

So, you've been fired. While it may seem devastating right now, remember you're not the first, and most people rebound and move on to new opportunities.

But one thing is certain: To get your next gig you'll need to answer questions about why you left your last job. The keys to doing so effectively are self-awareness and preparation.

Mend the Fence

When you're ready to get back in the game, call your previous manager to conduct some relationship repair. Start by asking his opinion about the type of position he thinks you're best-suited for. Then inquire about the reference information he's comfortable providing to a prospective employer. Doing this serves several purposes: It mends the fence between the two of you, and lets you know what he's likely to say in response to reference calls. In addition, it causes him to reframe his thoughts about you.

Consider asking your previous manager about your greatest strengths. By asking him or her to reflect on your positive attributes, they are more likely to remember those things when a reference call comes in.

If you didn't ask during your termination meeting, call HR at your previous company and ask what information they'll release about you during a reference check. While most companies are reluctant to release negative information about previous employees, the truth may still come out. You should never lie about being fired, but talking to HR will help you prepare for any objections you encounter by giving you insight into what prospective employers might hear from your old firm.

Reflect

Why were you terminated and what have you learned? The answers are vital, not only because you want to find a better fit in your next job, but because you'll need the result of such introspection to assure an interviewer you've learned from your experience and the same situation won't happen again.

It's important to identify what part of the culture may not have been working well for you. Was the job not challenging enough, did you want more collaborative working environment, or do you prefer to work alone? If you weren't motivated enough to take the job seriously, it's important to understand what the real reason for your termination was, so you can explain it and make a better choice next time.

Technique

First of all be honest. If you're asked directly if you were fired, answer affirmatively but use language that will soften your answer. Most importantly don't offer up the fact you were let go unless you're asked.

Never bring it up first because the subject may never come up. Rehearse your answer out loud so you are confident when the subject arises. Keep your response direct, concise and truthful. Remember that you are permitted a minimal amount of positive spin, but only minimal. Your response has to be consistent with whatever a prospective employer might uncover during a reference or background check. It is critical that the response be direct and concise, and then shut up. You will be surprised how many times few or no follow up questions are asked.

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Because your old boss can still be a wild card, line up some former peers who are willing to give you positive references. Exercise some control over the process by proactively providing a list or letters of reference to your prospective employers.

In response to questions about your termination, consider beginning with a phrase like, "I don't want to speak ill of my former employer, however the situation was this." This allows you to tailor your answer in a way that conveys your diplomacy so interviewers are less likely to dig for information.

Finally, stay emotionally controlled while answering questions about your termination. Focus the lion's share of your answer on what you've learned and the corrections you've made as a result of losing a job. This is where you can take the opportunity to spin your answer back around to the positive if you've had that fence-mending discussion with your old boss.

If appropriate, close with a statement such as 'I've spoken with my old boss and he acknowledges that we didn't see eye to eye on everything. But he'll also admit that I'm a hard worker and that I made some valuable contributions.' Be absolutely truthful because someone might call your boss to confirm.

And remember: What do Steven Jobs, Howard Stern and Terrell Owens have in common? They've all been fired.

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