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## Tips to help you fare well at job fairs

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Devin Cook of Lombard considers himself lucky. Before he attended his first job fair as a newly minted engineering graduate, he learned job-fair strategy at his alma mater, the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terra Haute, Ind.

"They taught us how to sell ourselves, how to write attractive resumes and how to dress," said Cook. Before he attended the 2006 engineering fair that would lead to his job, Cook took this one step further. He researched the companies that were going to be at the fair, narrowed his choices and wrote constructive questions to ask recruiters. And, he asked some engineers to critique his resume.

The result: After the fair, Cook secured five interviews, then landed a job as structural engineer at Valdes Engineering in Lombard. Cook was way ahead of the crowd, said **Brian Price, a recruiter with the Chicago branch of Solomon Edwards Group, a consulting and professional search firm. As a job-fair veteran, Price has seen it all -- from well-prepared job seekers like Cook to those dressed in Hawaiian shirts and those who read to him from their own resumes.**

**The typical job-fair recruiter sees hundreds of candidates in a few hours. "We have to quickly differentiate between the qualified and the unqualified," Price explained. Consider it speed-dating of the human resources field. The best candidates, he said, ooze confidence. "They look me in the eye when they shake my hand and have done their homework in order to match their skills to job openings," he said. They have short, bulleted resumes with no errors and no silly typefaces.**

In industries that host frequent job fairs, such as education, recruiters recommend that job seekers attend many of them. That worked for Ellen Jacobson of Palatine, who attended five fairs before landing her job as a special education teacher at Canton Middle School in Streamwood.

"I had experience in the field and had a master's [degree] so I knew I cost more and wouldn't have as many chances as teachers right out of school," Jacobson explained.

"Some districts won't even hire people like me."

In 2007, she hit the jackpot with two offers. She weighed the two (one high school, one middle school) and chose the one at Canton.

In addition to being prepared, which, she said, for educators means bringing certification papers plus resumes, she brought questions to ask the recruiters. "I asked if they had upcoming referendums, about their teacher-parent rapport and about their [state] school report cards," she said.

Although many teachers dress casually on the job, Jacobson said dressing up at fairs is a must. It helps to wear comfortable shoes, she added, because you may have to stand in line for hours.

In fields where the candidates outnumber the job openings, Jacobson said, you have to be flexible. "If you are a math major but the district has an opening for a history teacher, and you really want a job, you will teach history," she said.

Some fields are so small, the industry job fair is one of the few places to job-hunt. Jewelers, for example, flock to the Gemological Institute of America shows for qualified gemologists.

"I know the [job seekers] there are qualified," said Isaac Gottesman, owner of Dimend SCAASI jewelry store in Chicago. "This isn't an industry where you can put an ad in the paper because there are few people with the right qualifications. I go to the show every year and hire people on the spot."

Gottesman said he knows immediately if a candidate is worth pulling into a side room for an interview. "If they smile, are cheerful, shake my hand firmly, use proper English and are well-groomed [no tattoos on your forehead], they are halfway there," he said.

The winners, said Gottesman, have not only researched his company but have written resumes geared toward it.

Gottesman suggests candidates consider working for smaller companies. "Let all the others queue up for the big companies," he said. "The smaller ones hire fewer people but make bigger commitments to them."

**After the job fair, follow-up is key, said Price. "Be sure to get the recruiters' business cards and write them thank-you notes that say how nice it was to meet them and that you were the one who talked to them about this or that," he said. "Send them by snail mail, not e-mail. And, spell the recruiters' names right. You'd be surprised how many people spell my name wrong, and it can't be easier."**

Gottesman said stay in touch with recruiters you have met if you don't land a job after the interview.

"A company may hire someone else who doesn't work out and be willing to take a second look at you," he said.