

Tips for Job Seekers with Disabilities

Here are a few tips to help you make the most of your time with recruiters.

1. Write Out Your Details Ahead of Time!

During online career fairs, you have the opportunity to chat in real time with recruiters from participating companies. However, the chats are fairly short—often only 12 minutes maximum, so it is helpful to come to the event with a few standard responses typed out into a Word document (or another easy to use document) that you keep open during your chat times. Type out some basic information ahead of time—your experience, your strengths, and your questions. Then you can cut and paste the information into the chat window to communicate more quickly. Be sure to proofread your responses—making sure words are spelled correctly helps make a better first impression. Here are some examples:

- ✓ Have an introduction: “Hi, my name is Mark. I’m glad to chat with you today about your company. My area of expertise is customer service, and I’ve been pursuing some additional education in my free time.”
- ✓ Highlight your skills: “You’ll notice from my resume that I have my bachelor’s degree in biology, and I’ve been working since I completed that degree in 2006. I am comfortable with technology-- including MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint, and have done significant online research for my current position.”
- ✓ Share your interests: “I have strong interpersonal skills, am good with communication--especially written, and have been working in the field of customer service for 3 years already.”
- ✓ Ask a question about the company: “I looked online at your website, and noticed you are hiring for a number of positions. I’d love to discuss any that you have related to customer service.” Other questions might include ones such as:
 - “Do you offer positions in the St. Louis area?”
 - “What kinds of skills do you think are necessary to be successful at your company?”
 - “What is the best way for me to follow up with you about available positions?”

2. Do Some Research on the Participating Companies

Knowing a little bit of information about the companies that are participating ahead of time can really help move your chats with recruiters to a deeper level. Use the internet to search company websites before the event. 2 Here’s how to do it:

Before you come to the event, look at the list of companies who are participating and check out their job or corporate career pages. Look at what positions they are looking to fill that you can reference in your chats and ask questions about.

- ✓ Most companies use an online application system—you might consider filling out the application ahead of time so that you can tell the recruiter that you’ve applied for specific jobs with their company.

- ✓ Get your resume updated and ready to go! Once you've checked out a company's corporate career page, develop a few questions about their job openings. Consider tailoring your resume specifically to the company, and be sure to highlight how your skills and strengths make you a good fit. It is really helpful to include information about any successes in your previous work—such as key accomplishments, awards, special positions, volunteer work or other recognition.
- ✓ Pay attention to the companies that are participating and identify which ones are the best fit for you and your interests. To make the most of your time and the recruiter's time, only chat with companies at the event with whom you have a real interest in working.

3. Use the Event to Promote Your Strengths and Make a Great First Impression

- ✓ Recruiters want to hear about you, your strengths, work history, and abilities. Be polite, punctual, and responsive. Make an impression by highlighting YOU—not your disability.
- ✓ Show your knowledge of their company. Share how your skills and experience add value. Talk about results and lessons learned from previous work or education.
- ✓ Recruiters often recommend that you visit their company's career site to apply for jobs. If you have already checked out their jobs in advance of the event, you can tell them about jobs you were interested in and even jobs you've applied for.
- ✓ During the chat, you may wish to ask, "May I mention your name when I apply? I'd like to be sure I let your team know we spoke at the career fair."
- ✓ After you chat with a recruiter, you can leave a note for that person in the company booth. Thank them for their time, remind them of what you discussed, and even leave your contact information to make it very easy for them to reach out to you again. You may be able to find the recruiter on LinkedIn to connect with them again.

4. Be Ready to Answer Difficult Questions

If you have a gap in your employment that shows up on your resume, be prepared to talk about it. Let the recruiter know what you've been doing during that time—but don't dwell on personal health challenges or things that went wrong. Focus instead on how your abilities shine through despite challenges, and talk about any experiences you've had that are meaningful, such as: taking classes, interning, volunteering, or mentoring. Most importantly, be prepared to explain how the timing is right for you now to return to work!