How to Address Your Layoff in Cover Letters and Interviews

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Question:
I was recently laid off from my firm and am now starting on a search for a new position. I am concerned about the effect that being laid-off will have on my ability to obtain a new position. Should I address the fact that I was laid off in my cover letter? How should I deal with the issue during interviews?

Answer:
Dealing with the fact that you were laid-off in a subsequent job search and/or interviews is always difficult. In many cases, it raises red flags to a potential employer because they inevitably question whether the lay-off was actually a performance-based firing. The one silver lining in today’s current market—lots of people are in the same position. With the number of lay-offs currently taking place across the country, most prospective employers will understand (and believe) that your situation was the result of the current economic downturn.

With this in mind, the last thing you want to do is give a prospective employer any reason at all to doubt the circumstances surrounding your lay-off. Thus, it is best to be straight-forward about your situation and, you should address it in your cover letter. In most cases, it is not necessary to go into great detail or to provide a lot of background information. You only need to state that you are looking for a new position because you were laid off as a result of the economic downturn. If you have strong references from the firm that laid you off, make sure to mention this fact as well. Offering references at the outset is a good way to let prospective employers know that your previous firm did not have concerns with your performance.

- See Top Ten Interview Questions for more information

As for the interview process, the same guidelines apply. Be straight-forward about the fact that you were laid off and resist the urge to sound apologetic. In the interview setting, it may make sense to discuss some more of the details surrounding your firm’s lay-offs. For example, were a large number of people let go? Everyone in your specific practice area? Such pieces of information may help to alleviate any lingering doubts or concerns.

- See Interviewing Tips for more information

While being laid-off is never easy to handle, employers are encountering numerous well-qualified attorneys who have been laid off. Thus, your overall goal should be to focus on demonstrating to a prospective employer that the lay-off was related only to economic conditions and not connected in any way to performance-related concerns. Be ready to discuss facts in a straight-forward manner, have references ready to go, and let the manner in which you address the situation instill confidence in your qualifications.

See the Top 32 Reasons Attorneys Lose Their Jobs Inside of Law Firms to learn some of the most common reasons attorneys are fired or let go from law firms.

Learn why attorneys usually fail law firm phone-screening interviews in this article: Why Most Attorneys Fail Telephone-Screening Interviews

See the following articles for more information:
Top 23 Law Firm Interview Tips: How to Excel in Law Firm Interviews
21 Major Interview Mistakes to Avoid at All Costs
The Best Way to Prepare for a Job Search and Interviews

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How to Talk About Other Interviews in Your Interviews
How to Answer the Tell Me About Yourself Interview Question
How to Answer the Do You Have Any Questions for Me Interview Question
Had a Great Interview But Have Got No Response to My Thank-You Emails
What Does It Mean if I Haven’t Heard Anything Back from an Application/Interview in a Couple Weeks?
What to Wear to a Lunch Interview?
How to Effectively Interview Lateral Candidates: Pointers for Law Firms
The Interview Post-Mortem: Don’t Forget Your Thank You Notes!
The Secret to Effectively Sharing Concerns about Your Current Employer without Committing the Most Common Interview Blunder
How to Conduct Yourself During a Lunch Interview
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