

Ask the Career Coach: Jumping Back Into the Work Force

How does taking time off after being laid off affect your chances at finding work?

By [Lisa Chenofsky Singer](#)

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Dear Career Coach Lisa,

I was laid off over a year ago. I decided to take some time off, approximately 6 months, before beginning my search for a new job. Is it true that the longer you are out of a job, the harder it is to get back in?

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The longer you are out the more you will need to sell yourself based on your applicable skills relative to the market you want to re-enter. You need to be comfortable in telling your story. Your story needs to show how your time off and your previous work experience has prepared you for the next opportunity. You will need to sell your skills and abilities forward for the demands of this current market.

There will be some individuals that will hold it against you for being unemployed and that will be their loss. The critical element is how you communicate and how comfortable you are with where you are. In [Ask the Career Coach: Effective Unemployment](#), I said "Live it, breathe it and feel good about what you are doing during your transition period."

In today's market, networking will be a critical component of your job search strategy. How you are perceived, the activities you are involved in and what your reputation is will speak volumes about you to people who connect you and reference you for opportunities.

It is important to recalibrate your expectations in re-entering the job market. If your discipline has taken a heavy hit during this period, you may need to review your full set of skills and look to see how they fit into other opportunities.

When reviewing your skills, take into consideration what activities you have been involved in during this period. Are you engaged in any community activities or social causes, either in your field or another field, on a volunteer basis? Have you been gaining other additional skills? What have you been doing?

Perhaps you were attending to responsibilities for a family member or friend? Such activities may involve rearranging finances, arranging for elder care, dealing with a medical issue – all of which require business related skills. Some of your activities may have involved advocating, teaching, writing, speaking, coordinating, event planning, managing networks and, sometimes, fundraising—all applicable skills for today's job market. You can create a pro bono experience section on your resume showing how your non-paid experiences are applicable to the opportunity you are applying for now.

Regardless of whether you are working in a paid role or active in a volunteer role, you are either maintaining or gaining skills. You are building relationships or, as I like to say, "cultivating relationships for the long term." The job market will always be changing, the key is to understand yourself and look beyond the immediate moment. Have both short and long term plans for your career. You need to plan.

So think about the time off that you have taken and what you have accomplished during this time. Then network with every opportunity you have and communicate your message. Be patient as

networking is a long term process. You need to establish the relationship and help it to grow over time into a trusted and valuable one. This is a cultivated network.

About this column: "Ask the Career Coach" is a column dedicated to those who may be in transition or wrestling with a career dilemma by providing a forum for advice. We welcome your questions. Please send them to CareerCoachLisa@gmail.com. Lisa Chenofsky Singer is a Millburn-Short Hills resident and the founder of Chenofsky Singer & Associates LLC. She offers Executive and Career Management Coaching and Human Resources Consulting, writes and speaks on job search and career-related topics. Her web site is www.ChenofskySinger.com.