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How to Evaluate a Resume with Employment Gaps



As a recruiter, you'll probably see every type of resume under the sun. When it comes to resume gaps, how do you approach those? Evaluating potential employees has to be a holistic process these days because jumps between jobs, and industries are growing more common. These resume gaps normally happen when a candidate leaves a job for personal obligations or for larger economic trends that changed the way certain industries work (for example, a global pandemic!)

To build an inclusive workplace culture, recruiters should know how to evaluate a resume with multiple employment gaps. Work pauses are a fact of life, especially for women, so we need to treat them as normal as opposed to counting them against a candidate. Evaluating resumes with employment gaps is a necessary skill because you might be excluding possible employees who would add a lot to your company.

When companies make a commitment to be an equal opportunity employer, this means more than just hitting diversity targets (inclusion, the word is inclusion). It means taking applicants seriously even when they don't look perfect. Understanding how to evaluate resumes with lots of employment gaps can kickstart this part of a new, inclusive hiring

WHAT EMPLOYMENT GAPS ON RESUMES MEAN

Employment gaps stem from a variety of personal and societal issues. After the recession of 2008, several industries were slow to bounce back and many former employees were left out of the economic revitalization from the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#). When these people were able to get back to work, it was they had to figure out how to re-enter the job market under different circumstances.

This is going to be an ongoing problem for people because of the [coronavirus pandemic](#). Although many industries were able to transfer to working remote, or reopen under different conditions, professionals in the hospitality and events industry are still somewhat on hold. Even if a hotel reopens, they might not choose to bring back all employees. This means hotel employees may instead choose to pursue jobs in different industries that they feel are more stable and resistant to economic downturns. For example, roles and industries where [remote work](#) is possible might be preferable to former hospitality industry employees. However, the job market is still pretty competitive right now, so a career change might be a longer pause than it would have been a few years ago. If a job-seeker wants to make a change during or post-pandemic, their resume will likely have some gaps that can be explained by coronavirus-caused layoffs or job changes.

Another reason there might be employment gaps on a resume is childbirth or relocating to take care of aging parents. When a new baby is added to the family, women are more often the primary caregivers and therefore more likely to pause their career to care for their child(ren). Women having to drop out of the workforce because of companies that don't have maternity leave policies was already common, and of the 700,000 parents who left the workforce in 2020 to care for their children, [two-thirds were mothers](#). It's up to recruitment managers and hiring managers to appeal to applicants who might pass over a job they're perfectly qualified for because they're worried about questions about their choices.

Some applicants choose to leave gaps on their resumes because they only want to include relevant work experience. People who have been in the workforce for a long time, but in and out of different industries, might be trying to make a career change. It makes sense (and [we've given this advice before](#)) to include what positions are most relevant to the job description. Even if the employee is re-entering the job market after a long absence, they may choose only to include certain jobs that are most relevant to the position for which they're applying.

ASSESSING APPLICANTS RE-ENTERING THE JOB MARKET

Since applicants with a lot of gaps on their resumes are a common occurrence, every recruiter and hiring manager should have the tools and understanding to evaluate them

Job-seekers who have taken a long break, and might also be looking to [change careers](#), have probably worked very hard to present themselves in the best light.

An applicant might only include years instead of months for the amount of time they worked at each company—this could help them avoid having to explain how long the gaps between their jobs were. In this case, a recruiter might want to know specifics, but the applicant might be indicating that they don't want to get into them for personal reasons.

It's important to respect an applicant's privacy in this situation when drafting interviewing questions, especially if they say they'd rather not discuss a certain gap. Setting boundaries between work and personal life early on will also reflect better on your company and ease the onboarding process for new hires.

Potential new hires who are ready and willing to discuss their resume gaps are also common. In general, people want to explain what might be confusing about their resumes if given the chance to get their foot in the door. Being forthcoming about resume gaps allows a potential employee to explain their career narratives in greater detail, and why they're looking to rejoin the workforce or make a career change.

A big indicator of a potential employee's success is the story that they can tell about their work experience on their resume, even if it has a lot of employment gaps. Instead of writing overly specific descriptions of their past jobs, they'll be able to write about their work as a story of transferable skills. If they can explain the ways they've learned and integrated new systems and skills in the past. It's less about the specific software and more about how willing they are to take on a challenge. Look for the larger trends of how they can learn and grow, as opposed to the names of software.

HIRING AND KEEPING GOOD EMPLOYEES

The number one reason to understand how to evaluate resumes with lots of employment gaps is that it will help you build a more inclusive workplace. This practice is especially helpful if you want to build a multigenerational workforce because older potential employees might have more gaps. Instead of pulling all the same kinds of candidates with boilerplate experience, recruiters should look at a diverse pool with different work backgrounds. A [2017 study](#) from the Boston Consulting Group concluded that diverse teams produced 19% more revenue than a non-diverse team. [Innovation](#) is a key driver of success, and a team of people with diverse backgrounds will also be able to attack projects with different ideas informed by a wider set of experiences. This also means more of your team members will be able to anticipate untapped markets and suggest growth strategies.

We all want to find amazing employees and build thriving, trustworthy workplaces, and in order to do that we have to look at non-traditional work backgrounds. If a resume with a lot of employment gaps comes across your desk, it doesn't mean they are unqualified. It means you have the potential to tap into all of the knowledge and expertise they picked up during those gaps and how they can benefit your company.



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