



2025

Explaining Breaks in Your Career

**Smart Strategies for
Explaining Employment Gaps**

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Strategies for Explaining Breaks in Your Career



If you're taking the next step in your career this year, and you're already aware of a glaring gap in your employment history, don't panic. You're not alone and probably not at as much of a disadvantage as you'd think. Realistically, career timeline breaks are very common.

Around 62% of employees say they've had a gap at some point in their career. Sometimes gaps result from personal circumstances, health issues, or deciding to dive back into your education. Other times, they're a side-effect of something you can't control, like the pandemic, or a change in your company's hiring strategy.

It's natural to feel anxious about "explaining" these gaps to your next employer, particularly when the current job market is so competitive. But with the right preparation, discussing an employment gap doesn't have to feel like revealing a shameful secret. Sometimes, your story can make you more compelling to a potential employer.

Here's how you can confidently ensure you're ready to explain breaks in your career.

The Job Market Reality: Gaps Are Commonplace

The traditional "linear" career path is becoming somewhat outdated. Today's employees don't always progress steadily from one role to another. Most people have career moments when they need to pause, pivot, or change something.

Career timeline breaks are now standard due to shifting priorities, unexpected life changes, or the need to regroup. It's not because people today are lazy, but because their lives and priorities don't always follow a tidy path.

The good news is that most employers understand. They're increasingly open to hearing career pause explanations that are open, honest, or backed by a specific purpose.

However, some business leaders expect a more "in-depth" explanation than others. In certain industries, particularly where hiring cycles are extending, you might need to explain yourself repeatedly. Still, they will likely listen if you present your story with confidence, clarity, and a sense of growth.

The Types of Employment Gaps and Their Specific Challenges

Employment gaps happen for many different reasons. The reason behind your break shapes how you talk about it, and understanding that from the start can help you feel more confident and less stuck. For instance:

Family-Related Gaps (Like Parental Leave Or Caregiving):

You might worry that employers will question your availability or commitment, but don't overlook what you have gained. During these gaps, you may have gained empathy, learned how to stay organised under pressure, and mastered navigating emotional situations.

Health-Related Gaps (For Yourself Or Someone Else):

Gaps related to health can be difficult to talk about. You don't necessarily have to share personal details if you have to take time out to focus on your wellbeing (or your family). Focus on the fact that you're ready to re-engage in the workplace. Sometimes, you might also be able to draw attention to how the experience made you more resilient or motivated.

Education Or Retraining Gaps:

This is one of the easiest types of career break explanations to frame. Upskilling shows initiative. Make sure you link what you've learned to the job you're now pursuing. If you've switched industries or roles, you can highlight how you had to step back, reorient, and develop new skills to ensure you were ready for the next stage in your career.

Voluntary Breaks:

Taking a break for yourself doesn't make you less committed. It can lead to renewed energy and perspective. If you gained life experience, worked on a personal project, or just recharged, talk about what that gave you, not just what you stepped away from.

Layoffs and Economic Downturns:

These are more common than ever, especially post-pandemic. What matters is how you used the time. Did you network, consult, take a course, or explore new roles? Share that. Employers respect candidates who take setbacks and stay proactive.

Pre-Interview Strategies: Addressing Gaps on Your CV

If you're worried about explaining employment gaps, remember you don't necessarily have to wait until you're face-to-face with an interviewer to address the issue. Your resume, cover letter, and even your employer brand online can clarify your career story.

Updating Your Resume and Cover Letter

The first step is updating your CV to reduce the focus on your career gaps. If you've had multiple career timeline breaks, consider a skills-based or functional format. That way, you can focus on what you can do and what you've achieved rather than "when" you did certain things.

If you need to follow a chronological layout, try mentioning the years when you accomplished certain things rather than exact dates. It's also worth highlighting your proactive work during those career gaps.

Maybe you completed a certification online, volunteered for a local community group, or did some freelance work part-time. Combine your updated resume with an effective cover letter. You can acknowledge the gap in your cover letter, briefly explain its reasoning, and then focus on what you gained. Finally, explain why you're excited and ready to explore the new opportunity.

Optimising Your Online Brand

Most companies will check your online profiles when considering you for a role, as well as your CV and cover letter. Usually, that means tracking down your LinkedIn account. The good news is that LinkedIn allows you to add career pauses (with reasons) to your profile.

You can label the break (e.g., “Parental Leave,” “Career Transition,” “Professional Development”) and include a short description.

However, you choose to label your breaks, make sure your message is consistent across platforms. If an employer sees a professional gap on LinkedIn that is explained differently in your resume, it can raise unnecessary questions.

Think About the Applicant Tracking Systems

Most employers use Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to filter CVs before a human sees them. These systems can flag unexplained CV employment history gaps, so prepare accordingly:

- Use keywords from the job description
- Fill in the gap periods with anything relevant, learning, volunteering, or consulting
- Avoid large blank spots with no explanation at all

A well-structured resume helps you pass the first round and sets the stage for a more confident conversation later.

Discussing Gaps Confidently During an Interview

Interviews are often stressful enough without the added worry of having to explain your career timeline break. But you don't need to dread the question. All you need to do is ensure you're prepared to explain your story confidently.

Prepare a Clear, Honest Explanation

Reflect on your employment gap before entering an interview (or logging in to one). What was happening during that time? What did you learn? How did you grow?

You don't need to go in with a defensive mindset. Instead, think about how you can give the interviewer a clear, honest insight into what's happened throughout your career.

Don't avoid the question; explain yourself clearly and honestly. The PAR method can help with this (Problem, Action, Result):

- **Problem:** Briefly state the reason for your gap.
- **Action:** Explain what you did then, the skills gained, courses taken, and personal development you achieved.
- **Result:** Discuss how you're better prepared and ready for this new role.

Emphasize Transferable Skills and Current Value

Whatever the reason behind your career break, there's a good chance you picked up some valuable skills. They may not be obvious technical skills, like new data analysis abilities or a new certification. However, they could still be worthwhile.

You might have learned how to communicate more effectively when travelling worldwide. Maybe you became more resilient and emotionally intelligent when caring with a sick family member. Perhaps you learned how to manage your time more effectively. Draw attention to the transferrable skills that make you a great choice for your chosen role. Pivot back to the present whenever possible, too, talking about the relevant experience you already gained in other roles or all the new abilities you have to bring to the table after a period of learning.

Tackle Concerns Head-On

There's a chance that your interviewer might have some concerns about your gap, particularly if you've been out of the industry for a while. They may worry that your skills have become outdated or you're unaware of the latest industry changes.

Address those concerns directly. Talk about what you've done to stay current, whether taking online courses, updating your certifications, or attending industry events. Maybe you're following relevant thought leaders online or networking with professional peers.

You could even do some pre-interview homework to be extra prepared. Please read about the topics affecting your industry online and be ready to share your thoughts and opinions. That shows your future employer that you're staying proactive.

Turning Career Gaps into Strengths

One of the best things you can do now is stop thinking of your employment gap as a setback. If you view it as a black mark on your CV resume, you will also present the wrong perspective to interviewers.

The key to success is reframing the narrative. Look at your professional gap not just as time away from work, but as a valuable chapter of your life. Find ways to:

- **Introduce New Skills:** Highlight all the skills you've developed, from technical skills to soft skills like agility, resilience, or just strong communication skills.
- **Show Proactivity:** Reassure future employers that you weren't just sitting back and relaxing during your break. Discuss how you explored volunteering opportunities, took online courses, built your network, or worked on yourself.
- **Connect to Company Values:** Show how your growth during your break aligns perfectly with the company's mission. For instance, volunteering for your local community could resonate with a company focused on positive impact.
- **Show Clarity:** Sometimes, stepping back from work helps you see the bigger picture clearly. If you used that time to reassess where you want to be and confirm your priorities, share that with your potential employer.
- **Demonstrate Commitment to Growth:** Even if you fell behind on training during your gap, show your potential employer that you're keen to learn and grow now. Tell them about how you're seeking out new courses, mentoring opportunities, and development strategies.

Address your employment gap from a positive, confident perspective, and it's much less likely to drive potential job offers out of your hands.

Embracing Your Complete Career Story

Explaining gaps in your employment can feel daunting. You don't want your future employer to overlook you because your career path hasn't been linear.

Fortunately, most employers now expect to interview candidates with career gaps. They're not opposed to hiring people with breaks in their employment. They want you to explain the situation clearly, highlight what you gained from it, and show them that you're ready for the next stage in your growth.

Your career journey, including its pauses, reflects your resilience and adaptability. Embrace your complete story confidently, and let it propel you toward new opportunities.

A little about Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk If:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

Contact

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