

Fired From Last Job. Now What?



Nearly every successful person has been fired at least once. Your reaction to being fired will determine whether your being fired is an asset or a liability.

Being fired. . .

- Can happen to anyone who has a job.
- Occurs often in today's ever-changing labor market. These days there is no job security. In a sense, every job is a temporary job.
- Can happen for good reasons or silly reasons. In the real world, people are fired for all kinds of reasons that may be justified or unjust. Sometimes employees are fired for immoral, or even illegal, reasons.
- Feels worse than being downsized or laid-off because of the embarrassment and shame of being singled out. This is a normal reaction and often leads to anger.

Negative emotions

Being fired can be one of the most stressful events in a person's life, akin to the breakup of a marriage or the death of a loved one. It can trigger a wide range of negative emotions, including shock, disbelief, anger, fear for the future, guilt and sadness.

During this difficult period of your life, it is *you who must find safe ways to express your emotions*, to let out your anger or sorrow without sabotaging the job search.



Anger is the most frequent emotion that follows being fired.

Experts say that although it's better to let it out and not keep it bottled up, it's important to find constructive ways of venting anger. Find a safety valve, a trusted friend who will listen while you vent and fume and who won't feel threatened by your angry demeanor. A pastor, therapist or other trained professional can help you find ways to burn off the anger, so that it doesn't get in the way of your finding another job.

Sometimes people feel intense anger and animosity toward the person who fired them. But there is no future in getting back at people. In general, avoid saying bad things about your boss or the last company you worked for.

Take care of your negative feelings before you start talking with potential employers. If you allow negative emotions to spill over into job interviews, your chances of success are greatly reduced.

Illegal dismissal

There is no law that says an employer has to give a reason for firing an employee. However, in recent decades laws have been passed at the federal and state levels to protect employees against discrimination. For instance, it is generally illegal to fire employees because of their age, skin color, race, national origin, religious beliefs, handicap, gender or sexual orientation.



Cases alleging discrimination are often reported on television and in the newspapers, but behind the sensationalism such cases are generally lengthy and quite expensive. Be aware that being involved in a lawsuit against your former employer is likely to hinder your job search. Potential employers may be reluctant to hire someone who appears to be a litigious troublemaker and difficult to get along with.

Having said that, there may be times when you should sue. An expert in employment law can help you decide:

- Discuss the facts of your case with a counselor at your local office of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.
- The laws governing employment are complex and involved. An attorney who specializes in employment law will be able to advise you on the odds of winning a lawsuit and what the compensation is likely to be.

The National Employment Lawyers Association can refer you to attorneys in your town who specialize in employment law. For information on how to find a lawyer in your area go to www.nela.org.

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Why did it happen?

Sometimes there is no reasonable explanation. However, your chances of finding another job improve greatly if you can:

- ✓ Identify the reason(s) you were fired.
- ✓ Reassure potential employers that the problem has been fixed.

For instance, suppose an employee was dismissed for being consistently late for work. The employer and employee each have their own point of view of what really happened:

Employer's point of view:

"Work was not carried out effectively because the employee's presence at the job site could not be relied upon."

Employee's point of view:

"Car continually broke down. It was my transportation that was unreliable."

Regardless of who was right and who was wrong – or who should be blamed – *it is to the employee's advantage to address the problem* and to do everything possible to prevent it from recurring.



Figuring out what went wrong and fixing it

Your objective is to put your own point of view temporarily on the back burner and see if you can learn the employer's rationale behind the decision to let you go. If you know the employer's reasons, then you are well on the road to fixing the problem.

Often, employers try to explain what the problem was, but there are times when being fired can be as surprising as a lightning bolt from a blue sky. If you're not sure why you were dismissed, it may be worthwhile to contact your employer. Explain that you're trying to avoid repeating the same mistakes by understanding specific problem areas in which you could do things differently.

How to tell others about the dismissal

Telling future employers:

- The application form is a legal document and it is important to be honest. Do not misrepresent your work history on your application form, on your résumé or during job interviews.
- When asked about your reasons for leaving a past job, avoid responding with negative words such as "Fired." Use a neutral phrase such as "Let go involuntarily" or "Involuntarily dismissed."
- At interviews, be prepared to answer questions about why you were dismissed. In one sentence, summarize the problem that led to the dismissal; describe how you have



- solved it and explain why it will not affect your future job performance.
- Do not vent anger or whine about your former boss or co-workers. Avoid making negative comments about past employers.
- Review the **JobSearch Guide *How to Deal with Negative Information***.

Telling friends and family:

Friends and family need to know that you are no longer working so that they can support your search for a new job. Since most new jobs come from word-of-mouth contacts, it is important for people to know that you are job-hunting, so let people know that you are looking.

However, it is important for you to contain negative information and emotions about being fired. Share that information only with a trusted family member or friend, so that your job search will be helped, not hindered.

Is it time for a whole new start?

Launch yourself toward a successful future by evaluating all the possibilities that are now open to you.

Review the following **JobSearch Guides**:

- ***How to Determine Your Skills***.
- ***How to Relocate to Another Community***.
- ***Pluses & Minuses of Temporary Employment***. Sometimes, it's easier to re-establish a good work record by using this route.

Be open to new ideas and review other **JobSearch Guides** that interest you.

Is it time for a new attitude?

Attitude is an important part of how well we do our work and how others perceive us. The leading reason that people get fired is that they are perceived as having a "bad attitude".

Attitude is among the first things that co-workers and employers notice about you, including whether you are:



- ✓ Pleasant to have around
- ✓ Positive
- ✓ Enthusiastic
- ✓ Interested in others besides yourself.
- ✓ Full of energy

It is particularly important for someone who has been unfairly dismissed not to project an angry or depressed, whining attitude.

Sometimes our own attitudes can be invisible to us. We may not see how we are sabotaging our lives.

Ask a trusted friend whose opinion you value what they think of:

- Your general attitude
- Your attitude toward your former employer
- Your attitude toward the job-hunt

Internet resources



www.jobsearch.about.com/od/salary/a/fired.htm -- Valuable general information for people who have been fired.

www.employeeissues.com/fired_job.htm -- Information on employee legal rights.

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewfired.htm> -- How to answer questions about your firing in a job interview.