

**‘James Innes really knows the hiring process;
this book will help candidates to realise
and fulfil their ambitions.’**

Anthony Sherick, MD, Technojobs

THE INTERVIEW QUESTION & ANSWER BOOK

**How to be ready to answer the
155 toughest interview questions**

SECOND EDITION

JAMES INNES

The bestselling careers author and founder of The CV Centre®

The Interview Question & Answer Book

The interviewer might also be hoping to turn up any skeletons you may have in your cupboard, for example, dismissals.

Your answer

We've already covered the topic of changing jobs in detail in the previous chapter under, 'Why do you wish to leave your current position?' and much of that same advice will apply to this question. However, here I'd like to focus on two special cases: two more negative reasons why you might have left a previous job:

- Being made redundant.
- Being fired/sacked.

I would immediately like to apologise to any readers who have been made redundant. It is in no way my intention to cause any offence by listing redundancy as a negative reason for leaving a job. I fully appreciate that redundancy is a difficult time and that there's often little justice in an employer's choice of who to make redundant. I empathise entirely. However, my reason for including it in this list is not to suggest you've been made redundant through any fault of your own but because being made redundant may unfortunately be perceived in a negative fashion by a prospective employer; therefore, it is a hurdle you need to deal with.

Redundancy hurts. There are no two ways about it. However, you must conceal any bitterness and resentment you may feel and instead convey to the interviewer that, 'Such is life, these things happen,' it wasn't your fault. It is the position that is redundant, not the individual person. Under no circumstances should you criticise the employer that laid you off. Rather than dwell on negative aspects, you must aim to emphasise any positive outcomes, for example, that it gave you the opportunity to undertake some valuable training or that it meant you were able to move on to a new and better position.

EXAMPLE

Unfortunately, a major client that my department was responsible for supplying, decided to withdraw completely from the UK and close all their branches. It appears they had overreached themselves in deciding to expand beyond the USA. Almost everyone in my department was subsequently made redundant. However, with hindsight, it all worked out very well in the end because I was able to secure a new and more senior position within just a couple of months.

If you've been fired from a previous role then this is a tough one to deal with; it's hard to put a positive slant on such matters.

There are two points I need to make about how you should handle this. Firstly, you must be truthful; it's easy for a prospective employer to check these sorts of detail. Secondly, you must convey the circumstances as calmly and dispassionately as possible, acknowledge responsibility for the causes of your dismissal and, above all else, convince the interviewer that you learned a great deal from the experience and that this will never, ever happen again.

There are various words and expressions which can be used to describe being dismissed from a job: 'sacked', 'fired' etc. However, these have more negative connotations than simply saying you were dismissed. Therefore, you should avoid using them in your answer.

EXAMPLE

I was only in that job for a couple of months and I unfortunately left it sooner than I would have liked to. I had an initial probationary period of three months, and during that time I, regrettably, had an argument with a customer. I felt they were being extremely unreasonable, and rather than pacifying them, I let the situation escalate. It turned out that they were a long-standing customer and they used their influence to insist that my manager dismiss me. I was young and inexperienced and I learnt a great deal from it. I would certainly never now argue with a customer; I know that there are much better ways to resolve such a situation.

BLOOPER!

It's probably a good idea to avoid the following answer given by one candidate: 'The company made me a scapegoat, just like my three previous employers.'

28. Which of your jobs was the best?

Alternative and related questions

- What's the best job you have ever had?
- Can you describe the best job you have ever had?
- How would you define your dream job?
- In which job were you the happiest/most fulfilled?

The meaning behind the question

This is potentially a trick question. Does the interviewer really care which the best job was? Or are they more interested in identifying what your conception of the perfect job is and how that matches or differs from the vacancy for which they are currently interviewing you? It's much more likely to be the latter. By identifying what you have most enjoyed in the past they can assess how likely you are to enjoy this job in the future.

Your answer

You should endeavour to pick a job which is not greatly dissimilar from the one for which you are applying. You then need to explain your choice in such a way as to emphasise the similarities between that role and this current vacancy, subtly of course.

EXAMPLE

I have tried to plan my career path carefully, only changing jobs when the right role has presented itself. However, I would say my best-ever job was my role with Elisabeth Elkins Catering. I was given a considerable degree of autonomy to conceive, plan and implement our marketing strategy. I had a highly productive working relationship with the managing director and the outcome was very successful; our sales more than tripled by the end of my two years.

Word of warning

Avoid citing your current job. The interviewer will wonder:

- if it's that great then why do you really want to leave;
- if they do give you this job, is there a risk you might later regret it?

29. Why is there a gap in your CV?

Alternative and related questions

What did you do during this gap in your employment?

Can you tell me more about this break in your career history?

The meaning behind the question

There are two elements here:

- The interviewer will be interested in the reasons for there being a gap in your CV; why you experienced a period of unemployment.
- They will be interested in what you did during that period of unemployment.

Your answer

Most people have a gap or two in their career history. It's very common and not normally anything to worry about. There is, however, only one explanation that an employer is really going to view favourably:

- further training/education.

Other common and conceivably constructive reasons include:

- raising a child;
- caring for another dependant;
- travel.

But there are also reasons which will definitely be viewed negatively:

- inability to find a suitable position;
- ill health.

If the reason for the gap in your career history isn't obviously negative then there shouldn't be a gap in your CV; you should have included a brief entry explaining the situation. This will prevent an interviewer from asking you, 'Why is there a gap in your CV?' and will instead prompt them to ask the more positive question, 'Can you tell me more about this break in your career history?'

Further training/education: This is very simple and should already be covered within your CV but maybe the interviewer has missed it. You need to politely draw their attention to the further training/education you undertook and use this as an opportunity to talk about why you chose this option and how it adds value to your application.

Raising a child/Caring for another dependant: If you took time out of your career in order to care for a family member or close friend then it is very much your own private affair but one that an interviewer should hopefully view favourably. You should have included a brief entry in your CV explaining the circumstances and the interviewer should refrain from probing too deeply into the matter. The same applies for time out to raise your own family.

Travel: Taking a sabbatical to go travelling is often seen by an employer as a positive thing. Many will believe that the cultural awareness and sense of independence you will have gained as a result of the experience will prove to be of value to them. Also, if you've already taken time out to travel then it means you're less likely to suddenly disappear to travel the world just as they've got you settled in. This is a common worry amongst employers, particularly when it comes to younger employees. If you're questioned on this then it is important to emphasise that it was something you 'needed to do' and now you've 'got it out of your system'. You may also be able to make reference to any temporary and part-time work you undertook in other countries if that could be an additional selling point for you.

Inability to find a suitable position: This is definitely the most common cause for there being a gap in a CV. The problem you face is that if you tell an interviewer you were struggling to find work then that's inevitably going to worry them. You need to deal with this by explaining carefully that the right job isn't always available at the right time. For further advice on how to handle this, please take a look at Question 13, 'You've been out of work for a while, has it been difficult finding a job?' in the next chapter.

Ill health: If you have been absent from work as a result of a significant illness or a major accident, then the interviewer should appreciate that these things do happen. For further advice on how to handle questions about your health please take a look at Question 14, 'What's your sickness record like?' in the next chapter.

30. What do you know about us as an organisation?

Alternative and related questions

What is your impression of our organisation?

Why do you want to work for this organisation?

The meaning behind the question

The interviewer wants to make sure you've done your homework, that you really understand what their organisation is all about and that you have a realistic expectation of what it would be like to work for such an organisation. Whilst they're not going to be deliberately fishing for compliments they will want to ensure that you do have a positive impression of their organisation. Why do you want to work for them in particular?

Your answer

In the previous chapter we covered the closely related question, 'Why do you want to work for this organisation?' The difference with this question is the greater emphasis you need to place on what you know about the organisation rather than why you want to work for their organisation in particular.

Spell out to the interviewer the key points you know about their organisation and how you come to know this, for example, because you've researched their website, or you've read about them in the newspaper etc. But don't go into excessive detail.

Make sure you put a positive spin on any points you raise, and, if at all possible, communicate how you feel you are well suited to working for such an organisation.

Avoid saying anything negative or bringing up any bad press etc. that the organisation may have had.