

Mind the Gap: How to Explain Gaps on Your Resume

One of the most important things about acing an interview aside from authenticity? Transparency.

So, if there's a gap in your resume, rest assured it will come up during an interview. Assume recruiters will spot it on your resume and inquire about why there's a gap or what you were doing with your time.

There are several ways to address it in a thoughtful, straightforward manner depending on the actual reason.

Personal reasons. When I worked in recruiting, occasionally a candidate had gaps on their resume that alluded to a personal situation. While recruiters can ask why there's a gap on your resume, you don't have to go into specifics. Often times, candidates start divulging details like, "My mother was sick so I took time off to take care of her," and I understood the reason and they didn't need to go into any more details whatsoever.

So, if you have personal reasons for an employment gap, please note you do not have to reveal information, but you may want to allude to an broader explanation, such as, "personal matters." Employers should respect the fact that you were taking care of yourself and pausing in order to address a situation. Life happens.

Getting fired. If you get fired, you need to think of a good way to explain it, so you're not exactly saying, "Hey, yeah I'm a poor performer, but hire me, I will totally be an asset to your company!"

You can state something like you were downsized, "last one in the department, first one out," your department had to trim its budget and you were one of the casualties. If you state you were put on a performance improvement plan and didn't succeed, well, it's game over before it began. It's more common than not to have some type of employment gap on your resume, especially considering the Great Recession isn't necessarily too far down on a one-page resume, so confidently state you were let go and you're moving on. (And then wisely select references who can attest to positive attributes to your performance, perhaps in other roles?)

Getting downsized. So let's say you were a stellar (or even average to above average) employee and you were still let go. The same rules above apply: You were let go, however, you can add any performance accolades to your explanation. For example, you could mention that despite having won the award for top sales performer in the region for the past three consecutive years, decisions were made, the company wasn't doing well, so only the directors remained intact.

Less is more, but you can still leverage this as an opportunity to highlight your accomplishments without badmouthing the company. Just a case of "it is what it is" and you're moving on.

Burnout. It happens to the best of us. Sometimes you just need a break – maybe your boss was toxic, maybe it was the office – in the worst scenario, both were bad.

Perhaps you took a year off to travel the world, learn a new language, volunteer or just restore your self-care routine and wellness. This is definitely legitimate and you can say briefly, "I was incredibly burned out, working 14-hour days consecutively, it took a toll on my mind and body. If I didn't take a break, I

don't know what would have happened." Which is true – people have gotten sick and beyond by working themselves too hard – in some extreme cases literally to death.

The key to explaining each gap succinctly involves pivoting. Quickly address the gap (or more than one) and relevant dates and leverage them into talking points to continue moving the conversation forward as to why you're the right person for the job you're interviewing for right now. And if you were downsized for whatever reason, you can say you've now had time to evaluate what your next move will be ... or if you were burned out, you're rejuvenated with a clear head, energized to tackle your next role.

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