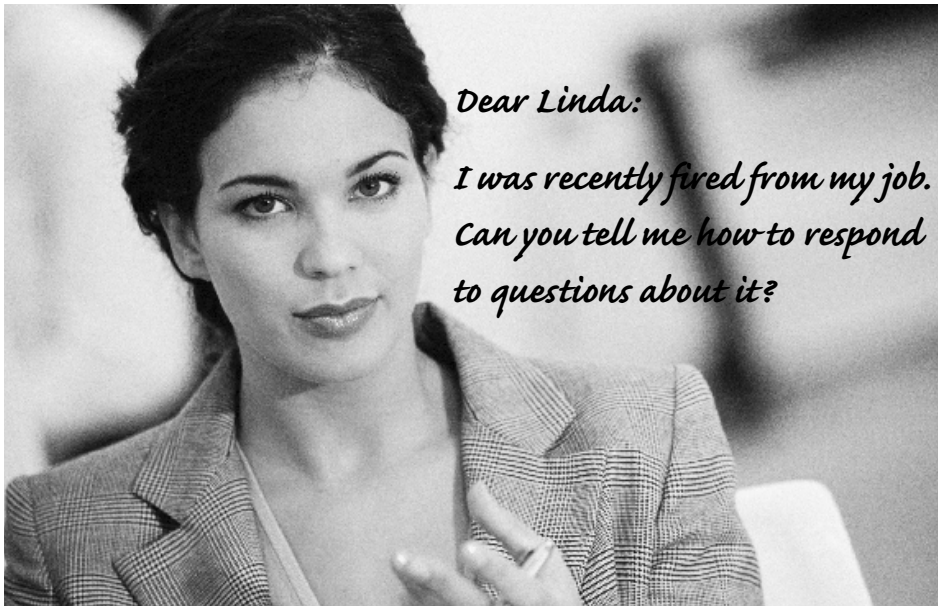


# YOUR CAREER

## Ask Linda



*Dear Linda:*

*I was recently fired from my job. Can you tell me how to respond to questions about it?*

Getting fired does not mean you will not get another job, but it does require some explanation. Employers will throw the red flag up if they are at all concerned the situation will repeat itself. You should come to an understanding about the dismissal and have a clear, objective explanation for why it was unique and will not happen again.

You may have been fired because of poor job performance. It is probably because you had the basic skills, but when your employer tried to advance you to more profitable tasks you lacked the training to do so. If you made a critical error it may have caused the final blow. Lawyers are busy people. Unless they take the time to teach you how to do the work, you are bound to fail.

Be up front about your skill level. If you stay in the same specialty, communicating your skills should be relatively easy. If you change fields, you should ask for a job description and tell them what tasks you think you can handle from the start.

Being in the wrong environment can be as much a hiring error as anything. Work relationships require chemistry just

like any other relationship. It helps to follow your intuition when it comes to deciding whether a personality type or a job is for you. Fitting in is sometimes more important than specific skills. You cannot change your personality, but you can learn new things.

A bad match can happen at anytime. While most people are sensitive to it, they expect that you will have a better sense for the right environment the next time. Pay attention to corporate culture and be honest about where you are most likely to succeed.

Being part of a conflict that cannot be resolved in your favor is out of your control. Sometimes people have to take sides and sometimes that means you lose. There are favorites in any organization. In most cases, upper level professionals will predominate over support staff, and people with seniority are usually favored over newcomers.

If you were caught in a conflict, do your best to explain what happened without taking sides and without divulging intimate facts about a potentially embarrassing situation. If you feel a need to set the

record straight do it with as little emotion as possible and don't be a gossip.

If you didn't think to cover these basics, do your best to back track even if it means calling the employer who dismissed you:

- Get the explanation straight so that all parties are on the same page. Be aware that sometimes employers give you one explanation when it really, in truth, is another. If you have to explain, this simply indicates that you expect there might be two explanations for the same event. Don't take sides; just use the opportunity to set the record straight.
- Get a reference in writing, and ask that a copy be made part of your personnel file. Sometimes in the heat of the moment it is uncomfortable to ask for a favor. Many companies no longer give out references, so this is a critical point of departure. In the absence of a reference you run the risk of having no corroboration at all.
- Don't hold a grudge. People and times change. You could be in the firing employer's company again so try and keep a positive outlook. Showing forgiveness will add to your credibility.
- If appropriate, agree with the employer that the parting was mutual. In most cases, the departure is the best solution for both parties. This is not unusual. Tell the employer that you hope if asked in the future, that he will represent it this way.
- Be as dignified and honorable as possible. Being emotional is counterproductive, unrewarding, and misleading.

Here are a few simple rules to follow when you are explaining your departure:

- Be honest. If you are asked why you left a position and you were fired, state the truth in facts. Then provide an explanation.
- Never bad mouth or blame the employer who dismissed you. What didn't work for one employer might seem inane to another, but it doesn't pay to show hatred or anger. Show disappointment, but do it diplomatically. You can do this by showing concern for both parties.
- Explain what you have learned from the situation, and that you have no reason to assume it will happen again. If you were

criticized for poor work performance, explain how you intend to overcome your weakness. If you were working in the wrong environment, talk about how that one was different from the one you are considering.

Is there a new job after fire? You bet there is. As long as you view your dismissal as an opportunity to get into an environment where you will excel, you will be able to convince a prospective employer of your value. Use the event to propel yourself into a positive future.

**Linda S. Jevahirian** is the Founder and President of *Legal Search & Management, Inc.*, a specialty firm that provides temporary and permanent recruiting to firms and corporations interested in improving their practice through the use of legal assistants.

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## Check out these Web Sites



- American Alliance of Paralegals, Inc., The .....<http://www.aapipara.org/index.htm>
- American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE) .....<http://www.aafpe.org>
- American Bar Association Standing Committee  
on Paralegals ..... <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/legalassistants/home.html> or [www.abaparalegals.org](http://www.abaparalegals.org)
- Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association ..... <http://www.detroitlawyer.org/>
- Grand Rapids Bar Association ..... <http://www.grbar.org/> or <http://firms.findlam.com/grbala/>
- Legal Assistant Management Association ..... <http://www.lamanet.org>
- Legal Assistant Today ..... <http://legalassistanttoday.com>
- Legal Assistants Association of Michigan, Inc. (LAAM) ..... <http://www.laamnet.org>
- Legal Assistants Section of the State Bar of Michigan ..... <http://www.michbar.org/legalassistants>
- Legal Assistants Section Job Bank ..... [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/la\\_sbm\\_jobs/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/la_sbm_jobs/)
- Macomb County Bar Association ..... <http://www.macombbar.org/>
- Michiana Paralegal Association, Inc. (MPA) ..... <http://paralegals.org/Michiana/home.html>
- National Association of Legal Assistants, Inc. (NALA) ..... <http://www.nala.org>
- National Federation of Paralegal Associations, Inc. (NFPA) ..... <http://www.paralegals.org>
- Oakland County Bar Association ..... <http://www.ocba.org/>
- Paralegal Gateway ..... <http://paralegalgateway.com/>
- State Bar of Michigan ..... <http://www.michbar.org>
- Washtenaw County Bar Association ..... <http://www.washbar.org/>