

## The Inside Story

Have you ever wished you could be cool, calm and in control during the job search process? Have you ever wanted to get the company information you need to make a smart decision? Ever wanted to find out what companies were really looking for and then sell yourself into the job you've always wanted?

Well, learning these insider secrets before attending a job fair is the opportunity you've been looking for! Some people think a job fair is a stressful event. Okay, it can be. There are prospective employers everywhere, looking over the crowd of job seekers. There are also job seekers everywhere, looking to the employers for great job opportunities.

But let's set our emotions aside for a moment and consider the obvious benefits of a job fair.

First, is it an efficient use of your time? How long does it take to read the classifieds, prepare your resume, e-mail or send it, wait for a follow up call (or call to follow up yourself)? This whole process can be very time consuming. At the job fair, however, you'll have direct access to many company representatives. How many times have you submitted resumes, sent letters, and called on the phone, just trying to get through to a hiring manager about a position? Well, this is your opportunity to meet those managers from several different companies all at one time. Because they are in one place, you should be able to touch base with as many as 20 companies at one time.

Second, it's the best opportunity to make a great impression personally. As you know, many of us are more persuasive and impressive in person than we are on paper, especially those of us with limited experience. The great thing about a job fair is that you can meet these hiring managers one-on-one, ask smart questions, and impress them in person.

So, attending a job fair and being well prepared can save you time and effort in looking for the job of your dreams. According to Cami Vignoe, Select's Corporate Recruiter, "job fairs are the best use of time for both the candidate and the employer." She should know. She conducts over twenty job fairs a year in various locations and has met and placed hundreds of candidates. Select Personnel Services has nearly 60 offices nationwide and employs more than 23,000 people each week. "Job fairs are an excellent way to meet candidates with unique skills to fill our many job openings," said Vignoe.

So, now that you are convinced that job fairs are a great use of your time, let's focus on how to make it a successful event! You should be able to accomplish all your goals at a job fair, if you have perfected the following Secret Strategies:

- Be Prepared
- Know Your Accomplishments
- Look Sharp

### Secret Strategy #1: Be Prepared

#### ***Know What Employers Want (Hint: It's not about you, at this point.)***

Some words of wisdom from a wise recruiter: Candidates should focus on WIIFT what's in it for them (the employer). Many people looking for work make the unforgivable mistake of telling a prospective employer what they want or need. Unfortunately, it's not about them . at least at this point. It is about whether or not the company can use the skills, attitudes and experiences the candidate brings to the table. The unspoken bottom line is, "why should we hire you?"

Remember, any company that hires you is making an investment in you. They are not only investing their time (orientation, training, etc.), but they are investing their money as well. So, just like any other smart investor, the company will be looking at how quickly they can expect to see a return on their investment. In other words, if they hire you, how quickly and effectively can you become a contributing member of the team?

Since the best indicator of future performance is a person's past performance, be sure to show your accomplishments in terms of dollars and percentages whenever possible. If you were able to increase profits, reduce costs, increase sales or productivity, you indeed have some very valuable skills. Quantify those results on your resume.



## How To Successfully Market Yourself at a Job Fair

### *Have a Career Objective - Get introspective.*

- Be prepared by knowing what your objective is. Ask yourself:
- How much do I know about the kind of work I want to do?
- What companies do I want to work for? Have I done my homework?
- Do I know what employers in this industry are really looking for?

If you have no idea what you want, or what your objective is, it will be very difficult for a prospective employer to tell you. The more focused and better prepared you are, the quicker you and the employer can have a meaningful discussion. So, try to come up with at least one objective. For example, "my objective is to land an entry-level position with one of the three plastic manufacturing companies in Ventura County."

### *Have a Goal for the Job Fair*

Similarly, you should have a goal for the job fair as well. A reasonable goal might be something like, "I will consider this job fair a success if I can leave my resume with at least five prospective employers." Or, ". if I can schedule 2-3 interviews with prospective employers." This will help you focus your time and energies. Just keep going until you have reached your goals!

### *Have a Current Resume*

This probably goes without saying. But keep in mind that the job of a resume is to get you an interview. If you get an interview, then it's mission accomplished.

Below are a few pointers that can give your resume a competitive edge:

Make sure the information is accurate and up to date. Include your name, address, and phone number. If you can be reached on alternative numbers, include these as well. Always include your e-mail address.

Make sure your resume has a clearly stated objective. Try to include what you want to do (function); at what level (entry, intermediate, executive); and in what setting (financial, aerospace, retail, services, etc.). Just make sure it is not too general or too narrow.

Use a traditional format. Standard resumes are either written in a Functional or Traditional format. We recommend the Traditional format for several reasons. According to Lily Maestas, Unlimited Options, "Be forewarned functional resumes make many personnel directors uncomfortable. It's harder for them to figure out what you did where. Others feel the format is used to hide something, such as a spotty record or limited work experience." Your best bet is still a standard chronological format, with a job-by-job explanation of your work experience. Ms. Maestas also said, "in many instances the format alone will keep you in [or out of] the applicant pool."

Include a Reference Sheet. Having an additional sheet that lists your references will be important at the job fair. You will be meeting directly with prospective employers and they may ask for your references. Make sure you have listed names, phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses for each of them. Make it easy for your perspective employer to contact them it may get you started in your new job even faster!

Make sure your resume looks clean and crisp and is brief. It should consist of short, well-written, action statements instead of complete sentences. Keep it to two pages, max. One page is even better. Use one typeface only, not two or three, and nothing smaller than 10 pt. type size. Show lots of white space so it is easy to read. Proof it for typos; have someone else proof it also.

Make it easy to spot your accomplishments. What is the best way to make your accomplishments short, sweet and to-the-point? Use dynamic words and strong action verbs. For example, instead of saying "I worked in the accounting department," it is much better to say, "I was in charge of analyzing and implementing a new accounting software." Instead of saying "I wrote," use "I designed" or "I created ."



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### *Know What Questions to Ask Prospective Employers (Information Interviews)*

Finally, asking questions is a great way to obtain valuable information. Your time will probably be brief, but ask as many questions as time will allow. Here are some ideas for you:

- What kind of openings do you have?
- What created the [particular] job opening? How long has it been open?
- May I see a job description?
- What are the key responsibilities for the job?
- What type of training will be available?
- How would my performance be measured?
- What do you like about the industry?
- Why did you join this company? What keeps you here?
- What is the corporate culture like? Can you describe the general atmosphere?
- Looking at my resume, what suggestions would you have for improvement?
- When will you be interviewing?
- When can I expect to hear from you?

Be sure to take notes. Get business cards or names. Plan to write follow-up notes to your contacts. In your note, remind her where you met. Thank her for the time she spent with you; then add that you will call next week to schedule a more in-depth interview.

### *Don't overlook the advantages of temporary work*

In a tight economy, it is not as easy to land the ideal job. Don't forget that signing up with a temporary staffing service may be particularly good for you if you are:

- still in school and want to work during summers or vacation
- just out of school, looking for your first job, and have little or no experience
- not sure what you want to do and want to get a taste of a variety of fields
- changing careers and want to be sure you're heading in the right direction
- looking for part-time or flexible schedule for personal reasons.

The main advantage, of course, is that you can use temporary assignments to "check out" a company or industry to find out if you would like to pursue a career in that area. According to Ms. Vignoe, Select's Corporate Recruiter, "I've seen so many people land absolutely fantastic jobs . not because they had great experience or a great resume, but simply because they took a temporary assignment and then were in the right place at the right time."

## Secret Strategy #2: Have An Arsenal Of Accomplishments

According to Dorothy Leeds, author of *Interview Your Way to Job Success*, an Arsenal of Accomplishments "is a list of achievements you consider most satisfying and rewarding in your life." She also notes that "if you want to stand out in any interview situation, you have to be prepared to answer questions about yourself and your past accomplishments." So, whether you have twenty years of work experience or whether you have none, everything you have ever done everything you are counts.

Want some examples? How about any merit badges you earned in your scout troop? Or the fact that you sold more magazines in your 9th Grade magazine drive than anyone else in your class? Did you manage to finish school on a limited budget, or volunteer as a big brother or sister to a less fortunate family? If you are currently employed, think about how you came up with ways to save your company money or increase the efficiency and productivity of a certain department.

These are all "salable" skills! Every one of these experiences demonstrates your ability to give outstanding performance and exceed expectations. What employer wouldn't be interested in those kinds of accomplishments?!



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And if you are a new graduate, don't despair. According to Richard Bolles, author of *What Color is Your Parachute*, "the average college graduate has between eight hundred and two thousand marketable skills."

That's the good news. The challenge will be learning to be your own PR firm. Think of it this way if you hired a PR firm to represent you, they would find out all your accomplishments and then develop a new marketing campaign to promote you. Well, now you are in charge, and looking for a job is your new campaign!

Try using the following formula to come up with your Arsenal of Accomplishments. The book, *Unlimited Options*, suggests listing three activities that give you satisfaction. Then, for each list:

What the activity involved    What it took to accomplish it    What the result was (Responsibilities) (Skills) (Accomplishments)

Next, you'll need to develop a 30-second commercial about yourself. Pretend you only have 30 seconds to tell someone why he or she should hire you. Focus on the results or accomplishments you have had (from your list above). Martin Yates, author of *Knock 'em Dead: With Great Answers to Interview Questions*, recommends that you focus on the processes you used to come up with solutions. He said, "No boss will pay you to prove that you can do something you haven't already done. First he wants to see you solve the problems he hired you to solve."

### Secret Strategy #3: Create A Great Impression Look Sharp!

Most people say that the first few minutes of meeting someone are the most crucial. We hate to admit it, but we all make quick judgments about people based on the way they dress, present themselves, their eye contact and body language. Certainly first impressions either help or hurt our chances for success.

Meeting prospective employers at a job fair is no exception. A job fair is, in essence, an "interview." You will have only a few minutes to interact with the company representative before you move on, and you'll need to make a good and lasting impression. Here's a few hints on how to maximize the impression you make:

#### *Professional Dress*

Appropriate dress is extremely important, so come dressed ready for an interview. If you want to be taken seriously as a professional, you'll need to look like a professional. That means a suit is a must, whether you are male or female, and regardless of the type of position you are interested in pursuing. Another wise recruiter once said, "dress like an auditor." There is wisdom in that. You'll probably dress more formally for the job fair and/or interview than you will for the job but it is best to wait until you find out what the culture and appropriate dress attire will be. Carry a note pad and nice pen with you to take notes.

#### *Personal Hygiene*

This is a critically important area. Make sure you are freshly showered, your hair is clean and combed, and your nails are clean. Bad breath is a turn-off. Make sure yours is fresh.

#### *Personal Behavior*

Here are some pointers that will help you make a positive first impression:

- Make eye contact it is important for establishing rapport.
- Watch your posture poor posture conveys a lack of confidence.
- Control your hands don't grip your portfolio, fiddle with your tie or jewelry, or keep your hands in your pockets.
- SMILE! You will look better when you have a smile on your face and it will make you appear more natural and confident.

So, we've looked at 3 secret strategies that can help you have greater success in marketing yourself at a job fair. These are important because job fairs are an efficient use of time and they're also an opportunity to make a great impression personally.

So, do yourself a favor: invest in your future. Buy some good books on interviewing. Write out your answers. Practice your answers out loud, with a tape recorder and in front of a mirror. Then go to a job fair and meet as many prospective employers as you can.

Let us know when you land the job of your dreams so we can personally congratulate you! See you at the next job fair.