

## **How to Work an Education Fair**

By Sandy Womack, Ed.,D., Director, *EduPlan*, Educational Planning for Working Professionals

You get an e-mail from Human Resources.--An Education Fair is scheduled at your worksite. You are thinking about getting that degree someday and decide to go. Reps from all the local schools have their banners displayed and all their materials on the table and are ready and willing to talk to you about coming to their school. So, you go around to the 20 or so tables, take a catalog, a schedule, marketing materials--and go home and throw it all away.

This is how many employees at companies work a room at an education fair. What a waste of paper for all those expensively published catalogs to go in the trash. And what a waste of your time to go to the fair and get nothing out of it. A little preparation before the event can make this fair worth your time and probably help you select the right school for your background, skills and goals.

Take 15 minutes before the actual event and do the following:

- 1) Call your Tuition Reimbursement coordinator or someone in Human Resources to get the list of the schools that will attend the Education Fair.
- 2) Check the websites of the colleges and see which schools offer your major area of interest.
- 3) Narrow down your selection to 2 - 3 schools and make a list of questions that pertain to your situation. The college representative will be glad to talk to you about specifics.

When you go to the Education Fair, first stop by your company's benefits table and pick up information about your company's tuition reimbursement policy. What is the maximum amount reimbursed? Does this reimbursement start on the calendar year or the fiscal year? How does the company reimburse you? What paperwork is needed? What types of programs are reimbursed? Do you need manager approval before starting? How much do you have to pay in taxes?

The next step is to visit the tables of the colleges pre-selected. Ask questions of the college reps that focus on the curriculum, teaching methods, amount of homework, prerequisites needed, admission tests needed, etc. The college rep will be glad that he/she is talking to an employee who has done the "homework" about the school and are asking more than generic questions.

If you are pursuing an undergraduate degree, you will want to ask about transferring former transcripts, credit for prior learning, such as military courses, certificates, and corporate classes. If you are pursuing a graduate degree, you will want to ask about admission tests, prerequisites, teaching method. Ask if the college has deferred payment

plans so you will not have to pay your tuition until after the classes is completed and after the company has reimbursed you.

Don't forget to stop by and visit the tables of the local community colleges. Classes from the community college might be used as prerequisites for graduate school, and for General Education and lower division classes for undergraduate degrees. Usually these community college classes are much less expensive than the private or state schools. Also community colleges' flexibility of day, evening and weekend classes may make it the place to start.

There are so many options for working professionals to gain certificates, classes and degrees that it can be overwhelming. An employee Education Fair can help sort out and help you find the best program for you.