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# Handling the question, ‘Have you ever been fired?’

In my April 2016 column, “Answering conventional, exasperating interview questions,” I discussed how to answer the question, “Why are you leaving your current job (or why did you leave your job)?” One of the points I mentioned was what to consider saying if you had been fired. Chances are if you’ve ever been fired from a job, you probably dread being asked about it during a job interview. While answering this question isn’t easy, there are strategies that can be utilized to boost your confidence level and minimize the potentially negative effects.

## Ask your references what they will say if called by a potential employer.

Lynn Taylor, a national workplace expert, leadership coach and author of “Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant,” says interviewers are often trying to identify several things from your response: Are you a risky hire? Do you handle adversity well? Do you become defensive or upset when asked the question, or are you poised and confident when responding? What is your real-time response to pressure? And finally, how honest are you? These points reveal much more about you than the answer itself, Taylor adds.

Here are a few ideas that should help guide you through developing your response and being prepared to

answer, “Have you ever been fired?”

- Be honest. Don’t even think about lying in your response. As Monster salary and negotiation expert Paul W. Barada says, “There’s no good way to sugarcoat being fired, so the best course of action is to tell a prospective employer as honestly, objectively and candidly as possible your view of what happened. The worst thing any job seeker can do is be less than honest about the reason for leaving an employer and then have somebody check your references and discover you lied.” That’s a sure way to lose credibility and negatively impact your reputation.

- Talk to your references. Ask them what they will say if called by a potential employer. Be sure to send them a copy of your up-to-date résumé. Carole Martin, a Monster contributing writer, also points out, “It is important to find out what your former employer will or will not say about you if called for a reference.” As much as possible, you want to ensure consistent messages from your references. Kristin Johnson, job search coach and owner of Profession Direction LLC, tells us, “Remind him that you are still looking for work, and ask what he might say about you if he were contacted. This strategy takes a lot of guts, and it will speak directly to your ability to self-assess. Plus, it diminishes the chances of your previous employer bashing you to the new one.”

- Script your answer. To help ensure a confident response, you should

write out what you want to say, read it aloud and rehearse it with someone whose opinion you trust. Although your answer should be concise and positive, be prepared to elaborate and explain what you learned from the experience, how you’ve gained wisdom about yourself and abilities, and the fact you are now ready to move forward as a viable, qualified candidate for positions for which you’re interviewing.

Carole Martin, the Monster contributing writer, provides an excellent example of how an answer can have a positive spin. The job candidate responded, “I was terminated after a major reorganization. The merging of different cultures had caused a major change in the way things were done. There were some differences of opinion between my boss and me. In the end, I was let go. I take responsibility for my part in the way things turned out. I learned a lot from the experience, and in retrospect, I would have handled it differently. But that is behind me now, and I am ready to move on with a new perspective.”

In closing, be prepared, be honest, keep your answer short and simple, and explain what you learned from the experience and how you are moving forward in a positive vein in your career.

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