

Guerrilla Tactics for Job Fairs

Jo Curtin, Manager, Career Expo Conference Planners. (adapted January 2006)

After watching and talking to thousands of job seekers who've attended our events over the past 12 years, we've learned there is an "art" to getting a job through participation in job fairs. A few tips that make the difference:

Take the event seriously.

It is an interview. You are making that all-important first impression. Only a small percentage of hundreds of interviewees will stand out at the end of the event. Make sure you're one of them! Dress well. Practice your best handshake, award-winning smile and eye contact!

Create the ideal resume.

It should be short, sharp and digestible in one minute's reading by an employer. There are really excellent guides on resumes. Make sure yours is one that is memorable but totally professional. Use good quality light-colored paper.

Plan your strategies carefully.

Use all the information provided by the Career Development Center and the Job Fair website. Company information and job descriptions are usually available. If you do your research prior to meeting with recruiters, you'll be prepared and ready to make conversation and ask intelligent questions--making you a much more interesting candidate than those who ask "So. What do you guys do?" Bad move.

Your "mini-interview" should be a dialogue, not a monologue.

Because you have limited time to make an impression and gain valuable information about the company, you should have several questions ready. These questions help you figure out if the company is a good match for you.

That is, "What skills and characteristics would the ideal programmer need for your project leader position?"

THEN, use that information to sell yourself.

"As you can see from my experience, I have..."

OR, "Can you tell me what characteristics your most successful sales reps have?"..."I'm glad to hear that because...."

Answer questions directly, politely and concisely.

Your goal is to get an interview, or a SECOND interview, if the employer interviews you at the event. If you're genuinely interested, let them know! "I am quite excited about the possibilities your company offers, and I think I have the talent to help you achieve your goals....What do I need to do to arrange a second interview?"

This isn't "pushy"; it's flattering and says you are professionally assertive! Ask them how they rate your credentials and "fit" compared to other candidates they're seeing. Asking for an honest appraisal is one of the best ways to raise it a notch!

Follow-up

Do the old-fashioned thing--send a thank you note to the person you met. (Get their card or write down their name and address at the event). Remind them of your interest and your qualifications and reiterate your interest in an interview. Few people follow through this way today and you'll stand out from the crowd and demonstrate professional follow through.

Don't forget to "network".

Do not only concentrate on the organization you "know" hire people in your field. Make connections, ask questions, and interact with employers who are not as well known to you. Also, there are hundreds of other candidates on site. Many of them have interviewed with employers who may have an ideal position for you. Some may be leaving the ideal job for you. Share resources, leads and ideas.