

Answering the "Why Did You Leave Your Last Job?" Question Like a Pro

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There are no easy questions in a job interview, but some are trickier than others. Explaining why you left your last job – or why you want to leave your current position – is the perfect example.

Perhaps you worked for a toxic boss, or you met obstacles on your way up the ladder. Maybe you were just uninterested in continuing that type of work. Unlike questions about your skill sets or why you are pursuing a new opportunity – both which allow you to discuss yourself in a positive light – asking about your departure calls for you to address aspects of your previous job that left you unsatisfied.

With so much at stake in this single question, it's crucial to respond properly. Here are a few strategies to keep in mind when tackling this tough question:

Stay Positive

Maybe you worked for the worst person on the planet at your last job, but that's not something you want to discuss in an interview. It is inappropriate to speak poorly of previous managers, co-workers, or the company and implies that you are immature and difficult to manage. These are not the images you want to project. Instead, speak broadly about company goals or mention that you disagree with the direction the business is pursuing. Use it as a chance to discuss how much you like this company's business strategy and how your personality would be a good culture fit. Doing so highlights your business-savvy and demonstrates your knowledge of the organization.

Less is More

Although it is important to be truthful, there is no need to detail every single event that led to your decision to leave. Let's say you were frustrated by a lack of opportunities. Start off by describing some of the things you accomplished, then pivot to saying how you no longer have opportunities to learn and develop your skills. Bonus points if you can tie your answer back to why the job you're applying for is a better fit and will offer you new, exciting opportunities. This is especially important if you were fired from your previous position. While many candidates fear that this perceived black mark will make it impossible for them to find a new job, that's just not the case. If you were fired, focus on discussing what the experience taught you. The ability to learn from your mistakes and become a better employee is desirable to a hiring manager.

Practice

Tone is critical when discussing why you left a previous job. It's important to be honest but not overly frank in responding to this question. Don't let the actual interview be the first time you address the question, especially if you're nervous about how to respond. Conduct mock interviews with family and friends to practice giving a short, clear, and unemotional response.

Remember, everyone has left a job for one reason or another. Regardless of your reason, be ready to use this question to highlight how your past experiences prepared you to become the perfect candidate for the job.

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