

BUILD. EMPOWER. CONNECT.

How to Start a Conversation at a Career Fair

Try to approach recruiters personably but professionally, and you will be able to hold a productive conversation and potentially make an important connection. Here are some ways to talk to recruiters at a career fair:

- **Go to a pre-fair networking event**

You could find helpful information and opportunities to connect with other candidates and even recruiters through events prior to the career fair or through a LinkedIn group specifically for the event.

- **Prepare an elevator pitch**

Before you go to the fair, make an elevator pitch, which is a 30-second explanation of who you are and what you've done. A great pitch should tell the recruiter your interests, summarize your experience and capture their interest. Elevator pitches are extremely useful at career fairs since you have little time to speak to each recruiter but want to capitalize on the opportunity and generate interest as a potential employee.

- **Do your homework**

Before you attend the career fair, spend some time performing research. Look into what companies will be in attendance, then make a list of businesses you are interested in. You can even order them according to how much you would like to work for each. Next, research those businesses. Find out what positions they are currently seeking, read about the expectations for certain roles and read their mission statement and company values. Doing so can help provide more questions and conversation topics to bring up when you meet their recruiters.

- **Write down questions**

Based on the research you performed, write down your questions, which can help you reference them later and note the answers you receive. Here are some example questions to prepare:

- ▶ "Aside from manufacturing, what other positions is your company considering?"
- ▶ "How do you see the company growing in five years?"
- ▶ "What is the company culture like?"
- ▶ "How long have you been with this company?"
- ▶ The last question shows interest in the recruiter. By asking, you are being more personable and memorable. Impressing the recruiter by showing interpersonal skills could be beneficial in making a connection.

- **Approach a table you are not interested in first**

If you are nervous about your preparation or introducing yourself, try speaking with a recruiter that's not on your list first. Practice your elevator pitch on them. Take the opportunity to learn more about a company you did not prepare for and about how you can present yourself. Once you have made the first step, it might be easier to approach the companies and recruiters you truly wish to talk to.

- **Start the conversation with a smile**

Smile at the beginning of your conversation to show you are excited to be there. This small cue can tell recruiters you are friendly and interested. Introduce yourself simply but professionally, for

example, "Hello, I'm John Samuels. It's a pleasure to meet you." Shake their hand firmly and look them in the eyes. All these cues are ways to make yourself stand out and seem presentable, open to conversation and professional.

- **Be confident**

First impressions stay with people for a long time, so it's helpful to make a strong impression on every recruiter you meet at a career fair. If you know what you are interested in, communicate clearly and listen carefully, you're more likely to appear professional and confident. Sometimes an earnest and honest personality can help you secure an interview.

- **Listen to the recruiters**

After you introduce yourself, ask the questions you've prepared. Listen carefully to how the recruiters respond and don't interrupt them with more information. You can take notes to help you remember their answers and reference them later if you decide to apply for a job with the company. Answer thoughtfully and positively if they follow up with another question or comment.

- **Keep your conversation formal**

Be sure to address recruiters professionally—"yes, sir" and "yes, ma'am." Keep your conversations on topic and professional, but it's acceptable to show some of your excitement and personality. If you can balance remaining polite and professional while also showing interest and enthusiasm about the recruiter and the company, you can be better prepared for potential interviews.

- **Be sensitive to the recruiter's time**

When you are speaking with a recruiter, be aware of how long the conversation goes on. If the recruiter seems interested, try to continue the conversation. However, remember other people may also want to talk to the recruiter. Job fairs are designed for quick conversations to allow you and the recruiter to connect and network. This is not an interview, so be courteous to the recruiter and the others waiting by keeping your conversations short but meaningful.

- **Write down names and ask for business cards**

Even if you only visited a few tables or recruiters, write down the names of the people you spoke to and ask for their business cards. You can even exchange business cards if you brought your own, or you can leave your resume so they can review it later. Remembering their names can be helpful when you want to follow up or ask more questions. You can also write down the names of other candidates or professionals you connected with. Keep in contact, and one of them might be able to help you find a job later.

- **Follow up**

Follow up with the recruiters you spoke to. Using the contact information from their business cards, write them an email a day or two after the career fair. Reiterate your interest in the company and the position. If you remember a point from your conversation, mention it in your follow-up email. This shows how engaged you were in the meeting. Ask for any further directions about applying, and let them know you are available if they have questions.