

the importance of preparation

# BEFORE THE CAREER FAIR

by Ashley Collins, AgCareers.com Education & Marketing Manager

**A**TTENDING YOUR CAMPUS career fair can be key to securing your first career or internship. Unfortunately, many students skip this critical opportunity, or those that *do* attend are unprepared.

## GETTING PREPARED

A prepared student has dressed for success in professional and well-fitted clothing. Even if not wearing a full suit, their attire doesn't look like they picked it up off of their floor. Since they know they'll be on their feet, their shoes are professional yet comfortable.

They also have copies of their generic resume as well as customized resumes for specific employers. Be sure to keep these organized so not to give a resume with a competitor's name or job title referenced in the objective. They may also have a handful of personal yet professional business cards.

An unprepared student walks up to the booth and asks, "What does your company do?" "What kind of jobs do you have?" You should know these answers before the career fair, but sadly, most students use these as their intro questions. Every career fair publishes a list of companies in attendance. Many of those lists include company information, their website, and often titles for the roles they are recruiting for.

A prepared student takes initiative and does a little homework before the career fair. Beyond the basics, research the company's mission, competitors and clients, and if they have been in the news lately (and for what)—from

positive, reputable media. Take notes about the companies that you hope to visit and leave space to quickly jot notes following each interaction.

## ASKING THE QUESTIONS

Having thoughts and questions to review before approaching a booth will give you a conversation starter so you don't have to rely on off-the-wall jokes to "break the ice!" Also, this preparation will help the conversation flow and allow for more meaningful discussion.

Start with a firm handshake, eye contact, and a professional greeting. Have an elevator pitch prepared including your name, major, graduation date, and career objective. Practice this a lot—basic information about yourself can just disappear when you're nervous.

Then reference the open roles you've found they are recruiting for, the specific requirements and skills you'd bring to the role, and how the position fits your passion. Follow that with questions you have about the organization based on your research. For example, ask about the future of the company or the company culture. You might also ask about recognition or awards the company has received.

Remember to be conscientious of your time and the representative's.

## BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Before leaving, ask about next steps. If your conversation has gone well and you think you'd like to further explore employment, this is a critical step.

Offer a copy of your resume but understand if the representative directs you to their website instead. This is where those business cards come in handy. This also gives you a chance to ask for their card, which will be helpful when following up. They may also be staying to conduct interviews on-campus and you could sign up for a spot.

Now is the time to accept any material or swag item (notice item is singular!) that the company is handing out. Don't forget to find an area where you can jot down notes and review your notes for the next booth.

The simple act of attending and visiting with a few companies at a career fair will allow you to make significant progress in landing the internship or career you want. Going a step further by preparing will decrease your perspiration and increase your success!



Comic by Becca Schwartz