a copy of Career Fair Map to locate the companies on Job List
  o Clearly Mark and Identify companies who are on your Target and Focus List.
  o Keep in mind the Target and Focus list are your priorities.
  o Make sure you attend all scheduled interviews
- Be confident and display a winning attitude
- Stay Focused - Rely on your research and preparation to help you stay focused
- Become familiar with the Convention Center Layout.
  o Know where support areas are located
    *(Such as: resume writing area, cyber café, business center, Convention Center entrances and exits, restrooms and refreshment areas, etc.)*
- Visit the Resume Clinic during the Conference (if applicable)
  o Have your resume checked by professional resume writers
  o Often this will be a confirmation that you are on the right track.
  o This may also identify glaring mi-cues that you did not catch and save a substantial waste of time.
During the Career Fair

• **Keep organized**
  - Keep all materials well organized.
  - Have folders for the various resume styles (make sure you do not hand out a basic resume to one of your target companies)
  - When the doors open it will be like a stampede at the front. Take your time, be very focused and stick to your plan.
  - In-between scheduled interview times with Target companies, make your way to any representative who is waiting for someone to appear. This will give you the opportunity to practice your elevator speech. During these practice interviews please ask the sponsor questions in regards to their company.

• **Be Efficient**
  - If you see a booth with a lot of folks at it, don’t wait for your turn to talk to a recruiter. Simply move on to another booth and go back later
  - As an alternative, obtain the representative’s business card and call that person to leave a message that you are at the Job Fair would like to personally meet with him/her
  - Most of the recruiters will be checking voicemail and this is a good way to make an appointment vs. standing in line

• **Conduct yourself professionally at all times**
  - Remember that your first impression may have started when you were first sighted walking up to the company’s booth. This could be three four or five booths away and you not know it.
  - Do not assume a company does not have open positions in your field. Instead, ask what positions they have available now and anticipated in the future.

• **Don’t judge a booth by its cover.**
  - Some of the best opportunities may be at the booths that don’t have the bells and whistles
  - Keep in mind when you see a booth where no other job seekers are present, this does not mean the company does not have opening, or that there job openings are not worth discussing
  - Ask about the company and be willing to listen and to ask questions

• **Observe recruiters from a distance or while you are waiting in line**
  - Once you’ve scoped out the kind of person you’re about to face, you can mentally prepare for the interview or conversation that you’re about to have
  - Watching the job seekers in line ahead of you will give you some idea of what to expect

• **Try to listen in on what Recruiters are saying to other job seekers**
  - Then try to differentiate yourself so that you do not appear to be just like the last person
  - Recruiters want to see variety; they listen for the correct “buzzwords” to spark their interest
  - Listening is very important to know what the buzzwords are

• **Make personal connections**
  - Approach exhibitors with a smile while making direct eye contact and offering a “FIRM” handshake.
  - Introduce yourself as you practiced earlier
  - Express your interest by demonstrating knowledge about the organization
  - Relate your skills, professional interest and experiences to the specific needs of the employer
• Stay relaxed!
  o Do not stress out by rushing
  o Speak slowly
  o Speak in a tone that is loud enough (the exhibit hall will be very loud and crowded)
  o Speak directly to the person, not behind them or from the side.
  o Speak with confidence and maintain a high self-esteem!

• Listen carefully, and ask relevant questions about the company and the positions
  o Do not poke fun of company names
  o Do not bring up negative recent events that would require the recruiter to explain the situation about the company, unless they bring it up first
  o Ask what they look for in an ideal job candidate. This information may be vital in understanding what other recruiters are looking for.
  o This is not the time to discuss salary and or potential wage ranges

• Before leaving the booth, get appropriate contact information and request a business card
  o Ask the representative what the next step is to follow-up, especially if they ask you for a resume.
  o Do not refuse to hand them your resume. Often the company recruiters will measure their success on the number of resumes they obtain
  o Just because you are not interested in the company do not say, “sorry I don’t think giving you my resume will help me!”

• Take notes on the back of recruiter’s business card, your note pad
  o Write down important details about the company and or something the recruiter said that can help them remember you when you follow-up.
  o Take down enough notes on all target and focus list of companies when you speak with them.
  o These notes will play an important role for follow-up or if they call you for a formal interview and/or invite you to their company for an interview

• Use the career fair to help polish your interviewing skills
  o Pay close attention to the popular questions that you may not have anticipated and or have prepared to answer.
  o This will help you the next time you are asked these difficult questions.

• Network with other job seekers
  o Talk to others while you are standing in line to exchange job-hunting ideas, provide support, and identify employment leads

• Network with the Career Fair leaders in attendance
  o Normally you will be able to identify the leadership through a special ribbon on their badge
  o Introduce yourself, and let them know that you are interested in staying in touch
  o Ask them to help you with introduction that might benefit you with your target and focus lists
  o Get their business card and stay in touch with them

Going Shopping?

• As you will find, all of the exhibitors will have “take-away” gifts to offer you. It will be obvious to the exhibitors who are the true job seekers, and who is there to go shopping.
• Stay focus and only take what is offered to you, provided it is not going to drag you down or cause you discomfort to carry, since you need to remain focused and do not need the distraction of a heavy load
• Take a break to review the literature you have picked up
• Keep in mind it will be a long day. Your bag will get very heavy if you use this time to shop for goodies.
• Breaks will allow you to rest and to reflex on what you have seen, heard, and need to digest. You don’t want to make the job seeking a marathon. You may be exhausted at the time you need the energy when meeting that Target Company.
• Do your shopping after you have completed meeting all your Target and Focused List of Companies.
• Use this time to go back to the booths to meet other companies, and to go back through to your Target list and or most promising prospects.
• Remind the recruiters of your interest. Often it is this second visit that creates a memory for the recruiter. This also gives the recruiter an opportunity to ask you questions that they later discovered that they needed to know.
• Between the first meeting and this one, the recruiter has had time to measure all candidates and you may have surfaced to the top. This second meeting is to confirm your interest and just may be the “lasting impression” they were hoping to take back home with them that makes a difference for you.

**After the Career Fair**

• Immediately send back a thank-you note and reconfirm your interest in the position and the company
• If possible address in your letter the companies hiring needs, state your qualifications, and express your desire for a second interview

**Events at the Conference**

• You will find at the career fairs that there will be a lot of evening networking events that offer food and drink. Be cognizant of those around you. The person standing next to you may be dressed in different attire or may still have their company branding attire on, but represents one of the companies you met with earlier.
• You need to remain professional at all time. Carry on intelligent conversations and use this time to network and to reach-out.

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