

Making the Career Fair Worth Your Time

Preparing like a pro

To make the most of your trip around the booths, you'll have to spend time beforehand defining your goals and gathering the right tools to impress recruiters. You can start by answering these questions:

What do I want to achieve? Knowing what you want gives you focus and something to work toward—just be realistic. You may be able to score two interviews, or make ten new contacts, or have conversations with four target recruiters or organizations. On the other hand, an on-the-spot offer isn't too likely particularly if the market is especially competitive. For the most part, a fair may provide only introductory and informational opportunities rather than immediate job vacancies. Regardless, it is up to you to turn this event into an advantage for you.

What can I learn about recruiters that will be at the fair? First, find out which recruiters will be attending and flag the ones that interest you most. Then find out all you can about them—their mission, opportunities they have, recent news about them, etc. Recruiters are more drawn to candidates who've done their homework and demonstrate a genuine interest. The First Avenue Fair uniquely brings employer and graduate school reps together for you to meet and engage in conversation about your future.

What information am I looking for and why? Do you need information about different industries, hiring practices, a particular company or grad school, a position, networking opportunities, internships? If you are seeking full time employment, you need to give an employer a clear idea of how you'll fit in at the company and likewise for graduate school. You will have done most of the work for them. This is time for your elevator pitch: tell them who you are and where you're going.

What questions will I ask? You only have a short time with recruiters, and you want to get the best information possible. Don't waste your time with info you could easily find online (hence researching beforehand). Instead, ask questions like "Can you describe the workplace culture?" or "What do you like best about working for Company Z?" or "What are some of your graduates doing?"

What will I wear? There may not be a job on the line, but you should still dress like you're at an interview. Wear something conservative, professional, and clean, and remember it's better to appear overdressed than lazy. If you need guidance about your choices, talk with your career office personnel.

What will I bring? Make sure you bring resumes geared toward the employers you want to meet with, but also bring several more general copies for those chance encounters with other employers. Gear your resume toward grad school admission if that is your goal. Remember: your resume helps employers identify you later, but a good in-person impression will put your resume on top of the pile.

Adapted from article by C. Scharf at www.WetFeet.com 11/5/2009