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Title:

Interviewing Skills: Presentation of Your Work History

Word Count:

681

Summary:

It may take you some time and self-exploration to identify it, but there are always some aspects of your work history that carry a positive spin. Don�t be afraid to dwell on your strong points no matter how unimpressive you fear your prior jobs may seem.

Keywords:

unemployment,job search,careers,support,psychological reframing,

Article Body:

Your work history becomes a key focus in a job interview, usually right after the requisite pleasantries of whether you had difficulty finding your way, comments about the traffic and weather, and an offer of coffee or water.

As you settle back in your chair, trying to look a lot more relaxed than you feel, the interviewer picks up your resume or application and starts to ask for details about your prior experience.

If you have a resume that specifies quantifiable results, now is your chance to expand on that. If you increased sales by 20% per quarter or completed a departmental reorganization that resulted in a budget reduction of 10%, you are on your way. Obviously such achievements outlined in your resume impressed the potential employer enough to call you in for an interview, so your amplification of the details of actions you took will be eagerly welcomed.

Unfortunately, most of us perform work where the results are less obvious. If you have worked in production or customer service or retail, it is very difficult to tie your efforts directly to company results. In such a case, try to highlight any personal successes or management recognition that demonstrates your competence.

Any promotion is excellent, even if only to a lead position or being put in charge of a special project. Describe what you did so that the interviewer can appreciate your prior employer�s belief in your ability to take on new responsibilities.

If no promotions were made (often none are readily available), identify any situations where you were singled out for recognition. That may range from being employee of the month to being asked to train new coworkers or receiving a written or verbal recommendation from a customer you assisted. If you received positive feedback from supervisors, describe the details.

While each job applicant tries to represent themselves as a super-achiever, the fact remains that many of us work quite competently for years without ever receiving a genuine promotion or even much recognition. Employers are aware of that. In fact, if the position is routine without much room for upward mobility, they may be wary of an over-achiever who is going to chaff against the lack of promotional opportunities. One of �The Apprentice� applicants looking for work in a manufacturing environment would be viewed with more than a dose of suspicion.

If such is your case � a good solid worker (or even somewhat marginal), find some personal strengths to describe. If you seldom take sick leave or have a reputation for always being on time, now is the time to focus on that. Perhaps you take off time whenever you can and run perennially late, bring up another aspect of your character such as an ability to work as part of a team or outstanding relationships with coworkers (those jawfests around the water cooler or the three beers after work with your cronies, complaining about the management monkeys you have to tolerate, are finally a positive reflection on you!)

If you have worked for one employer for an extended period of time, you don�t have to stress your stability, the interviewer already knows that. Instead, concentrate on answering the unasked questions in his mind, his fear that you are set in your ways. Stress your flexibility and desire to learn new skills and procedures. If you changed departments or job title or responsibilities during your long tenure, give the details and how well you adapted to change.

If your work history is varied with many jobs for short periods of time, explain how much you learned from each separate job and stress your current desire to blend your experiences into a long-term, stable career. Describe how you are looking for a company where you can hunker down and commit for the long haul.

It may take you some time and self-exploration to identify it, but there are always some aspects of your work history that carry a positive spin. Don�t be afraid to dwell on your strong points no matter how unimpressive you fear your prior jobs may seem.