

How Should I Explain a Bad Fit at a Past Employer on My Résumé?

Your résumé can just have a stop date. Mention when you stopped working there. It's very difficult for attorneys, a lot of times, to get positions when they're unemployed—a little bit more difficult than if you are employed. But what you need to do is when someone asks you why you're not working there, rather than talking about it was a bad fit or there were issues with it, and so forth, you try not to emphasize this point. Don't go into a lot of detail both in interviews and in talking to people.

I had an experience yesterday that was unusual. I was interviewing someone for a position in our company, and she had a one-year gap where there was nothing on her résumé. I asked her, What happened during that time? She replied I was a contractor. And I asked her, So what? Why did you leave this great firm and become a contractor? And she replied, Well, because my firm was having financial problems, and I heard they were having financial problems. I just thought it'd be a smart thing for me to leave. That wasn't a good answer.

Your answer to why you left the firm after only seven months is it wasn't a good fit. Remember, there are all sorts of reasons for leaving firms. Most attorneys, by the way, have been fired and have left jobs over the course of their career--sometimes, many, many times.

So, there's nothing to explain in your résumé. Just put the stop date. Then, people will ask you about it during the interview. You simply need to have a good story, and the story, hopefully, can be something along the lines of--the best examples are--work was slow, I had to take care of a parent, and those sorts of things to look at your best.

One thing too is, by the way, when you're laid off anytime--I hope you guys remember this--from a law firm or employer, always ask them to keep you on their website, to keep your voicemail live, and to keep your email, and so forth, as long as possible. Law firms will negotiate that, and so will private employers. It's always easier to find a job when you're employed.

But if you are laid off--lots of people, by the way, were laid off because of COVID-19, I mean, tons of them--there's really nothing wrong with being laid off. Right now, as it has been in the past, you don't really want to worry too much about it. You just leave it on there and roll the dice. Hopefully, you have good reasons. Law firms and everybody can be very understanding when things go wrong from a business point of view. So, it's alright to leave that information on there about being laid off.