

# The elephant in the room

The elephant in the room is this: You want a new job because things aren't going well for you right now. And you do NOT want to talk about it! But you have to ... for 2 big reasons:

1. When you're afraid of these questions, they will silently and maliciously hold you back from doing all sorts of things in your job search.
2. How you answer these questions can make all the difference between you getting the job you want, and/or bringing on a whole heap of awkward conversations.

Maybe you got fired. Or laid off. Or, you're working for a bad boss. Or you hate your job. Or maybe you're just really bored at work, and you want something new. No matter what brought you here, you are not happy about your work situation. Psychologists say that losing a job (and sometimes leaving a job, even if it's your choice) throws most people into a vicious cycle of grief. Until you stop to recognize the loss, and the grief, you can get stuck in one place. If you are unable to shake the sadness, anger, shame or any number of really hard feelings, I highly recommend seeing a therapist to help you process this. It's a big deal, and if you're carrying around some of those big emotions, they can really hold you back in your job search.

## 6 STEPS TO ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS WELL



### 1. Recognize the pain

EXERCISE: I am working right now, but feeling ...

- Worried about a layoff, or getting fired
- Fed up with working for a rotten boss
- Tired of working with jerks
- Mad that I'm not getting paid what I'm worth
- Feeling really underemployed / underutilized
- Bored in my current job & dreaming about having fun again
- Sad & mad that I got passed over for a promotion
- Other

EXERCISE: I am unemployed, and feeling ...

- Still in shock (I did not see this coming)
- Devastated (really sad) about losing my job
- Angry that I lost my job
- Angry about how they let me go
- Confused about why they let me go
- Embarrassed about losing my job
- Humiliated about how they let me go
- Ashamed to tell anyone that I lost my job
- Worried that I won't be able to find another job
- Afraid of being rejected
- Other



## 2. Recognize where you are in the grief cycle

Circle where you are in the grief cycle below. Psst! You can bounce around!





### 3. Answer the hardest questions with yourself first

It's time to pull those skeletons out into the open ... and then forgive yourself! Is there a dark side to your story? Things you never want to talk about ... but are terrified they will come out in an interview? Most of us have some dark sides in our career history! Here are a few examples:

- *I kept showing up late for work.*
- *I kept missing deadlines.*
- *I said no to a promotion, and now they want me gone because they don't think my heart is in this anymore.*
- *I was 30% behind my sales goals for the year.*
- *I called my boss a jerk in front of the entire team, and it was clear to both of us in that moment that I needed to go get a new job.*
- *I threatened to punch my coworker. I stole something.*

What about you? Is there something that happened, that you did not handle well, that is bubbling in the back of your mind ... and causing you to be afraid of the question “*Why did you get laid off?*” or “*Why did you leave that job?*” or “*Why are you unemployed?*”

#### **EXERCISE: What DID happen? Why DO you need a new job?**

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#### **EXERCISE: What happened that was OUT of your control?**

*i.e. COVID! Restaurant shut down. Company lost 50% of its revenue and slashed a bunch of jobs. Company got sold. New management came in and hired all his old people from his old company. I got a pay cut because sales are down.*

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**EXERCISE: What happened that was IN your control?**

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**EXERCISE: What lessons did you learn from this? What would you do differently next time?**

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**4. Forgive yourself ... and give yourself the kind of advice you'd give your best friend, or one of your children.**

**EXERCISE:** Are you blaming yourself for something that was totally out of your control? If so, what is it ... and what is the REAL story?

- What are you feeling shame about that was totally out of your control?

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- What is the REAL story around it? \_\_\_\_\_

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**EXERCISE:** What do you need to forgive yourself for?

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## 5. Find a safe place to talk about the tough stuff.

You just unpacked some heavy stuff. Maybe that's all you needed, and you're ready to focus forward. On the other hand, maybe you're now feeling REALLY heavy, and realizing that this job search is drumming up some really tough issues for you. If you're in that second camp, then #5 is for you.

You need to find a safe place to talk through the icky stuff 1:1 with someone. A job club, a networking event or a job interview are not the place to talk about these things. If you're struggling to process this and focus forward, then it's time to see a professional therapist to help you sort through all of this.

My friend Steve for fired from a job, and unfortunately refused to go see a therapist for 6 years. He is a FANTASTIC salesperson. I worked with him for a few years, so I know what I'm talking about. Well, at one point he landed at a company that was a really bad fit for him, and he got himself fired for bad behavior three years later. He was the #1 sales guy in the company. He was pulling in \$8.5million per year for them. And yet, they fired him on a Tuesday, right after his wife had delivered baby #2. He didn't see it coming. They were cold and impersonal about it. They walked him out of the office on the spot. He carried his anger and shame about that around with him for 6 YEARS. I often heard him bad-mouthing that company at parties after a few drinks. 6 years later, he finally went to see a therapist, and in three short sessions was able to process it all and let it go.



## 6. Focus forward, then find a script that works for you.

LOOK AHEAD! What are you looking FORWARD to for your next job? That's the best thing to tell people ... as soon as you can! The best way to answer most of these tough questions is to answer their question VERY briefly, then pivot immediately to what you're looking forward to next in your career.

**EXERCISE:** What job are you excited about getting into next?

Target job title: \_\_\_\_\_