

How Do I Explain Being Laid Off?

J.T. & Dale; December 4, 2010; King Features Syndicate, Inc.

Dear J.T. and Dale: I took a job as a sales assistant a few months ago. Yesterday, I was laid off because they are restructuring. Do I note that information on my resume or cover letter? What do I say? How do I explain it if I make it to interviews? — Nellie

Dale: It hurts me to say this, Nellie, but even in this economy, where layoffs are so common, it's not unusual for a hiring manager to be suspicious of someone who is out of work. There is a lingering belief, perhaps not even conscious, that truly first-rate employees don't get let go, or should have anticipated the problem and moved on. So, if the facts support it, you would say in your cover letter that you were caught up in a major restructuring and that your entire division (or department) was eliminated. This makes it clear that the layoff truly had nothing to do with your work.



J.T.: On the other hand, Nellie, a layoff from a restructuring is a perfectly logical reason for you to be looking for work. So logical that I disagree with Dale; I doubt that hiring managers first reaction will be skepticism — most will accept the facts you give them. If ever there was a good time to offer a restructuring as an explanation, this is it. The key is to stay objective when describing your situation. On your resume, simply state that you were “laid off in a restructuring.” That gives hiring managers all they need to know — although I wouldn't argue with a sentence in the cover letter like the one Dale is suggesting. Then, when it comes to interviews, the key is to focus on what you want to do next. What skills do you want to leverage and how do you plan to save and/or make the company money. If you can articulate your value, hiring managers won't be thinking about why you are laid off.