

## 4 Ways to Get Back to Work After a Long Period of Unemployment

2017 November 2



### How to Find a Job After a Long Period of Unemployment

One sad reality of the job market today is that the long-term unemployed get a raw deal. The longer you've been out of work, the harder it is to find a job.

By some estimates, those who have been unemployed for six months or longer must send out 3.5 times as many resumes as those who have been unemployed for less than six months.

There are a number of reasons why people end up unemployed for lengthy periods of time, from being downsized to returning to school to taking time off to care for a loved one.

Unfortunately, employers don't tend to view the situation with much nuance. They see a long gap in employment history, and they immediately assume the worst.

This is not to say that the long-term unemployed can never bounce back. With some smart maneuvering, it's possible to return to the workforce no matter how long you've been gone.

Here are four tips to get you started on the way to a new job after six months or more of unemployment:

## 1. Address the Gap

It's true that your employment gap is your worst enemy, but you can't hide it. Your new employer is more likely than not to find out about your fib, and they won't hesitate to boot you for it. No one likes a liar, especially not as an employee.

You don't have to reserve a spot on your resume for the gap. Simply include accurate dates in your work history.

Use your cover letter to get out ahead of the gap by explicitly mentioning it. Don't dwell on it – your cover letter should mainly be used to make a case for why you're a good fit.

Inserting 2-3 sentences to acknowledge the gap and briefly summarize how you spent your time during unemployment is enough. You can offer a more in-depth story about your time unemployed during phone screenings and in-person interviews.

What should your in-depth gap story cover? Ideally, you'll have spent your unemployment productively. Emphasize volunteer work, voluntary training, schooling, and any other activities that kept your skills sharp or introduced you to new skills.

If you took time off to raise children or care for a sick loved one, you can talk about the transferable skills you learned from these scenarios, like the logistics of coordinating care or the customer service skills you picked up while parenting.

If you look back at your unemployed time and can't seem to find any productive periods, you'll need to start playing catch up right away. Volunteer for organizations that are relevant to your desired role. Take some online learning courses to brush up on your skills.

Anything you can do to contribute to your professional acumen will make your period of unemployment that much less of a problem to prospective employers.

## 2. Leverage Your Network

It's estimated that as much as 85 percent of all jobs are filled through networking rather than blind applications. Networking is important for job seekers at any stage of their career and in any situation, but it's especially critical for those who have been away from the workforce for a while.

Networking allows you to make personal contact with hiring influencers at target organizations. The personal aspect of these connections is why networking matters: When decision-makers know you on a more personal level, they'll have an easier time overlooking your employment gap.

Start by getting in touch with contacts already in your network. Invite them out to coffee or lunch – your treat, of course – to talk shop. You want to be upfront about your search for a job so that they can point you in the right direction. However, you need to remember that networking is a two-way street.

You have to be prepared to offer some sort of value to your contact in return, if you haven't already helped them out previously. You may not be able to provide such value at the time, but you definitely need to keep your contact in mind for when you have opportunities to return the favor down the road.

You should also reach out to what Elissa Kuykendall of career support firm ArcVida calls "near-peers." These are people at target employers who are at your desired level or a step above your desired level. These people can help you get your foot in the door at companies for which you'd like to work.

Start the relationship off by requesting informational interviews with near-peers. In these interviews, your goal is not to aggressively pitch yourself for a role; instead, you want to learn more about the organization and its culture. Nurture these relationships as you would any other professional contact, and they may lead to referrals.

### **3. Go Independent**

One way to get back into the game is to start freelancing in your desired field. As a freelancer, you'll likely be able to avoid conversations about your work history. Prospective clients will be more interested in your accomplishments and your portfolio of previous work than in your resume.

Not only will freelancing help you kick-start your income stream, but it may even lead to full-time work with a happy client. Alternatively, you can use the experience you build as a freelancer to strengthen your resume when you return to the job hunt. Your time as a successful freelancer will show prospective employers that despite your employment gap, you're still capable of adding value to their business.

If you've ever wanted to be an entrepreneur, you may also consider taking the opportunity to launch your very own startup. Of course, that's a big decision, not to be taken lightly. Don't just start a business because you can't get work anywhere else. Start a business because it's your passion.

### **4. Make a Career Change**

Finally, you may choose to use your re-entrance into the workforce as a chance to make a career change. Many professionals are prevented from making career changes by the fact that switching roles or industries often entails a necessary step down in terms of seniority and pay.

As a person who has been out of work for some time, you're in a unique position: It's not as big a blow to your career track or bank account to step onto a lower rung of the career ladder.

If you decide to go the career-change route, you'll want to focus on your transferrable skills when speaking to prospective employers.

Emphasize how your previous work experience – as well as the things you've done while unemployed – can translate to the new industry or role. Be clear that you aren't applying for a less senior position out of desperation but rather out of genuine interest in this new career path.

–

Ultimately, the path that gets you back into the workforce will depend heavily on your specific situation. Approach the above tips as general guidelines and don't be afraid to tweak your strategy as needed. There's very little about the job hunt that is truly hard and fast, and that goes double for the long-term unemployed.