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Fired? The Interview Solution

By Judi Perkins

So you were fired? Now what? How will you explain it when you interview?

There are many questions that plague job seekers. "What salary are you looking for?" is a big one. "Why should we hire you?" is another. And "Why did you leave your last job?" can leave you spluttering if you were fired and don't know how to answer.

And most people don't! After they've stumbled through a few answers—trying in vain to phrase it in an acceptable way—and are not invited back for a second interview, their fears are confirmed. No one will hire them because they've been fired.

Except that's not what's really happening. The problem is not that they were fired, but how they answered the question.

We don't stay at a job our entire lives like most of our grandparents did. Not only is it common to change jobs, some believe it's the best way to leverage salary and career. While most of the changes may be of your own volition, odds are a few will involve being fired or laid-off.

Companies are bought out, merge, and consolidate, which means inevitably there's a duplication of staff. It can be as simple as the new president wanting to bring in his own team. He probably didn't even look at your capabilities, He just decided you were ...outta there.

These departures aren't as difficult to explain. You can say:

- o "Our company was bought and the entire department was eliminated." (It's not me; a bunch of us were asked to leave.) Safety in numbers.
- o "The new president wanted to bring in his own guy. I lasted about a week." (It's not me; the president didn't even take the time to find out if I was good at what I do.) A prospective company can't possibly hold something against you that's so... impersonal.

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o "The company was losing money and downsized." (It's not me; if the company had been profitable, I'd still be there!)

The common thread is, "It's not me." Therefore, I am not flawed, unwanted, performing poorly, or any other reason you can think up or worry about. But these types of partings, while they seem impersonal, can still have a detrimental effect. We'll get to that in a minute.

The instances that cause real damage feel very personal, even when they aren't. You are the only one who was dismissed, and what's more, you know they'll replace you. You're caught off guard, angry, and frightened, too. In an instant, you're on the defensive, which is usually where people remain. And that's exactly what causes the problem.

Firing isn't always about the individual, even though that's who's impacted the most. Sometimes it's about the boss—especially bosses with issues. It might be about poor performance, but that's not

always negative. It could be the result of having different philosophies. For instance, the company may value those who work weekends, nights and holidays. You prefer to balance your life.

Once you're fired, you can't change the circumstances. But you can control how you view them. While departmental or companywide layoffs are easier to explain, they can also cause damage. You wonder, "If I'd been really good, wouldn't they have found another spot for me?" In addition, you're in an insecure place that sometimes is difficult to adjust to.

Take time to clear some tears or anger. If you're tempted to recoil, rehash, threaten revenge or otherwise communicate with your previous employer, don't. Remember one word: reference! Don't burn your bridges. Leave the company gracefully.

Most importantly, detach yourself from the event and honestly examine what happened. That's the only way you're going to get any insight and begin adjusting your thoughts and perspective.

There are hundreds of reasons for dismissal, so no pat answer will suffice. The unequivocal rule is to tell the truth. If they discover you lied, you'll be wondering for a long time how you'll pay your bills. So when you're asked why you left - tell them you were fired. Forthright brevity is best. It's all in how you phrase it. The trick is a shift in perspective, which is easier when you've purged the defensiveness and shame.

Don't give a long, rambling story or blame the company, your boss, or anyone else. Were you -even partially- at fault? Take responsibility. Did you learn from the experience? Say so. Are you completely at sea as to what happened? That's okay.

Not every job is right for everyone. There are philosophical differences, chemistry problems, tough spots, and bosses who are difficult and self-absorbed.

Regardless of the reason, it wasn't your perfect job or you weren't quite what they needed. The great thing is that it was recognized (in whatever form) and everyone is moving on. The goal is to be real

about what works for you and why the firing took place.

The first step, as trite as it sounds, is to look at it as a blessing. It may take some time to see, but no matter how bad it looks or feels, something good will come of it. Maybe it will be a better job, a chance to grow, or the realization that you hated your career - who knows?

But if you're too busy being angry and defensive, not only will you miss the chance to capitalize on the positive outcome, but you'll also keep experiencing negative consequences. When you're in a victimized frame of mind, you'll miss recognizing an opportunity and continue to perpetuate your unemployment.

Let's examine two answers to the question: "Why did you leave your last job?"

HOLDING-ON HENRIETTA: I don't know. I was doing my job. Everyone liked me. They always came to me for advice instead of our boss. When the other manager left, they promoted the assistant. She's maybe about 28. I guess they thought she'd be good just because she'd been there a long time, but she really was a shrew. I think she hated me. She was always talking down to me. One time she took credit for one of my projects. She's the one that should have left! I'm glad to be out of there.

OBJECTIVE OLIVIA: I was fired, actually. The assistant manager was promoted to manager because she had seniority and she was very good at her job. Unfortunately, she was young and perhaps she thought respect was automatically accorded instead of earned, because when everyone else began coming to me instead of her, it didn't seem to sit well with her. Despite that I excelled in my responsibilities and met my goals, she let me go. I'm sorry to have had to leave the company. I learned a lot there.

Can you spot the differences? As the interviewer, what would you think?

You must work out a comfortable response. Rewrite it, rephrase it, and test it. Be able to say it calmly and sincerely. If you notice hesitation or discomfort, your words, your attitude—or possibly both—need adjustment.

There is no good or bad. There's only perspective, which is your choice. Firing is considered "bad," but what's bad about being fired when a boss has issues? What's bad about protecting a customer or not compromising your ethics? What's bad about being asked to leave because the position description changed and doesn't fit your job preferences or skills? What's bad about being fired from a sales job for lousy numbers when you hate selling (and realize later that you're relieved to be gone)?

When you're comfortable with what happened, you'll be comfortable with your response, and it will be much easier to look someone in the eye while you answer their question.

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Crazy Interview Questions

By Joel Vance

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If you want to get that amazing new job, you are first going to have to learn the answers to common job interview questions. The majority of the interview questions that you have thrown at you will be typical interview fare, but a company may decide to throw you a curve ball in the form of a crazy job interview question. This is starting to happen more and more, it is becoming quite a trend actually, so you need to take some time to learn what these interview questions might be so that you can answer them quickly and in a manner that leads to you getting the job.

There is a method to an employer's madness when they use an 'out of the ordinary' job interview question – and that's to get you thinking fast. In most cases the employer is testing you to see if you can think on your feet or if you are creative enough to work well in this job position. If the interviewer doesn't think you have what it takes because of your answers to the job interview questions, then you will not get the position.

Before you go into any job interview try to keep an open mind. Prep your imagination a bit to get it flowing freely just in case you get some of these crazy job interview questions asked of you. You can't afford to freeze up during an interview; because if you do, it is all over. So go in prepared, or at least as prepared as you can be.

Here are a few of the strange and yet rather common job interview questions that you may run across:

Q) If you were an animal what kind of animal would you choose to be?

Choose an animal that is efficient at everything that it does and one that is often very busy.

Q) What kind of fruit would you be?

You should choose a fruit that tastes good in a fruit salad along with many other fruits. This can be used to show that you are a team player who works well with others all of the time.

Q) What would be the very first thing that you would do if you won the lottery?

This is a gauge of your priorities. Whatever you do don't say you would quit your job.

Think about the answers to these sorts of job interview questions before you go into the interview. This way even if these particular interview questions don't get asked you will still have an idea of the types of answers that you should be giving.

Joel Vance is a Human Resources 17-year HR expert who's taught at 4 major universities around the country and currently has a best selling book on interview questions at

<http://www.theperfectinterview.com/go/tpiarticle023.php>



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