

## Navigating Career Fairs

Employer comments and observations made by Career Services Professionals have alerted us to the growing trend of parents attending career fairs with their students.

The reason your student went off to college was to prepare them for a career, and for many juniors and seniors the time to get serious about the career search is fast approaching. It can be tempting to assist your student through this process, particularly given our current economy and the amount of money you've invested in school. However, there are helpful ways to assist your student and ways that can be harmful to their future as a professional. The helpful and harmful ways to assist your student through this process are explained below:

**Helpful:** Buying resume paper for your student's resume, and even proofreading their final copy.

**Harmful:** Passing out your student's resume for them at the career fair.

**Why:** If your student is going to perform tasks at their future job effectively, the employer needs to see they can work independently. If they do not hand out their resumes on their own, will they be able to perform daily job duties without assistance?

**Helpful:** Taking your student's suit to the dry cleaner, or purchasing them a new suit before the event.

**Harmful:** Adjusting your student's tie at the table of a prospective employer.

**Why:** Employers want to see that your student is independent and can think for themselves. Your presence at the career fair can undermine your student's abilities to perform independently in a job.

**Helpful:** Practicing interview questions with your student before the career fair.

**Harmful:** Answering interview questions for your student at the career fair.

**Why:** You and your student have invested a lot of time, money, and effort in their education, which has prepared them to think for themselves and answer questions on their own. Answering for your student undermines their preparation and intelligence. Instead, help instill confidence in their interview skills by conducting practice interviews prior to the fair.

**Helpful:** Going over the list of potential employers attending the career fair to help your student choose the best companies to focus their energy on.

**Harmful:** Demanding your student speak with certain employers or attending the fair with your student and passing out their resume to particular employers.

**Why:** Your student has put time and effort into figuring out what they want in a career. They have had your guidance

helping them along the way and need to have the opportunity to employ your guidance on their own.

**Helpful:** Working with your student on how to negotiate salary, benefits, hours, etc.

**Harmful:** Calling the employer on behalf of your student to demand a certain pay rate or benefits.

**Why:** If you always handle the difficult conversations for your student they will be unequipped to deal with them when you are not around. Instead, work with them on skills they can develop to effectively handle difficult situations so they are ready to handle anything that comes their way.

**Helpful:** Making sure your student has a way to get to the career fair, along with money for gas and parking.

**Harmful:** Walking your student into the career fair.

**Why:** Your student has been navigating their life at college for the past three years or more. They can effectively attend a career fair and choose appropriate employers to speak with. Instead, help them out by making sure they can afford to get to the career fair and that they have money for parking so they don't get a ticket.

**Helpful:** Discussing the career fair with your student after the fact: what they felt they did well and how they could improve the next time.

**Harmful:** Telling your student "You should have done this" or "Why didn't you do that?"

**Why:** Searching for a career can be scary and overwhelming. Your student will be in need of support and reaffirmation throughout the process, not criticisms.

You and your student have invested a great deal of time, money, and effort into their degree. Give your student the chance to show off their talents, skills, and knowledge but remain in the background as a supporter and encourager throughout the process. Send them to the Career Services Office in Lower Donnelly for additional support on interviewing, resume building, and how to work a career fair -this service is included in tuition so take advantage of it! And, if you get tempted to accompany them to a career fair or on an interview, remember that many HR reps have yet to hire a recent graduate whose parent accompanied them to an interview or career fair.