

The Do's and Don'ts of Explaining Your Recession Layoff

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Getting laid off is an embarrassing experience -- and not a particularly fun one to relive again and again during interviews. But the way you handle the topic can make or break an opportunity to restart your career and leave the past behind.

To help perfect your approach, we've compiled the following advice for how you should -- and shouldn't -- handle the discussion.

DO be the first one to address your layoff.

One of the first questions a recruiter is likely to ask is, "Can you tell me about yourself?" Reveal your passions and career motivations first, and then take this as an opportunity to explain your recent layoff. "You'll get credit for bringing it up," says Lewis Lin, founder of Seattle Interview Coach and former hiring manager for Microsoft and Google. "You'll get to frame the layoff and explain it on your own terms, as opposed to letting the recruiter ask about it."

DON'T weave a complex story.

You may still feel wounded from your layoff, but don't be too sensitive and over-explain why you were let go. Weaving a complicated story (like you were laid off during a restructuring even though your boss promised your position would be safe, but instead your colleague was chosen to stay because she had a lower [salary](#) requirement -- whew!) will raise red flags that there was some deeper meaning behind your termination. Just say, "There was a restructuring and unfortunately my position was eliminated." Then move on to the next question.

DO mention if it's a recession-related layoff.

It's perfectly fine to use the recession as an excuse for your departure. In fact, although layoffs typically carry some shame for the interviewee, Lin says many recruiters aren't even batting an eye when candidates mention they've been laid off as a result of the poor economy.

DON'T speak poorly of your last employer.

This is just unprofessional, and again, will make your interviewer think twice about why you were laid off.

DO mention if you were involved in a mass layoff.

If you were one of many laid off at your company at one time, you should say so. "If it's a mass layoff, it draws less attention to why you, specifically, were laid off," says Lin. "A single person getting laid off draws more scrutiny." A good, objective way to phrase this kind of layoff is to say, "There was a reduction in force. One hundred positions were cut, including mine."

DON'T be afraid to say you're not comfortable answering.

If your interviewer presses for more details, don't be afraid to say you'd prefer not to talk about it. "Candidates forget they can choose not to answer," says Lin. "Especially in this recession, many people feel like they are begging for the job, and that they need to answer every question. It's a matter of dignity, and it's OK to decline."

DO discuss how you've filled your time.

Before the interview, you should come up with a solid answer about how you've been filling your days -- and catching up on "Days of Our Lives" doesn't count. Lin advises his clients to be honest, clear, and confident. "I had a client this week who was getting caught up about how to explain what he'd been doing, and I advised him to just be honest: he should say he took two months of vacation to relax, and then for the past two months he's been consulting on some tough engagements." It's also acceptable to explain that job-searching and networking has become your full-time job.