Written by Julie Desmond
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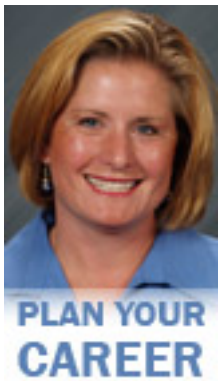

Reader Preetham writes: “One of the most significant issues is gaps in employment. I even had one recruiter tell me straight up, ‘The hiring manager will not consider job seekers with gaps in their work history.’ I have been impacted by multiple downsizings and have held several contract positions. It seems so critical to hiring managers that it takes precedence over my qualifications.”

This obstacle is familiar to scores of job seekers. Managing your own attitude toward lapses in employment will help hiring managers keep them in perspective, too.

While some hiring managers seem to overlook the fact that unemployment is at an almost all-time high, remember that an increase in job seekers creates an overload of applicants for every position. One HR manager received 250 resumes for a part time administrative position. Hiring managers have to weed through the applicants and gaps in work history are a simple way to eliminate groups of resumes from consideration, making the hiring process more efficient, although not necessarily more effective.

The best way to address this challenge during an interview is to change perceptions – yours and the hiring manager’s. Realize that millions of Americans now have significant gaps in their employment history, as victims of our economic debacle. Similarly, after 9/11, our economy and people’s personal views took a significant change in direction, and many lost jobs or changed careers as a result. Hiring managers came to recognize the gap as expected, and after a year or two, stopped eliminating applicants with breaks occurring during that period. Today’s problems eventually will be regarded the same way. But for now, anticipate the questions that you have heard before.

Decide in advance how you will talk about your transitions. Plan one or two sentence explanations about your reasons for leaving each position. Don’t apologize or give the

impression that you did anything wrong. Rather, treat it as inevitable, and move on in the conversation.

Stellar references will boost your chances once you're in the interview stage. If most of your work is contract-based, collect the best possible references from each position. Ask for written letters of reference during or at the end of each contract whenever possible, because it is likely that your supervisor will eventually move or be laid off. If you request a reference through LinkedIn, it will appear with your profile on that site, adding to your credibility even prior to an interview. If you are contracting through a recruiter, ask that person to request a reference for you. They may already have one on file, saving you and your supervisor some time.

Recruiter's secret: Prior to the interview, hiring managers are looking for ways to narrow the field of applicants. Once they invite you in, their expectation is to hire you. They truly hope you are in person the professional you appear to be on paper. Most interviewers already know why you were laid off, but are required to ask, so do not spend more interview time than necessary on transition issues.

Please send your career management questions to Julie@insightnews.com .