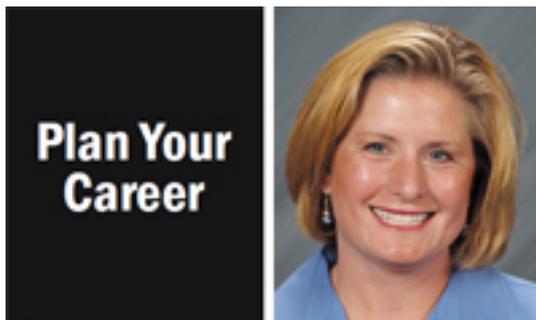


Gaps in employment: The interview hot spot

Written by Julie Desmond

Friday, 03 December 2010 15:50



By Julie Desmond
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Over sandwiches with HR placement guru Susan Seward of HR Advantage Partners, she and I agreed that the number one concern candidates have today is around interviews. Specifically, “I’ve been out of work for two (ten, twenty) months. How do I explain that employment gap?” If you, reader, happen to have a gap in your resume, keep reading.

See, you’re still reading, as are countless others with the same issue. You are not alone. So much so that interviewers have become experts in recognizing resume gaps. They are paid to notice these and ask about them; they are not required to rule someone out because of them. They simply have to ask, so first, ‘fess up: “I have been unconventionally employed.”

According to Seward, why you left matters far less than where you went next. Can you turn the empty space into a bridge? You weren’t working, but you weren’t fishing, robbing banks or lost at sea, either. Shift the focus away from what you were not doing (working for a paycheck) and onto what you were doing in the context of how your activities create added value for your next employer.

Don’t say, I was looking for work. Do say, It was a great time for networking.
Don’t say, I took a couple classes. Do say, The xyz class I attended was eye-opening and solidified by desire to move forward with my career in widget making.

Beware of those honest statements that seem innocuous but can easily be misunderstood. Remember, most employers want to bring on new hires who can help them specifically on business issues. Unless you are applying for a position in home health care, be aware that stating, “I stayed home to care for an ill family member,” will come across as not working and not working on it. Instead, perhaps you were developing new skills by caring for a family member, and perhaps you could elaborate on your experience dealing with insurance issues, legal representatives, contracts, communications with other concerned parties, etc. Choose to look at what you have done through the eyes of your hiring manager. Be honest. But also be applicable.

Seward’s sense is that carefully managing the time between positions is critical. Volunteer work, board memberships, coaching a team (i.e. developing leadership skills) or (improving your social media skills through) daily Facebook sessions is going to help a hiring manager comfortably move past the gap question and on to questions about your relevant skills.

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Remember, your interviewer wants to get past that question as much as you do; make it easy by expecting the question, planning the answer, and getting on with the conversation. It's not what you weren't doing; it is what you chose to do that matters most.

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