

## How to Make Job Fairs Work for You

### Career Builders

By Mary-Alane Wiltse

On October 19<sup>th</sup>, the Workforce New York Career Center at Columbia-Greene Community College will be hosting its annual Fall Job Fair. During this period of growth, job fairs have become a popular recruiting tool. They are an excellent opportunity for recruiters to see a maximum number of candidates in the shortest period and for job hunters to meet directly with company representatives. The size and chaos of job fairs can be overwhelming, but with proper preparation, you can take full advantage of these events.

Before you attend a job fair, you need to ensure you have an up-to-date resume that reflects the career area you are targeting. If you are open to considering more than one occupational field then you also need to consider developing a resume for each of those career choices. Remember, your resume is your written advertisement, and you need to be clear about the skills and experience you are selling. Bring lots of copies because you are going to want to leave a resume with every recruiter you meet.

First impressions are very important. Prepare the wardrobe you are going to wear. You need to dress as you would for an official, scheduled job interview. Suits may not be necessary, but you should look neat and professional. Please do not wear jeans, t-shirts or sneakers. Try to match your attire to what you believe will be the attire of the recruiter you most want to meet. Keep jewelry and perfume or cologne to a minimum. Also, make sure you wear comfortable shoes because, trust me, you will be standing for long periods.

You also need to prepare a verbal sales pitch. This “thirty second sell” should begin with an explanation of the type of position you are seeking, and include a description of your career interests, work experience, and related extracurricular activities. It should focus on your strengths and be relevant to the needs of the organization. Although you may feel foolish, you should practice your routine until it feels comfortable and natural. This sales pitch will be part of the first impression you make, so you want it to be a good one.

Your final step before the day of the job fair is to research the companies that will be attending. You should always feel free to call the sponsor of the fair to get a list of these businesses. Then go to the companies’ web sites, read their mission statements, and find out what products they make or services they offer. Spend some time analyzing how you could benefit their organization.

On the day of the job fair, try to arrive near the start time. As the day progresses, the likelihood of having a recruiter’s full attention diminishes. The crowds, the noise and the effort it takes to speak with hundreds of people can be exhausting for the business representatives that attend.

When you first arrive, stop at the registration desk and pick up a list of employers and a map of the floor plan. Take some time to plan your strategy. Visit first with some of the companies that do not seem like the best match. This will give you a chance to practice your technique and gain confidence before you move on to those companies that hold the best promise. Then finish your visit by talking with the rest of the businesses. Even if a company does not have any jobs that are right for you, their recruiter may have valuable leads of other companies unknown to you.

Remember to conduct yourself professionally at all times. Keep in mind that although the atmosphere may appear casual, you are being evaluated even as you stand

in line or move about the fair. Respect other people's privacy as they complete their contact with a recruiter by leaving some personal space between you and them.

When you first walk up to the recruiter's table, introduce yourself with a firm handshake and maintain good eye contact. Be assertive and ready to launch your 30-second sales pitch as you hand the recruiter your resume. Your goal is to stand out from other candidates. Prepare a couple of questions you want to ask the recruiter, including their hiring process. Pick up any company literature, comment on their "give-aways" and ask for a business card. At the close, shake hands, thank the recruiter and walk away with confidence.

After the job fair send a thank-you letter to the companies you liked the best. Because most people will not take the time, sending a short, professional letter attached to another copy of your resume will really impress the recruiter. You can reiterate your skills and your interest in the organization. It is another way to help you stand out from the crowd.

Job fairs are excellent networking tools and a great first step in getting to know the businesses in our community and the people who can help you reach your career goals.

*Mary-Alane Wiltse is the Director of the Workforce New York Career Center at Columbia-Greene Community College. For more information, call 828-4181 ext. 5510. The job fair is scheduled for October 19 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the gymnasium at the college.*