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Explaining an Employment Gap in an Interview

By Kelly Eggers



Having a gap between jobs on your resume used to be a serious detractor to your application. However, times have changed, and in a post-recession world, interrupted employment is commonplace for job seekers -- particularly for those in the layoff-stricken finance sector.

Just because it's a reality, however, doesn't mean you're off the hook. You need to be prepared for the questions you'll receive during an interview, whether the respite was a result of layoffs or poor performance.

We spoke with New York finance career coach and author of The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide Roy Cohen to get some of his suggestions on how to handle the situation gracefully:

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Don't Bring It Up

"If it's not addressed [by the interviewer], it's not typically an issue," says Cohen. Be wary, however, if it appears to be a total non-issue for the interviewer. "If they don't ask about it, it's not a good sign for the interview," says Cohen. "It says something about their interest in you."

Break It Down

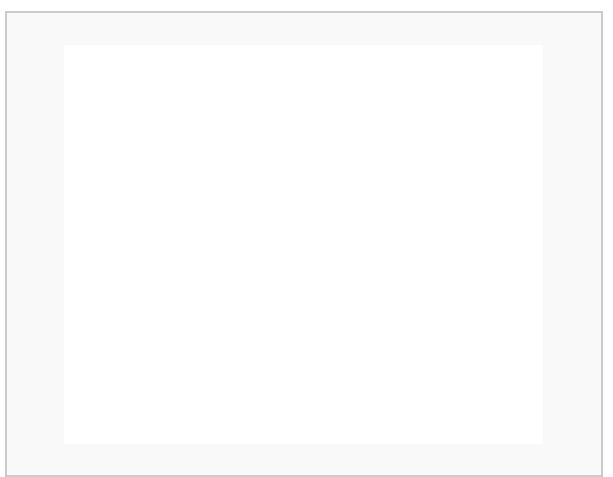
If you've had a long gap between jobs, you should break that period into chunks. "Deconstruct for your audience how you've used that time," says Cohen. Having a story for each of those periods of time will make it clear that you didn't spend months upon months twiddling your thumbs.

Be Honest

While choice wording can help take attention away from an employment hiatus, there's no room for dishonesty when you're a job-seeker. You'll shred your credibility before you even get through the door -- so whether they're little and white or big and bold-faced, leave any and all lies at home.

Have Something to Say

This isn't just about preparing for the interview. Do something while you're out of work to build



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your **career capital**. And, besides, you'll have more to say during the interview.

-- Travel, especially if you travel to places relevant to your business. If you're a **wealth manager** out of work, for example, traveling to a hotspot like Asia to attend a finance professionals' conference shows you're keeping tabs on industry developments.

-- Take classes, whether they're personal or professional. Use the time to brush up on your **certifications**, or add some new, relevant ones to your repertoire. Or, if you're so inclined, learn a new language -- that can open up new job opportunities that you might not have been qualified for previously.

-- Volunteer at a non-profit. No, it's not paid, but balancing the books or consulting for a struggling foundation has a number of bonuses -- the good karma only being one of them.

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