

## Hiring fairs: 7 things to know before you go

PHOENIX PATRIOT Winter 2014

By Julia Sullivan

Link to online version of article: <http://phoenixpatriotmagazine.com/article/winter14/>

To successfully navigate veteran job fairs, candidates must arm themselves with the tools, tactics and tips to get noticed. Here are seven things you should do to leave a great impression on potential employers.

### 1. A strategic game plan matters

According to Ross Cohen, senior director of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes program, the first thing you should do is to familiarize yourself with the companies that are attending the fair.



"Do a thorough review of the employers that are registered. Find out who will be there and what type of positions they have available so you can prioritize your time at the fair," says Cohen.

Mapping a strategic plan was vital for former Air Force Staff Sgt. Kerion Dawkins. She found success at a Hiring Our Heroes career fair in March 2013.

"I knew the leadership, mission statement, company goals and a description of the jobs I

was interested in before approaching each booth," Dawkins recalls.

### 2. First impressions count

Recruit reviews occur in two sequentially rigid rounds at career fairs: assessment of appearance, and assessment of skills and experience. Fail the first review, and failure in the second is inevitable.

"Come dressed for success. If you attend a job fair in business attire, it will show employers you are serious about finding employment. Even if the actual job allows casual dress, it is always better to err on the side of being overdressed versus underdressed," advises Cohen.

### **3. Boost your resume**

A well-produced resume is critical for catching a hiring manager's attention, but for many companies looking to fill positions, individualized resumes work best.

After planning which company booths to visit, Dawkins made sure each resume she produced was company-specific. "My resume was tailored to each individual position and employer I was interested in," she explains.

"Highlight instances in your resume when you were leading others or had an active contribution to the end goal of a mission," says Bryan Zawikowski, vice president of the Lucas Group Recruiting's Military Transition Group.

As for structure, keep your resume simple and a single page, says Zawikowski. "List your most recent experience first," he says.

### **4. Companies don't always know how your military experience benefits them**

From impeccable punctuality to quick decision-making in high-pressure situations, most veterans emerge from military service with the kind of experience that would benefit any given company. However, that dialogue can become lost in translation if you fail to align those skills to specific business needs.

To aid in 'civilianizing' military experience, University of Phoenix's Career Guidance System features a Military Skills Translator Tool that allows military service members and veterans to connect their occupational specialty code to a list of civilian occupations and roles that align with their acquired skills.

Cohen explains that job seekers should be ready to interview. "Prepare for the job fair like you would for a job interview. Think about the questions you would like to ask prospective employers and be ready to talk about your experience and why you would be the best candidate for the job," he says.

### **5. Be a PR team of one**

Corporate America and the military tend to have a similar structure: Both work in synch with coworkers and personnel to execute tasks and accomplish goals. However, one critical cultural difference between the two involves self-promotion within the corporate world.

**"Military veterans are conditioned to give credit to their team—there is no self-credit. But at the job fair, 'I' has to take center stage," explains Jake Hutchings, director of CivilianJobs.com and a career fair organizer.**

**Job seekers should perfect a 30- to 60-second elevator speech that highlights their accomplishments. Effective presentations will outline how you can positively impact an employer's end goal.**

**"Be prepared to promote yourself briefly by reflecting your direct impact on a mission or task," explains Hutchings.**

## **6. Ask the right questions**

**Asking employers the right kinds of questions can be as crucial as answering them correctly. Asking questions that are targeted and specific shows hiring managers that you've done your homework. Keep in mind that recruiters see through job-seekers who ask questions about information that can easily be found on the company's website.**

**"The best questions are driven by research," says Hutchings. "It can be impressive when someone says, 'I noticed you just launched a service in this state. Will you be adding to your team to support this expansion,' for instance."**

## **7. Follow up**

With a heavy influx of resumes to keep hiring managers occupied after a fair, staying fresh in recruiters' minds requires proper follow up.

You can connect with recruiters you've met through LinkedIn so you can stay in touch. Send a follow-up email, which should be succinct. Reiterate your interest in the company and how you can contribute. Be sure to attach your resume to remind them of your background and abilities.

## **Connecting pieces of the military employment puzzle**

Although military hiring fairs are excellent tools for reaching employers, don't consider the event an end-all to your job search.

"Don't assume you'll walk out with a job," stresses Zawikowski. "However, realize that you'll get out what you put in. If you show up unprepared holding a stack of generic, military-jargon resumes, don't expect good things to happen."

Cohen says, "The overall message here is do your homework and come prepared to get the most out of your job fair experience."