

Dealing with Resume Gaps

1. Be Truthful about Your Dates of Employment on the Resume

Interviewers today know that it has been a particularly challenging time for many people, companies and entire industries. You may have been outsourced, laid off or furloughed or you may have even chosen to take time off for personal matters. It is acceptable to use a year to year format, VS month and year format on your employment history, I.E. 2007-2009 VS 3/2007-5/2009, providing you use the format consistently throughout the resume. When completing an application, use complete dates and explain your reason for leaving. Never, however, alter the dates of employment, as a basic reference check will uncover the truth.

2. Spend Your Time Wisely

For the past 14 years we've been recruiting technical professionals in Southern CA, and I've observed a constant Catch-22. Being out of work provides much needed time off to do so many of the things we want to do—go back to school, take a class/learn something new, travel, get certified, spend more time with family, just relax, etc. Yet, we become so engrossed in the job search process, or get down about being unemployed, worried about the future, struggling financially and maybe even lazy during this time that we forget our dreams and goals. By all means, focus on your job search but also use the down time to recharge, retrain and nurture yourself. When you look back 3, 6 or 9 months later you will feel proud of the fact that you made the best of a negative circumstance.

3. Be Prepared to Explain Your Employment Gaps in the Interview

In an interview, you will be asked why you left each position and to explain what you have been doing during your time off. Be prepared and be confident. If you have been out for 9 months and you answer this question with "looking for a job", you leave much room for doubt. If you answer the same question with, "I have been out of work for 9 months. I spent the first 3 months getting to know my family again as I have been consistently employed and working long hours for past 5 years. Since that time, I have been searching for the right position, which has been challenging. In addition to my job search, I've taken this opportunity to learn .NET 3.5 which I hope to work with some day." This response acknowledges the fact that yes, it has been some time, but you are making the most of it (see point 2).

4. Countering Negative Perceptions by Hiring Managers

Yes, there have been numerous layoffs, downsizings, and company closures in the past 18 months—to the tune of an estimated 2 million Americans losing their jobs in the past year. But, not all layoffs are due to the economy. Some companies use this “downturn” to eliminate their poorest performers and least desirable employees. Make sure that you are providing examples of high achievement, top quality references and recommendations and details on whom and how many in your group were laid off. Explain the reason why, ie: “My group was relocated to Texas and I lost my job along with 13 other engineers in my department. I survived three rounds of prior layoffs and, although offered, I chose not to move to Texas for family reasons.” Be proactive in your approach and detailed in your explanations. If there is ever a time to go above and beyond for yourself, it is now.