

Career Fair Case Examples

Career Fair Case 1

Maria, a graduate student, is interested in talking to a recruiter from Company X at the Career Fair. She knows the company hires PhDs from her program every year, and she has talked with these alumni about their good experiences. She has practiced her introduction and feels ready, if a little nervous.

Maria approaches the recruiter for Company X, shakes hands, and introduces herself, “Hi. I’m Maria Suarez.”

The recruiter responds kindly, “Hi, Maria. I’m Jan Reedy. Nice to meet you. What’s your major?”

“I’m actually a graduate student,” Maria replies. “I’m in the PhD program in physics. In undergrad I majored in math and statistics,” she offers. Jan’s expression loses some of its warmth. “We’re not currently hiring grad students,” she says bluntly.

“Oh. I see,” says Maria, feeling embarrassed. “Okay, well, thank you for your time,” she manages to get out before quickly walking away.

Discussion questions:

What did Maria do well?

Maria did her research on the company, including speaking to current employees. She also prepared well by practicing her introduction. Lastly, Maria was polite with the recruiter in the face of an unexpected and strange social situation.

What else could Maria have done in this situation to have a better outcome?

Maria could have asked for the contact information of others at the company for follow-up (e.g. “Do you have the contact information of someone at the company who I could talk to about careers for PhDs? It could be a recruiter or an employee with a PhD. I’d really like to learn more about their experiences and how they made the transition after graduate school”).

Do you think the recruiter handled the interaction well? Why or why not?

It is not uncommon for a recruiter at a fair to be focusing on filling particular roles instead of all positions a company may hire for. In addition to being rather blunt, this recruiter was also misinformed about the position her company is hiring for. Even if this happens, it’s important to be respectful and make the most of the interaction.

Career Fair Case 2

Taylor is finishing degree this year, and she's attending the Career Fair to find some job opportunities. She's interested in banking and finance, and she saw that a few firms would be at the fair.

Taylor waits in a 10-minute line to talk to the recruiter from a large firm, one of her top choices. She shakes the recruiter's hand and says, "Hello. I'm Taylor Swan. I'll soon receive my Master's of economics, and I wanted to learn more about your company."

"That's great," replies the recruiter. "Hi, Taylor. I'm Vijay Srinivasan. What would you like to know about us?" His expression is friendly.

"What jobs do you currently have available?" asks Taylor.

Vijay looks a little impatient, but still responds pleasantly, "At the Master's level, we mostly are looking for risk analysts and data scientists."

"I did an internship last summer where I focused on assessing risk, so that sounds like a good match. What industries do you focus on?"

Vijay says, "Mostly insurance, healthcare, and a little in the life sciences." He looks at the line of students behind Taylor. "Well, I have a few people waiting, so it was nice to meet you."

As Vijay is turning away, Taylor asks, "Would you like a copy of my resume?"

Vijay quickly says, "We have an online application, and you can visit our website to submit your resume."

Taylor walks away feeling okay about the interaction overall, but she is unsure of what she go out of the conversation. She wonders if this is all that's supposed to happen at a career fair.

Discussion questions:

What did Taylor do well?

Taylor looked at what companies would be at the fair and decided which would be her top choices. She seems friendly and confident in her initial interactions.

What could Taylor have done better?

Taylor asked for information that she could have easily found online, such as on the company's website. The recruiter expected Taylor to have done her research and asked questions more particular to her interests and values.

Is it a bad sign that the recruiter did not take Taylor's resume? Why or why not?

Not always. Many companies collect all applications through their website, so recruiters will often direct you there. It is certainly a good sign if a recruiter wants a copy of your resume, possibly to help them remember you later when they are reviewing applications. You can use your resume as a point of conversation to encourage the recruiter to ask for a copy (e.g. "I know your company values internship experience in this field, and as you can see on my resume, I've had internships at these companies and gained skills in...").

Career Fair Case Examples (cont.)

Career Fair Case 3

Hao would like to stay in the U.S. after he finishes his PhD program, so he is going to target the companies at the Career Fair that sponsor for visas. He checked the Career Center's list of companies that say they're interested in international students. From there, he researched the companies to look at the type of work they do and what positions they're currently hiring for. He prepared his introduction, questions for each company, and he's feeling confident.

At the Career Fair, Hao has done well talking with a couple recruiters. He approaches one of his top choices, Company Y, and introduces himself. After the recruiter, Ken, introduces himself, Hao gives his introduction and has his resume ready. Then Hao says, "I see you have a globe sticker on your sign. Do you sponsor visas for PhD-level employees?"

The recruiter pauses and then responds, "Sometimes. It really depends on the person and the project. If we need someone with particular expertise, then we can sponsor. Otherwise, we usually don't."

Hao is unsure how to respond, but decides to stay upbeat. "As you can see on my resume," Hao says, pointing to the document, "I have excellent analytical skills with large, complex data sets, machine learning, and text mining. I have experience in research on labor markets and various types of economic modeling. Do those fit some of the projects where you might offer sponsorship?"

"Unfortunately, no," replies Ken. "Sorry."

"That's okay," says Hao. "Thanks for talking with me and have a nice day."

Discussion questions:

What did Hao do well?

Hao did a good amount of research on companies at the fair. He prepared an introduction and well-tailored questions. He even paid attention at the fair to signs that indicate that an employer sponsors for visas, and used this to transition the conversation to visas.

What could Hao have done better?

Not all companies sponsor for visas for all of the roles they're hiring for. Sometimes a company will tell the career fair organizers that they sponsor for visas, but the roles the recruiter is hiring for at the fair may not be eligible. How could Hao have used web resources such as My Visa Jobs (<http://www.myvisajobs.com/>) and GoinGlobal (<https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/career/online-tools-resources>) to find out more about the company's track record with visa sponsorship.

Career Fair Case 4

Felix is a first-year Master of Fine Arts student, and he's looking for an internship for the upcoming summer. He is interested in exploring how his documentary skills could intersect with business and marketing. He has looked into some companies that will be at the fair, practiced his introduction, and prepared questions.

The day of the Career Fair, Felix has class until 1pm, so he knows he needs to go directly to the fair to maximize the time he has. After registering and walking around the room to see where different employers are, Felix sees one of the companies he's interested in. Luckily, there is no line for this company, so Felix walks up to the table.

The recruiter is sitting in a chair behind the table and Felix notices that she looks a little tired. He introduces himself and talks about his career interest.

The recruiter responds without getting up, "Hi, Felix. Pleasure to meet you. I'm Nadia. Here are some brochures about our internships," indicating a stack on the table.

Felix picks up a brochure and adds, "Thanks for the information. I have a few questions I'd like to ask. Do you require particular academic programs or coursework?"

"No, not really," Nadia responds.

Felix waits for Nadia to elaborate, but when she doesn't, he presses on with his next question. "Are any of the interns hired later for full-time employment?"

"Sometimes, depending on what we have available," says Nadia. She sighs afterward and looks down at her table.

Felix is not sure how to keep the conversation going further. He was prepared to ask for recruiters' contact information, but it does not seem like Nadia is interested in him. He decides to move on and says, "Well, thanks for talking with me."

"Thanks for stopping by," she responds.

Discussion questions:

What did Felix do well?

Felix has clear goals for the types of projects he wants to work on. He prepared thoroughly to make a good impression even with the short amount of time he had at the fair. Felix handled the interaction well and remained positive and polite. He could have asked some of his additional questions, but he perceived that the recruiter did not seem interested.

What could Felix have done better?

Felix did quite well, and there are only a couple of points where he might have done better. He could have asked the recruiter for her contact information so he could follow up with her after the fair, perhaps when she is more inclined to talk more in depth. Felix could have also asked questions that don't lead to yes/no responses in the hopes that the recruiter would have engaged more.

Do you think the recruiter handled the interaction well? Why or why not?

Recruiters can get tired after a day of being on their feet and talking to students. Getting to the fair earlier is a good way to avoid this. If nothing else, knowing when to end a conversation and how to follow up by email can be useful.