Job Fair Basics for Transitioning Veterans

During my recent transition to civilian life, I was fortunate to experience a successful job search. My search included visiting job fairs and signing up for virtual job fairs. Of the various interviews and other interactions I engaged in during my job search, a few were initiated through job fairs, both in person and virtual. The interaction helped me improve my personal interview skills and boosted my confidence.

The first part of preparing for a job fair is to add it to your schedule before you do anything else. This is part of committing to attend the event.

Next, upload your résumé to the web site. If you update your résumé before the job fair, upload the update if it is applicable. You may want to tailor it to a particular opportunity. The new résumé may interest more prospects than the original.

You can tailor your résumé effectively if you review the list of participating employers online before the event. Company and government agency lists are typically updated as prospective employers sign on. By reviewing the list and descriptions, you can find organizations that pique your interest and read company and government agency descriptions.

Ask yourself, "Would I like to work with this company?" and, "Is the company's market interesting to me?" If your answer is either "definitely" or "maybe," you will want to visit the company's web site. Highlight companies that *might* interest you. Finally, review your list before the job fair; you may also have time for review on location while you are waiting to enter the job fair.

Your résumé may interest some prospective employers beforehand. A well-known company contacted me before my first job fair based on my uploaded résumé. We scheduled a preliminary in-person interview for the job fair and followed this with an online test. This in turn led to a follow-up in-person interview. I even interviewed by telephone with a company that reviewed my résumé uploaded to a virtual job fair.

Wear a suit if you are searching for a corporate or government job. If you prefer a blue-collar position, dress appropriately. Recruiters are searching for veterans who can successfully transition to civilian life.

When you are at the job fair, keep a clean copy of your résumé separate in your briefcase or portfolio. The job fair desk may, as in the case of Corporate Gray, have a copier available for you. (I used this free service after running through my supply.) Not all job fairs offer this service, so check beforehand.

Before stopping at a booth you are looking for, walk the full aisle casually to review the booth and the people and see if anything else in the aisle might interest you. If someone catches your eye, or vice versa, stop and strike up a conversation. Recruiters and talent managers are usually eager to talk, and they can help you by guiding the conversation.

Be ready to talk as this can become an impromptu interview, and it will give you practice for any interview that may follow. Have your résumé readily available and easily accessible. This will show you are organized and prepared. Business cards are optional since your contact information is on your résumé; if you have some on hand, exchange them if the recruiter offers.

If you are genuinely interested in the company, be proactive and follow up with an e-mail to the representative. This may open a new door or else open a door wider. In general, if a company representative you met follows up, graciously respond – even if you are not interested in the company or the job. This can help keep a door open.

Job fairs are effective for both prospective employees and employers. This is why companies and the government invest in them. Enjoy your experience, learn from it, and perhaps find the right opportunity for you. When you do, share your experience with others so they can benefit too.

You can access a select list of military friendly job fairs and networking opportunities on the Mount Vernon Chapter TOPS web page.

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