How to ROCK a Job Fair

With the BCF Career event and the PhD Job Fair coming up soon, I thought it would be a good idea to share a few pointers with you on how to prepare for a Job Fair. Oftentimes participants just wing it or just print a few of their resumes at the most. However, you can get much more out of events like these when you come prepared.

Therefore, I have put together a short **manual** for you on how to rock a Job Fair:

1. **Do your research!** Just like giving an awesome presentation, 95% of the work happens beforehand. So get those beloved laptops out and find out which companies will be at the fair (send an e-mail to the organizers if you can’t find them on the website of the event) on the one hand; and learn to talk about yourself comfortably (skills, strengths, experience, what it is you are looking for in a job…) on the other hand.

2. **Find out who’s coming!** Browse through the list of companies and visit the websites of those that are of interest to you. Find out what their **biggest challenges** are and how your skillset is exactly what they need in order to deal with these challenges. This will give you a good angle for conversations with the company representatives.

3. **Create opportunities!** Don’t be discouraged if they don’t advertise job openings on their jobsite that fit your profile. Talk to the representative **anyway** and ask about the challenges they have in terms of finding the right talent. (During the investors talk at the recent Supernova event, the panel asked the scale-ups in the audience what their biggest challenge was: attracting the right talent was by far the most pressing issue – even over finding investments.) You’d be surprised what comes out of that conversation.

4. **Speak their ‘lingo’!** The company websites will give you a feel for the **vocabulary** they use. Casually drop some of the specific words they use during your conversations with the representatives. **Rehearsing** with friends/family can increase your confidence exponentially.

5. **Ask questions!** This is a way to show them you are interested and that you did your research (e.g. link the activities of the company to events that came in the news recently).

6. **Be a STAR!** Look at the competencies they list in their job openings (e.g. Biocartis, an employer that will be at the BCF event, lists ‘**self-propelling**’ as one of the competencies they are looking for in candidates for the position of Field Service Engineer). Ask yourself: ‘**When in my career so far, have I been ‘self-propelling? ’**’. Look for **specific examples**. They are powerful because they showcase many of your skills and strengths in a specific context.

7. **Update your (digital) brand!** Having a few printed resumes on the side can come in handy, yet more importantly, make sure your **Linkedin profile** is up-to-date. After talking to a company representative connect with them immediately on Linkedin with a **personalized message** (!), e.g.:
a. Hello xxx, it was a pleasure to meet you at the BCF career event today. I would love to continue our conversation on .... Thought it would be nice to connect through Linkedin. Thank you in advance.

b. Hello xxx, it was great talking to you today at.... What you said about ... piqued my interest. I would like to continue our conversation on that. I hope we can connect. Thank you.

c. Hello xxx, I really enjoyed our talk today at .... I appreciated learning more about the company and your career opportunities. I hope we can connect and possibly speak about it further. Thank you in advance.

By browsing the internet, you will find many more examples that you can customize to your personal style. Just make sure your message is personal, polite, and indicates where you met.

8. Break through the PhD stereotype! For positions that do not specifically ask for a PhD, don’t assume the recruiter knows what skills researchers have. Make sure that you are aware of your different skills and that you can talk about them comfortably. E.g. ‘You mentioned that you are looking for a person that knows.... Well, in my work as a researcher, I have set up complex projects consistently over the last 3 years, managing timelines and deliverables, setting up collaborations with various partners, and managing budgets of approximately x EURO. One particular project that I think is relevant mentioning is... where I....’

9. Remember it is a two-way street! You are there to check out these companies and what they have to offer as much as they are there to check out good candidates. It is giving and taking in both directions. You could say that you are also interviewing them for the job of becoming your next employer.

10. Be yourself! Once you have done your prep work, let go and trust that your brain has absorbed what you have researched. Dress in a professional way that makes you feel confident and comfortable; and give the people you talk to a flavor of your personality. Don’t try to conform to an image of the ideal candidate. Trust that when you did your prep work and the fit between you and the company culture/position is right, that you already are the ideal candidate just by being you and the expertise you bring.

The only thing that is left for me to say now is: Go and rock these job fairs!

Questions? Don’t hesitate to reach out to me: annelies.colpin@vub.be. And, please, do share your experiences with me after the job fair.