Recruiters Say Be Prepared for Career Fairs

by Kevin Gray

Even in a good job market, the competition for jobs can be tough. How can you stand out from the pack at career fairs? It's simple ... be prepared.

Recruiters from New York City Transit (NYCT) said many students don't realize the valuable opportunity that career fairs present. In fact, both Joyce Lea, manager of sourcing, and Stan Karoly, chief electrical engineer, estimate that just one-quarter of students they meet at career fairs are adequately prepared for the event. And, they say, it shows.

From the moment they meet you, recruiters are trying to determine if you would be a good match for their organization. The key to impress recruiters with your preparation at career fairs is to do the basics, and then go several steps further.

You already know to dress neatly and demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively. But, recruiters say, the students that most impress them at career fairs are those who demonstrate a familiarity with the organization, have intelligent questions to ask, and have thought about the way they might fit into the organization.

Karoly has some suggestions to help you prepare for and succeed at career fairs:

- Prepare a resume that is accurate and grammatically correct. Then proofread it and have others do so. Bring several copies to the career fair.
- Do a little research on the organizations of interest in the days leading up to the career fair. A list of employers scheduled to attend a career fair is usually available in your school's career center.
- Learn and use proper interviewing techniques (Prior to the career fair, ask an adviser in your career center to do a mock interview). Communicate effectively by speaking clearly and using proper grammar.
- Dress neatly. While different employers have different expectations of dress, you can't go wrong by dressing as you would for an interview or business meeting.
- Make sure you are interested in the organization you are talking to rather than the "goodies" they give out. Make sure your familiarity with and interest in the organization comes through during your conversation.
- If you don't know what type of position you want, provide the recruiter with information (major, courses taken, skills, experiential education assignments, and other experience) that could help determine what positions might be suitable for you. Don't ask employer representatives, "What jobs do you have for me?" or "What can your organization do for me?"
- Ask appropriate questions about such things as an organization's career opportunities and relevancy to your major, what the organization values in its employees, and the best way to present a resume.
- If you aren't looking for full-time employment, let the recruiter know that up front.

While many students are looking for employers that are impressive, employers are hoping to be impressed by you.

"It's a two-way street," Lea adds. "Students need to understand that information gathered at career fairs is vital and can provide background when conducting a job search. Beyond that, the personal connection a well-prepared student can make with recruiters is very valuable in the job-search process."