

## **What have you been doing since your last job?**

Losing your job is ranked by experts as one of the most stressful life events that people experience. Being made redundant can knock your self-esteem, strain your personal relationships and of course negatively affect your bank balance and quality of life. To compound matters, just as you're learning to cope with the aftershock of this trauma, you're required to be at your personal best to perform well in interviews and convince employers that you are their ideal candidate.

For anyone with a gap on their CV, you'll inevitably be asked in interview what you've been doing since your last job. This can potentially be an emotionally charged question if you've been job searching for a period of time and maybe become a little disheartened. Thus, it's wise to anticipate and be prepared for it. Below are some guidelines that will help you answer this question in a positive, constructive manner.

### *Upskilling*

When you're looking for a new position, use your time productively. By structuring your days and keeping your skills updated, not only are you making yourself more valuable to a future employer, you'll probably feel more positive about yourself as you take control of this new situation. This positive mindset will give you a strong competitive edge in interview. Upskilling could include keeping up to date with trade journals and industry trends, enhancing your IT skills or even enrolling on a post graduate programme.

### *Positive Attitude*

Being laid off can lead to feelings of anger, loss of control and depression. It's important to work through these negative feelings before commencing your job search.

Employers will always look to appoint somebody with a positive attitude – somebody who will add energy to a team and look for creative solutions to problems, a person who will develop good relationships with clients and customers.....in essence a person who is passionate about their role cares about the future of the company.

This is going to be an important issue particularly if you are feeling that you need to secure employment, any employment, to help make ends meet. If your approach is - "I am applying for this role because I need a job to pay the mortgage ..." employers will pick up negative vibes and will be deterred. If you approach your application with a positive outlook you have a better chance of securing the role.

### *Job Search*

Sure, you may want to reply that since your last position you've been searching high and low for new positions, but, you must be careful not to show frustration with your job search. Instead, you might indicate that you have been selective in the types of roles you have applied to and want to ensure that your skill set closely fits the employer's requirements. By doing this, you will reassure the interviewer that you have a specific interest in their role and would be committed to the company. You need to get the message across that you are interested in "this job", and not just in any old job!

### *Volunteering*

Doing some "pro-bono" work is both a good way of contributing to society whilst continuing to develop and enhance your skills. You could do some work in your field of expertise – for example, if you're an accountant you could sign up as the treasurer in a local charity. If you work in an unrelated field this could be the opportunity to develop other qualities such as leadership, project management skills, etc. Although looking for a job should be seen as a full time job in itself, it's important to look at the bigger picture. This may be one of the few times in your life that you'll have

an extended period of free time; use it wisely. In addition to job seeking, try and do something fun or that you've always dreamed of – maybe learning a new language, volunteering or even training for the marathon.

### *Contracting*

Many people aspire to working in a full time, permanent role. In a sluggish market place, the traditional permanent, pensionable job may be more difficult to obtain as companies introduce head count freezes and like to maintain a more flexible workforce by hiring contractors instead of permanent staff. Taking a number of short term contracts is a good way of keeping your skills fresh. It may also help you learn new skills – for instance, learning a new IT system or gaining more people management experience. Contracting also offers another valuable benefit - it builds up your contact base. By impressing a company, they may be happy to recommend you to clients. Also, there's always the possibility of a contract turning into a permanent position!

### *Conclusion*

To excel in *any* interview, you must turn perceived weakness into strengths. When asked to outline what you've been doing since your last job; by providing concrete, constructive examples showing how you've been developing your talent, learning new skills, and discovering new ventures, you'll have an opportunity to turn the question around and let your drive and resourcefulness shine!

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