

May I speak badly about former employers in a job interview?

Of course not! Yet many applicants take this principle so literally that they end up harming themselves. Because: it takes two to tango – an unsatisfactory working relationship is always the responsibility of both the organisation and the employee. But how can you communicate the company's share appropriately without bad-mouthing it?

Peter Näf

Some applicants skirt around the reason for leaving out of consideration for their former employer to such an extent that one might almost suspect something dramatic had happened. In most cases, it turns out that it was nothing of the sort. After all, a poor fit between an organisation and an employee does occur (see the article "Change the situation – not yourself!").

Most people, including recruiters and hiring managers, have experienced such situations themselves. So do not shy away from addressing your experiences; they often meet with understanding.

Do pay attention, however, to how you communicate. The reason for leaving is not irrelevant to the new employer. After all, it will want to avoid a similar situation.

It's not about blame...

Clear communication is often blocked by the notion that one side must be at fault for the failed collaboration, as I described in the article "When it's time to move on in your career". A range of different reasons is possible.

Often, the reasons lie simply in differing personalities. I, for instance, have always struggled when managers hovered over my shoulder. As an

independent person, having freedom in how I carry out my tasks is essential to me.

When a collaboration did not work out, I had to ask myself some searching – and sometimes uncomfortable – questions: Did I check in the interviews whether my future managers would give me enough autonomy to work in my independent way? Or did I renegotiate the working conditions once it became apparent that this freedom was lacking? Should I perhaps even learn to accept a certain degree of control by managers – even as a reliable employee – as part of their leadership responsibility?

But: take responsibility

To understand why the collaboration failed, I had to acknowledge my own share and take responsibility for it – which often means admitting one's own weaknesses.

After sufficient reflection, the reason for leaving might be phrased as follows: My former employer was unable to offer me the degree of autonomy in my work that is important to me. And I did not check this thoroughly enough during the interviews.

This kind of self-critical analysis builds trust. But it also has consequences: I will not get the job if the hiring managers at the new company favour a more controlling leadership style.

Taking responsibility for oneself and standing by one's own needs does, after all, come at a price.

[#application](#) [#jobinterview](#) [#personalbranding](#)

Please find further articles on career topics on my homepage

<https://karrierecoaching.ch/en/articles/>

