

November 2001  
www.AFPonline.org



## Why Are You Seeking a New Job?

Matt Bud, Chairman, The Financial Executives Networking Group

**D**ownsized — rightsized — laid off — fired — reduction-in-force — I think you have to agree that the world has developed a very colorful vocabulary to describe those things that have caused many financial professionals to explain why they're actively job searching. If a prospect enters an interview situation with a cast on her arm, she wouldn't hesitate much to explain how it happened. Furthermore, I am pretty sure that she would provide an explanation without any prompting. It is just such an obvious thing that it cries out for commentary. And, as long as the accident didn't happen in any embarrassing manner, such as sheer clumsiness, I don't think that there would be much hesitation in her voice as she delivered the story.

The same thing is not true about why you may have left your last employer, however. And for some reason, it just doesn't occur to us to provide an explanation unless an interviewer requests such information. But delving into the reasons for your last job departure is an obvious avenue an interviewer will want to pursue with you. The choice you have to make is whether you provide the answer in a positive manner or whether you wait until you are cornered and forced to offer one.

When you have an obvious question such as this "hanging out there" during a conversation, you can be well assured that the other party may not be listening fully to what you are saying. They have this question that they are trying to find a polite way to ask and they are just waiting for an opportunity to throw that ball your way. If you want them to focus on the core communication you have prepared, you

***FENG is an international organization of CFOs, controllers, and vice presidents of finance, treasury, tax, and mergers and acquisitions. AFP is the official sponsor of this organization.***

have to get the miscellaneous questions out of the way.

It isn't even that the reason you are looking for a new job is really all that important. (Unless of course you were fired for cause, and then you probably aren't going to tell them anyway.) It is just that potential employers are interested in why

you were let go, fired, terminated, etc.

If you have been part of a downsizing, rightsizing, or some other "sizing," the question really isn't why you are looking for another job, but rather why you were picked and not someone else.

What you need to do is focus on the positives of your most recent work experience. For example: "I was working for an Internet company most recently, and as I am sure you can imagine, funding simply dried up. But because of the frenetic nature of start-ups I got more work experience in that year than I could have gotten anywhere else." This example provides a positive spin on a short-term job.

Whatever it is about your career that, on reflection, needs an explanation, volunteer the information. If you were with one firm for 30 years, it cries out for an explanation. If you have had five jobs in the past five years, you need to explain that, too. But, keep it short and keep it positive. Focus on the knowledge you gained. Focus on your ability to manage people and situations. These are the skills that any rational employer wants and needs. Just as Ricky Ricardo would tell Lucy, "You got some 'splaining to do."

Be smart and address obvious issues head-on so they in no way diminish the valuable time you have in an interview. When you get that far, it is a shame to blow it. ●