

## How To Talk About Getting Fired In Your Next Job Interview

by *Chris Westfall*

On *Saturday Night Live* this weekend, Adam Sandler opened the show with a song about how he left it: He was fired. In 1995, the year he was terminated, Sandler's *Billy Madison* debuted at number one at the box office. In February of the following year, he released *Happy Gilmore* - another wildly successful comedy hit. How could somebody with that kind of track record be fired from SNL?

For NBC in 1995, the show's television ratings were down. The box office results didn't matter to the brass at the network.

Sandler's talents, skills and abilities were unquestionable. But his employment was a big question mark. Why?

### Right Place, Wrong Job?

If you've been fired, you know the disappointment, frustration and pain that can come with that decision. But is getting fired the end of the world? There's always more world to discover, when you can look past the pain of parting ways. Sometimes your job doesn't spark joy. Your unemployment could be a reflection of being surrounded by the wrong circumstances, the wrong people, or the wrong opportunity. Or, in Sandler's case, the wrong ratings.

Ultimately, Sandler had to discover what every transitioning employee must: *He wasn't his job*. Or his employer. His talents were not tied to a place, a producer, or a position. Those realizations aren't just for comedians and actors - these facts apply to everyone.

There are several takeaways that can help you to talk about being fired, in your next job interview:

1. **Getting Fired Is No Laughing Matter - But How Serious Is It, Really?:** There is a balancing act surrounding the psychology of being fired. On the one hand, it can feel catastrophic: the loss of income, identity and routine can be hard to handle. On the

other hand, people are fired everyday. People like Adam Sandler. And Chris Rock. Also, Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs, JK Rowling...the list goes on. While I don't want to minimize the impact of losing your job (it's an impact I have felt myself!) it's important to put things in perspective. Do you blame yourself for the weather, or the traffic on the road? Because those things are happening to you, much like the television ratings, revenue numbers or market factors. The financial crisis left many without work - was that a reflection on their character, skill set, or work ethic? No. People are let go for many different reasons. It doesn't make sense to try and discover every one of them, and analyze every nuance in the situation - even though it's totally normal to have that impulse. Beyond asking "Why me?" there's a more important question: "What's next?"

- 2. Don't Duck, When Talking About Getting Fired:** If you were fired for a reason, say so. For example, if you were consistently late for work, you argued with customers, dated the CFO or maybe even broke the law, don't try to dodge the facts. Your actions may be discovered in a background check or unexpected reference call. Better to own your behavior, and show how you've moved on. Trying to hide your past is not the way that you show you've come to terms with it. Remember, everyone has made mistakes! Every. One. Luckily, life is filled with second chances. Why not start by giving yourself one? Maybe an employer will do the same. The secret to overcoming your mistakes is sharing how you are dealing with your weaknesses. Was being fired a learning experience, or the symptom of an unchangeable character flaw? There are many people who have overcome great challenges, like addiction, bankruptcy, divorce and loss. Are these circumstances the result of some personality disorder, mental defect or shortcoming? No. We've all got our junk, as the song says in *Spring Awakening*. And if you're human, you're going to experience love, loss and everything in between. Doesn't mean your broken - it means you have some junk to deal with. *Just like everyone else on this planet.*
- 3. Touch and Go:** Oftentimes, in an interview, you will feel the impulse to over-explain why you were let go from your previous job. You don't need to trash your previous boss and

co-workers as part of a story that makes you a total victim. Remember, the damage of why you left your last job is almost always bigger in your mind than in the interviewer's. Leaders understand that people are let go - sometimes for good reason, sometimes for no discernible reason at all. Touch on why you left - explain what your potential employer needs to know - but don't go on to cast yourself as a helpless victim of circumstances. Don't waste time on why your boss was a jerk, or how those pesky customers just didn't see things your way. Companies are looking for solutions providers, not victims. In spite of your circumstances, or because of them: what's the solution you can provide? What have you learned, and how have you grown? Ever met someone who got divorced, only to find a deeper relationship and true soulmate in their second marriage? Sometimes past mistakes are needed, to point in the direction of even greater commitment. Have the conversation you need, in your next interview: focus on what you've learned, what you're doing differently, and what commitment you can offer to the interviewer that's right in front of you.

### The Best Approach For Talking About Being Fired

While it may not necessarily be required that you disclose that you were fired, that information may be uncovered in a reference call or background check. Stating the terms of your termination can be uncomfortable, but it doesn't have to be. Tell the truth, and show that you are a high-integrity employee. Be brief. Talk about what you've learned, and how you've changed, and how you can provide real solutions to your next employer.

Remember, even superstars like Adam Sandler have been fired. Like any loss, it's part of life. But it doesn't have to be a part of your identity. While being fired for any reason can be incredibly difficult, it doesn't have to define you. Find the courage to face the facts, share them briefly and clearly in the interview. Then, move on to what really matters in your career: making a difference in your next opportunity.

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