



Your Resume, Your Background—and Inconvenient Truths.

by Ed Maier

Recently, one of our former partners, Wa’el Bibi of Ottawa, Canada, asked a question in our alumni group on LinkedIn. His question was:

“Is AA an asset or a liability? --Is being a former AA employee an asset or liability when you look for a new job? I know it has been awhile since AA has diminished, but I would like to know if your association with the firm is negatively affecting job opportunities.”

Alums from around the globe submitted a variety of responses that were almost all resoundingly positive. As I read through the responses, I thought to ask the question—How do you handle “inconvenient truths” on your resume? This question often comes up when working with people who are transitioning jobs and careers.

First let me clarify. For example, a young man or woman might be out of the work force for an extended period of time to care for an elderly or ill parent. In another example, either might voluntarily remove themselves from the workforce for a number of years to care for children. A third example might be an experienced executive who takes time off to battle a serious illness or disease. None of these circumstances should have an effect on a hiring decision. However, I have often been asked how or if this should be presented in a resume. I think Wa’el’s question also falls in the inconvenient truth category.

I use the term “inconvenient truth” because I think it is an accurate term that describes facts that we may not like to talk about during the transition process. From dictionary.com, “inconvenient” is synonymous with “annoying, awkward, bothersome” and “truth” is simply “a verified or indisputable fact.” They exist in our past and we just hope they will go away or be ignored. They are experiences which we have had that we think are negative to search executives, recruiters or potential employers. They are true, because they happened. They are inconvenient because we might prefer not to mention them.

I believe in “Think straight. Talk straight.” Like many of you, it was one of the first things I learned at Arthur Andersen. I believe it applies here.

If you have a gap in your resume between jobs or careers the facts that support that gap should be explained. Truth should fill the gap. Unfilled gaps in a resume only cause lost time and productivity on the part of anyone who reviews your resume. They waste time trying to figure out what was in the gap. They might think you are hiding something. Worse yet, they presume the missing link is negative and toss your resume aside. Examples of descriptions that I have seen or heard which relate to the situations above are as follows:

- “1996-1998 – Cared for two elderly relatives who were suffering from long-term and debilitating diseases.”
- “2001 – Out of the workforce to assist spouse with baby twins born in January, 2001.”



- “2003-2005 – Under doctor’s orders, unable to work due to health-related issues which have since been completely corrected.”
- In another example, an executive had a significant gap in her resume for staying home to raise several children. She took advantage of that situation by explaining it and describing all of the skills she had to use in managing the family – budgeting, organization and scheduling, logistics management, etc.

The question “Is AA an Asset or a Liability?” does not create a gap in your resume. Your experience and successes in your career at Arthur Andersen should be clearly described. A recruiter, search executive or potential employer may perceive your association with the firm as negative to your professional reputation. If you think this is true, you should deal with it in your interview. Remember, you must plan for any interview. If you believe your experience at Arthur Andersen carries negative connotation for your professional reputation, you should plan to address it. Organize your thoughts and rehearse your comments as you plan for the interview. Naturally, you cannot know what is in your recruiter’s head. You can only ask if they require some clarification about your experience with the firm. Like everything else you plan for in an interview, you should plan a response for any inconvenient truth.

In closing, I thank Wa’el for asking the question. It reminded me once again of the value I received and, hopefully, passed on to others throughout my long career at Arthur Andersen. I will never consider my Arthur Andersen experiences as a liability. The experience I gained, the things I learned, the friends I made can only be considered assets. I hope in the spirit of stewardship that I created positive experiences for others, helped others expand their own learning and development and built relationships that others treasure, too.

As always, I am interested in your comments on these newsletter articles. Please write me at Ed@ThinkStraightTalkStraight.com with your ideas. Thanks.