

How to Effectively Explain Gaps in Employment



by Dayna Mathews

One of the biggest anxieties of active job-seekers involves explaining gaps in employment history. Allow me to put your mind at ease. At a recent networking event for career service professionals, a recruiting executive candidly revealed, “Gaps of employment, really, are not that big of a deal anymore. As long as a job-seeker shows that he or she has been keeping busy and productive, I’m okay with it. At the end of the day, if they have what I’m looking for, that’s all I care about.”

If you’ve been out of work for some time now, but have kept busy with productive activities such as volunteering, raising a family, and/or enhancing your education and skill level, your job search is far from doomed. Sure, you may have to work a little harder to showcase specific skills an employer is looking for, but don’t let those time gaps keep you from landing the job you desire. If you possess the skills and qualities a company is looking for in a candidate, you’ve got a real shot!

Before I dive into tips on how to effectively explain gaps in your employment history, I want you to remember: *You* are amazing. *You* are marketable. *You* are exactly what an employer is looking for.

Explaining gaps in employment needn’t be complicated or frightening. Stick with these 3 simple tips to move forward on your job hunt with confidence:

1. Be Honest – *Nobody wants to hire someone they can’t trust.*

If you weren’t working for a period of time, be honest about the productive and marketable things that you *were* doing during your unemployment. And while it goes without saying, I feel compelled to state the obvious: never lie on your resume or cover

letter. Employers validate your claims and if they find even a small lie, they'll be inclined not to hire you. Give yourself good karma by being honest with the potential employer and yourself.

2. Think Like the Employer – *“If I were the hiring manager, what kind of explanation would I want to see and hear?”*

We all have an entrepreneurial spirit within us, so thinking like an employer can help effectively explain your position. If, for example, you've been unemployed for a year due to personal and/or medical issues, as a hiring manager, what kind of explanation would you want from a potential candidate? You wouldn't want to receive a cover letter explaining all of the details pertaining to the candidate's issue and/or illness – that's just too much information! Stick to your bottom line and leave it at that.

3. Showcase How You've Still Got It – *Explain what you've been doing to keep up your skills and remain a productive member of society.*

No matter how long you've been out of work – regardless of the reason – you haven't just been sitting on your behind doing nothing. You've more than likely been going to school, volunteering within the community, raising children, or dedicating your time to something other than yourself. Remember that even if you're not getting paid for your efforts, it doesn't mean you weren't gaining valuable experience. Give yourself credit for absolutely everything you are doing.

Ultimately, focus on the education, skills, and experience you *do* have rather than what you don't. On your resume, list all of your related experience, education, and skills to the job you are seeking. If there is a gap, address it, but don't make it the focal point of your resume or cover letter. At the end of the day, the employer is concerned with what you already bring to the table, *not* what you're missing.