

OAKLAND BUSINESS Finance

Focus on the positives when interviewing, minimize talk about problems



Q To fully explain why I left my last job, I need to talk about some personal problems. How should I handle this in an interview?

A If you can actually anticipate questions about sensitive subjects, practice giving answers that are impersonal and generic in flavor. Most people overestimate how much detail is required to give satisfactory explanations. Keep your responses brief. Talking too much about a negative or personal issue can make you sound defensive. State your case clearly, then move on to another subject. It's easy to fall into the trap of revealing too much, particularly when an interview seems to be going well. In fact, some people can't wait to unload

information that has little job relevance and is embarrassing to hear. Last week, one candidate couldn't resist describing various marital problems at length. I felt like sticking my fingers in my ears and making shrill noises as a signal to stop.

Note that a little "apple pie" thrown into an interview can actually score points. For example, a brief anecdote about coaching a kids' soccer team or restoring antique furniture can suggest an interesting, well-rounded person. This is distinct from a cathartic rambling about parents, divorce, addictions and financial woes. Discuss these problems with counselors, friends or relatives. Employers will back away from candidates who don't know the conversational limits of good taste.

Q What's new in resumes?

A More people seem to be writing resumes without an Objective,

opting instead for a Background Summary. I like it. While the theory behind having an Objective seems to make sense clarifying the writer's intent and giving purpose to what follows — it's a real boring way to begin a sales document.

Unless you are entry level, changing careers, or have a motley background, most employers can figure out possible matches by looking at your work history and skills. An Objective that is too tightly worded can restrict consideration for a wider range of opportunities. An Objective that is loosely worded, such as "Seeking a challenging position with a progressive company offering long term growth" is just a waste of ink. There's more potential harm than good in an Objective.

A less positive trend in resumes is the omission of employment dates. Older workers want to hide their ages, younger workers want to appear more experienced, and job hoppers want to

convey stability. It doesn't work. Those of us in the employment business who are ordinarily delighted to work with these candidates just won't call people who have left off dates. These resumes seem to scream out that something is wrong or that the applicant is probably hiding something. It's hard to pursue a relationship with this uncomfortable feeling.

Q I hate my job. How can I start to explore some career alternatives?

A Go visiting. The best way to learn about different jobs and lifestyles is to talk with those who are in them. People are usually happy to share information about their own careers and can offer some good stuff had stuff perspectives that you'll never find in a books.

One of our first outplacement candidates was sick of being an accountant and took an early retirement from Ford.

The last time we heard from Joe K, he was a motivational speaker for a well-known San Diego consulting firm — a job he found through meeting people at industry seminars.

More recently, a senior-level plant manager wanted to explore the real estate industry. After meeting several brokers and practitioners in the field, the person returned to manufacturing — a comfortable, well-informed decision.

Assume nothing about a job until you ask questions. Most people will be helpful and any conversation has the potential for being life changing. There are a million ways of making a buck out there. You've got the raw talent to be successful at most of them.

Send questions to George Hayes, Job Search, P.O. Box 2497, Southfield, MI 48037. Mr. Hayes is president of Simplex Corporation, an outplacement, recruiting and pre-employment testing firm located in Southfield.

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