

# **Put the Pieces Together**

to answer the questions they will always ask

**Why are you leaving?**

**Why did you leave?**



Katherine Moody  
**Recruiter Insider Interview Secrets**

Please feel free to share this with other job seekers. My own experience and that of the job seekers I've coached has proven that this strategy for answering this critical question is essential and effective.

My wish for you is a fast and outrageously successful conclusion to your search.

---

*Copyright notice ©2017 Katherine Moody*

[Katherine@ConsultativeRecruiting.com](mailto:Katherine@ConsultativeRecruiting.com)

832.464.4447

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Introduction.....	4
Problem 1: Too Much Information (TMI).....	6
Problem 2: Not Enough Information.....	7
The Formula.....	8
Important Step! .....	10
What Worked For Me.....	13
Now It's Your Turn.....	15

# INTRODUCTION

---

---

## *How you answer this common interview question could win or lose you the job*

Every interview you have will undoubtedly include one or both of these questions:

- Why are you leaving your current job?
- Why did you leave your previous job?

As a recruiter, I ask this question many times a week. It's so sad that most job seekers give



really bad answers to the one question they can predict will be asked. Therefore, they blow this unique opportunity to differentiate themselves and stand out from the huge crowd of competitors for the job.

So if your current answer is bad, you're in good company. And the good news? The simple formula I'll show you in this special report will make it easy for you to give a powerful answer.

### **Critical Things to Consider**

I recommend you be prepared to answer it about every company on your resume. It's rare for interviewers to go back more than the last ten years or so, which is probably all you have on your resume.

But you never know when you might run into someone (like the partner I worked with at Heidrick & Struggles) who will want to know about every job you ever had. We lovingly

---

[For even more essential interviewing secrets, tips, techniques, strategies, check out this guide.](#)

referred to that as the “going back to the little log cabin in the woods where it all started” technique.

As you read through formula for a powerful answer, it may seem like a lot of information that will take a lot of time to convey. Practice this and you should not need more than 3-4 sentences.

I’ll show you how to build this answer around your brand to create powerful positive images that say powerful positive things about you in a question most job seekers typically dread. Answer this question with this simple formula and you will really differentiate yourself.

First, let me share two problems with typical candidate answers, so you can avoid them.

## PROBLEM 1: TOO MUCH INFORMATION (TMI)

---

It's critical to think through how you answer this question. I'm a total advocate for honesty, of course. At the same time, you may not want to go into all the ugly details just because they are the truth. It's critical to know when you are doing TMI and do some editing.

I've seen candidates lose the interview because they shared too much about the dirty laundry of their previous company. Everyone, and especially senior level executives and HR professionals, is expected to be discreet in what they share—after all they have access to a lot of confidential information about their company. So being indiscreet will raise real questions about your ability to keep confidences.



Secondly, sharing what should have been confidential information also raises questions about your judgment. Is that fair? Probably not, but it happens anyway!

Regardless of what position you want to fill, you are expected and required to have good judgment. Think about what spilling all the beans says about you (in case you're tired of the laundry metaphor). It raises questions about your judgment. After all, you don't know the person you're sitting across from in this interview. Should you really tell all to someone who might have some kind of connection to the person and/or company you're talking about? Do you really want to raise the red flag that says you don't exercise good judgment about what you say?

And think about what the interviewer may be thinking: *"Oh my gosh. What will this person say about us out into the world if we were to hire them and then they leave?"*

## PROBLEM 2: NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION

---

If your answer is very brief or rushed, it can give the interviewer a feeling that something isn't right. I've heard hiring managers say, "I just had a feeling there was something I wasn't being told."

What a bind! You can get in trouble for a complete explanation and in just as much trouble for an incomplete one! Here's how to create an answer that walks the line between those two problems. Even better, it makes you an even more desirable candidate.



Here I'm talking about using your answer to differentiate yourself from your competition, as well as give an honest answer that makes the interviewer feel comfortable and you feel confident because it's a good answer and an honest one. Almost no one answers using this formula. If you do, you will really set yourself apart.

# THE FORMULA

---

1. **As long as this is honest, it's great to hear that you liked the company and people you worked with.** This is a subtle signal that you get

along with others. Why does that matter? Because every hiring manager is evaluating whether you will be a good fit with the team during the whole interview. They are always asking whether they will like working with you. Set their mind to rest a bit by letting them know how you feel/felt about the people with whom you worked.



2. **What did you like about the job—company—what you got to do, etc.** Just pick one thing that will let you showcase your brand or special expertise. For example, you might say you loved the company and your boss because they trusted you to successfully implement new initiatives (or they respected your ability to manage change in the organization) and that's why you accomplished XYZ. You might say the entire department was first class and you learned best practices in XYZ that you can now share with your new company.
3. What if you didn't like the company, people, your boss, etc? That happens. So find something you did like. One of my job search clients was in that exact situation. What did she finally decide she could say she liked and still be honest? She loved the service the company provided – transportation for handicapped people to shopping, doctor appointments, etc. I'm sure you get the idea.
4. **Now you will want to mention what happened to your old job.** You can say there were budget problems, the department was moved to the Everglades, there was a RIF (reduction in force which just means layoffs, of course), etc.



**Be brief and honest.** Then tell them what that meant for you. If the department or company moved and you were offered a position at the new location, always say that. Otherwise you've left the interviewer wondering why the company didn't want you.

**If they didn't offer you a position, a brief explanation can make all the difference in how the interviewer perceives you**—perhaps there was another person who could do the job at the new location, you were not able to relocate, the company was cutting costs by keeping lower level staff, the new CEO brought in their own people, your division was closed down, etc.

**If your boss told you they regretted having to let you go, you might mention that.** It's also important to let the interviewer know it wasn't a one-person RIF—tell them the percentage or number of people who were also let go.

Whatever your answer is, be brief and honest. At the same time, consider what additional



questions and concerns your answer might raise. Answer them positively even if the interviewer doesn't ask. If you don't address them, the interviewer will answer them mentally and probably negatively. It is always safer for the interviewer to make the negative assumption—can't make a bad hiring decision that way.

Remember that the people interviewing you don't want to make a hiring mistake. Help them feel confident about you as their new employee.

## IMPORTANT STEP!

---

---

### *Your Pre-Interview Rehearsal*

After you've prepared these statements for your last three jobs, put them together and see if there is a common theme. And does that theme support your brand—what it is about you that makes you the best candidate?

If that theme is positive and reinforces your brand, you've created a real sales message out of what is typically a throw-away answer. It will help make you the stand-out candidate in the eyes of the hiring manager.



If it's negative, you can lose the opportunity. For example, I had a candidate who was the lead candidate for the position. She had the interview totally nailed--until she got to this question. The hiring manager asked why the candidate had left each of her last three positions.

After the interview, the interviewer (my client) called to let me know this candidate would not be moving forward in the process. She told me, when taken together, the answers seemed to indicate the candidate lacked flexibility and did not take initiative to figure out to make things work when budgets declined or business circumstances changed. The clear theme was that once things got tight or focus changed at a company, the candidate bailed out and took another position.

The company where she was interviewing happened to be going through its own budget tightening (which the candidate knew going into the interview).

As a result of her answers to this critical question, the hiring manager felt the candidate demonstrated she would not be resourceful and resilient enough to be successful in their environment. So despite the fact she had all the other qualifications, the candidate did not get the job.

When it comes to interviewing, it's good to remember: *Having strong answers to a question you will almost always be asked, in interviews and networking situations, makes you memorable...a candidate they have to have.*

### What if the Interviewer Wants More Information?



Sometimes a recruiter or hiring manager will ask for more details. Be sure you understand what specifically they would like to know. By all means, give them the level of detail they want; they let you know if they have more questions about what happened. Even with more detail, I think it pays to keep in mind the first two problems discussed earlier as you craft your answer. Truth is good. All the ugly details? Not so much!

### Last and Really, Really, Really Important

Check the tone and energy you use to talk about why you left or are considering leaving. Words are important, but a low energy tone can make even the best words seem false or give the impression you're hiding something.

I know it's tough to talk about why you're interviewing, but your energy should be at your typical level. It can be difficult (it is for all of us at the beginning), so practice to make sure you don't sound neither apologetic nor defensive. Don't lower your voice or your eyes. If you've been interviewing for a while, check how you feel when you hear that question. You've probably answered it many times, and may need to remind yourself to keep your energy up.

## How Not to Do It

I recently interviewed a candidate for a mid-management position, and of course, asked this question. I could tell from his resume that it probably had not been a good transition, and that he had probably been let go. With a good explanation, that wouldn't have stopped me from moving him forward to interview with the hiring manager.

The interview had gone well until we got to that question. His voice lowered, he spoke hesitantly, and gave me an explanation that had big gaps. It just didn't really answer my question and actually raised more questions about the situation. And it just got worse.

When I asked the question again, he gave me a different version of his previous answer with some new information. He didn't just add details; he actually changed the explanation. You don't want to change your answer if the question is the same! It makes us interviewers nervous. I started to feel there was something important he wasn't telling me.



So once again, despite the fact the candidate met the qualifications, they lost out on the opportunity.

By now, I'm sure you can see the mistakes this job seeker made. And you can avoid making those mistakes with this formula.

## WHAT WORKED FOR ME

---

---

I resigned from a job awhile ago because I really disagreed with how clients were treated. I felt I was being forced to act in a way that was not aligned with my values. However, I didn't feel it was necessary to share that particular perspective; plus, conveying that information could be seen as poor judgment, to say nothing of the danger of unknowingly saying that to someone who had some connection to my previous company.



So, I followed the formula above to create my statement. When it came to the reason I left, I realized there were actually a lot of things that I could honestly say. I really did want to have my own business, do some writing and try some new things. It actually was an opportune time to leave because the company was doing some resizing and had done several layoffs. While I had not yet been let go, I decided to capitalize on a unique time in my career and the company's situation and try something entrepreneurial.

My answer to that age-old always-asked question is in the table below. All of it is true. I don't want to spend any time saying things that aren't true! Obviously I didn't memorize this word for word. For me, when I do that, I seem to lose some of the energy and it becomes rote and bland. So sometimes it comes out a little differently—but not much.

What I Said	What I Want Them to Know
"XYZ is a fabulous company and working with them was a wonderful experience."	<i>I liked the company and my time there. I'm not harboring any ill will, and I can be gracious about the experience. I didn't leave as an angry person, nor am I going to throw the company or anyone working there under the bus.</i>
"I still talk to many of the people I worked with."	<i>People liked working with me. I got along with people, made friends, and I kept connected to some of them.</i>  <i>NOTE: If you're not still talking to people from a previous position, it's fine to just say you really enjoyed working with them. Again, honesty is good but honesty doesn't mean you tell ALL.</i>
"I got to work with and learn from top notch professionals in the industry, including my boss. We made a great team and he would tell you how his business benefited from my ability to make our clients incredibly happy so they kept coming back."	<i>Says something complimentary about the people at the company. It's very mature and professional to pay these kinds of compliments.</i>  <i>I'm also talking about my special skill—making clients so happy they kept coming back. That is tailored to what I knew would be important to the company I was interviewing with. And, of course, it's honest.</i>
"XYZ was going through some restructuring at that time."	<i>Here's what was happening with the company at this time.</i>
"While I was not yet impacted, I'm glad I saw it as a great time to leverage what I had learned about making clients so happy they came back time and again and go out on my	<i>Even though I survived the restructuring so far, I was pro-active and decided to go out on my own to try something new. And I'm glad I did--no regrets.</i>

own for a while."	<i>Notice the brand reinforcement!</i>
-------------------	--

## Now It's Your Turn

---

---

Please take 10-15 minutes to design your own answers to the question. It's more important than you might realize. Plus when you're prepared, you're more comfortable and confident in your answer. Recruiters and hiring managers love that!

### How Others Hear It

Once you've crafted your answers, I suggest recording yourself giving the answers you'll give as if you're in an interview. Pretend the interviewer is asking why you left your most recent job, why the job before that and why the job before that. Do it for at least 3-5 of your recent positions, ideally for the last 10 years of your experience.



Put all your answers together and call your answering machine, record on your computer or even better video yourself. When you play it back, you'll know if you need to make some modifications or if you're good to go!

You may want to modify your newly crafted answer based on feedback during interviews. You may want to modify it for different employment opportunities. Be alert to the best way to put an honest, upbeat and positive shine on your answers to this always-asked question. It will make the job search adventure easier and shorter.

Good luck! Let me know how it goes!

*Katherine*

<http://BestInterviewTips.com>

