

Interviews – Explaining Why You Left Your Last Job

Searching for a new job is difficult enough. But what if you left your last job on bad terms? One of the most difficult questions in a job interview is: Why did you leave your last job? If it wasn't your choice, then the answer may be harder still. You want your answer to inspire trust and leave a positive impression. What you don't want the employer think is you were dismissed for your last job and they dont need to take a chance on you.

So how do you deal with this question without harming your chances of getting you that next job?

Changes that Lead to Layoffs

Start by identifying all the reasons leading to the dismissal that are not related to you directly, and express them to the potential employer. These external reasons could be changes that occur in society regardless of your role or your actions, such as company cutbacks, bankruptcy, merger with another company, relocation of the company overseas, or alternatively, you've moved. Another reason could be that the organization changed leadership, and the new director reorganized the company such that your task became unnecessary. In these cases, the answers are easy, as layoffs do not result from problems with you or your performance, but rather structural and systemic changes within the company.

Quitting or Firings

Other reasons for leaving your last job could be related to you. For instance, you do not get along with your boss or the people at work, you found the work boring, the pay was low, there was no promotion, or you were working too many hours. In these cases, it is important to talk about the situation objectively, focusing not on your own dissatisfaction, but how the environment and you may not have been a good fit. In any case, do not fidget or become emotional. Do not negatively criticize or discredit any of your previous jobs or managers or become negative about the departure itself. If you were fired, do some independent research before you go looking for a job. Come to terms with how you feel about the departure, and know what you are looking for, so that you won't repeat the situation and so that you can enter the interview room with positive energy and confidence.

Highlight your strengths

When asked about a dismissal during the interview, always talk about your strengths

and abilities, while minimizing talk about the circumstances surrounding the dismissal specifically. Confident body language also helps. Other helpful things to express are your interest in various professional challenges, your enthusiasm, and your motivation. If, however, you must discuss the layoff or dismissal, be aware that your interviewer could potentially contact your former employer to gain more perspective on the situation. Don't think that this is a bad thing! If your interviewer is willing to give your former boss a call, it may mean that you are under serious consideration and that your interviewer is trying to assess the risk of hiring you.

If this is the case, you can take the situation into your own hands and have an open and honest conversation with your former boss. Express to him that you regret that your previous job did not work out. Approach the conversation with a positive attitude and ask if you can take a few minutes to discuss the situation to get some closure. Explain that perhaps you were not right for the role, that the timing was not right, the work was not up your alley, and so on. If you talk about it openly, your former boss may see the situation as simply an unfortunate occurrence rather than something that is your fault.

If the situation is that you voluntarily left your last job, take responsibility for why it happened and how you came to that decision. If the departure was due to a disagreement with your former supervisor, you can explain that you did not see eye-to-eye on the situation, and because the issue was critical, you decided that it was best to leave the position. If you left the job after a short period, perhaps explain how the responsibilities did not meet your expectations.

Come from a place of safety

Of course, to be confident in the interview, make sure that you are fully prepared. Do some research on the company before you go in; surf the company's web site, and search for stories about your interviewer. Next, check professional and social networking sites to see if there are people in the company that you already know or people who can recommend you to the person who will be interviewing you. Before the interview, find a friend to simulate the interview with you by doing some role-playing.

It is also very important to take care of yourself, as you want to go into the interview with positive energy, a smile, and self-confidence. Calm yourself by focusing on the breath. Visualize a positive and successful interview. Ensure that you take copies of your resume and reference letters to the interview. If you left your last job under negative circumstances, ask others who you had worked with to provide a positive reference.

And finally, don't worry! Know that the job search process is just a normal stepping stone leading to a new phase in life.