The Career Fair is the Boise State University Career Center’s largest networking event of the year. If you want to leave with a list of new contacts, though, rather than just a bag of free stuff, you need to be prepared. The good news? If you’ve got 5 minutes, you’ve got time to learn how to prepare for the career fair. Our theme? Know before you go.

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To be successful, you first have to understand exactly what the Career Fair is. Is it a job fair? Nope. It is a networking event. Your goal is not to walk out the door with a job in hand... but to walk out with contacts in companies you want to work for, who you have made an impression on. Remember that getting a job today is VERY difficult WITHOUT a contact who refers you for that position. If the fair wasn’t happening, you’d have to seek out someone at each company you want to work for, and convince them to sit down and meet with you. At the Career Fair, you have a captive audience and can easily get yourself in front of someone at the companies you want to work for. Take full advantage of that.

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The key to success at the Career Fair is preparation. Your level of success depends on how good of an impression you make on the employers, and THAT depends on how prepared you are. To be fully prepared, it’s a 5 step process.

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Step 1 is to find out what companies are going to be at the fair. On the Career Center website homepage, as well as in your BroncoJobs account, you can access the list of employers who will be attending. The list will give you names and descriptions of companies, tell you what majors they are looking for, and give you the link to their website. View this list, and identify companies you’re interested in speaking with at the fair.

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Step 2 is to do some research on the companies you’re interested in. Browse their website, check out their careers page for info about who they hire and what they look for, view current openings, and just learn about the company. When you’re browsing their website, look for things like information on who they are, what they do, what needs they have, what they look for in people they want to hire, what they’re proud of, what their mission and goals are, and what projects or initiatives they’re working on. All of this information will give you topics of conversation when you meet the company representative.

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One of the most important things you can do at the Career Fair is engage the employer in conversation. REAL conversation. THIS is how you will make contacts. DON’T be one of those students who walks up to a table and says things like “So what jobs do you have?” or “What does YOUR company do?” Those are NOT the students employers remember. As you’re looking at the company’s website, start writing down specific questions you want to ask and topics you want to discuss. Showing that you took the time to research the company WILL impress the employer and make them remember you.

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Next, prepare your introduction. You may have also heard this called your “elevator pitch” or your “30 second sell.” The idea here is not to have a script memorized, but to know what the most important things are that you’d want to tell an employer about yourself. Make sure you know what your strengths are, what your qualifications are, and how you’d be able to contribute to the company. Think about what you want to say to employers when you first introduce yourself to them.

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Finally, prepare resumes to bring with you to the fair. Many people think you have to bring a general resume to a career fair, but that isn’t true. Because you will have identified the companies you’re interested in, researched the company, and looked at the opportunities available, you CAN actually create different, targeted resumes to bring to the fair. It IS a good idea to also bring extra copies of a more general resume, but it still shouldn’t be totally generic. Make sure it is targeted towards the field you intend on going into.

I do want to warn you that not every employer will accept hard-copy resumes at the fair, and unfortunately, you won’t know ahead of time which will want a resume handed to them and which won’t. But, it’s always better to be over prepared than underprepared.

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Finally, don’t forget that appearance matters at a Career Fair! This can make or break employers’ impressions of you. Dress for the career fair how you would dress to go to a professional interview for a job in your career field. This shows the employer you are serious about what you’re doing there, and know how to present yourself professionally.

But wait, there’s more! This year, the Career Center is providing an exciting new, free service. While you’re at the fair and already dressed up, have a professional headshot taken to upgrade your professional online presence on LinkedIn and everywhere else you use a profile picture. Times headshots are available will be posted on our website.

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Don’t forget, the Career Center can help! Check our website for information about upcoming career fair resume workshops, or access tons of online information on how to prepare a resume, search for a job, or even figure out what you want to do with your life!

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So remember, whether you’re looking for a job, an internship, or simply preparing for your career, you do NOT want to miss this event. The career fair is coming. Will you be ready?