

EXPLAINING WHY YOU ARE IN A JOB SEARCH

Five Tips for the Downsized Professional

By Barbara Safani, M.A., CERW, NCRW, CPRW, CCM
Career Solvers

The key to successful interviewing is being prepared. Certain questions are considered “standard”, yet few people think about their responses ahead of time. When candidates are unprepared, their answers may showcase emotions that are valid, but could be damaging to reveal during an interview. One of the most common interview questions is “Why are you currently in a job search?” When you have been downsized and you need to communicate your situation to a hiring manager, your response should combine a positive reflection regarding your previous employer with a brief discussion of the business reasons why you are no longer employed by them. Below are five strategies for crafting an effective statement.

Examine your emotions.

Was your position offshored to a country where labor costs are one-third of what they are in the U.S? Did management reduce their front line staff while increasing senior executive bonuses? Did your position become redundant after a company merger? When jobs are lost because of these types of situations, people can become angry and feel betrayed by their former employer. If this anger comes across in the interview, you will not be seen as the top candidate, even if you are the most qualified. Nobody wants to hire someone with emotional baggage from a previous employer. Prior to your interview, you need to separate your emotions from the business reasons for a job loss. Acknowledge your emotions to yourself and those close to you, but prepare a public statement that conveys the business reasons why you are currently in a job search.

Say something positive.

Before you discuss the situation that led to your job loss, say something positive about your experience with that employer.

Examples

- “I was fortunate enough to work with company X for seven years. I had the opportunity to work with some exceptional professionals and hone my technical skills.”
- “I was proud to provide quality customer service to clients at XYZ company. They stood by their products and rewarded employees that made a favorable impression on their customers.”

Discuss the business reason for the job loss.

Discuss your job loss in the general context of the company. Rather than personalizing the situation by saying things like “I was let go”, “My job was eliminated”, or “My position was outsourced”, discuss how a department, business group, or particular type of professional responsibility was eliminated. This shows the hiring manager that others lost their jobs as well and that the loss was not due to your individual performance.

Examples

- “Unfortunately my entire department of 20 was eliminated.”
- “As a result of a global company restructuring, the company had to reduce their New York workforce by 25%.”
- “The accounting function was outsourced and all ten accounting professionals were let go.”

Prepare multiple level responses.

If you were let go, but your co-worker who performs the same job function was not, it is wise to create two responses. Part one is a general response and part two is used if the interviewer probes further about your situation.

Level One Response

- “A business decision was made to reduce the general counsel staff by 50%.”

For some interviewers the previous answer satisfies their curiosity. Others may probe and ask “How many were in your department and how many were let go?” or “Why were you let go rather than your co-worker?” Assure the interviewer that the job loss was not performance based. Don’t discuss any speculations you may have about the company or your manager’s motives.

Level Two Response

- “The company suffered low 4th quarter earnings which translated into a 50% reduction of staff in four departments. In my group the 50% reduction represented the elimination of one position. The specific reasons for the decision were not communicated to me, however I can assure you that the decision was not performance related. My manager was extremely satisfied with my performance and offered to serve as a reference on my behalf.”

Keep in mind that if your company’s workforce reduction was significant, the situation may have received widespread media attention. In this case, the interviewer may comment on what they’ve read in the papers or say something like “I recently read that company X laid off 3,000 employees in the 4th quarter...that must have been an extremely difficult time.” Stick to your original story, be sure to say something positive about the company, and don’t turn it into an emotional exchange.

Practice

Write out what you plan to say and make revisions. Practice your response with someone close to your situation such as a family member, friend, or colleague. Use a tape recorder to record your response, play it back, and critique it. Have you personalized your situation or discussed it in a business context? Do your words flow and do you sound sincere?”

Preparing an effective statement to explain the reason you are in a job search is critical to the overall success of your search campaign. Reflect on the positive aspects of your work experience and take the time to create a statement that explains your reasons for being in a job search. You will enhance your confidence during the interview and improve your credibility with the hiring manager.

Barbara Safani, owner of Career Solvers, has over ten years of experience in career management, recruiting, executive coaching, and organizational development. Ms. Safani partners with both Fortune 100 companies and individuals to deliver targeted programs focusing on résumé development, job search strategies, networking, interviewing, and salary negotiation skills. She can be reached via email at info@careersolvers.com or by phone at 866-333-1800 / 212-579-7230.