

# Ask HR: Should I Disclose My History with Depression When an Interviewer Asks About Gaps in My Employment?

Publication info: HRNews ; Alexandria (Aug 13, 2021).

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## ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

According to the Anxiety & Depression Association of America, depression affects more than 16 million Americans. [...]when talking to recruiters, consider putting a positive spin on the gaps in employment. Since I have never worked in the office for this employer, can I ask for a cost-of-living raise to return to the office?

## FULL TEXT

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*SHRM President and Chief Executive Officer Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM-SCP, is answering HR questions as part of a series for USA Today.*

*Do you have an HR or work-related question you'd like him to answer? Submit it here.*

**I have a significant gap in employment based on my struggles with depression. Recruiters seem to pass me over when I reveal this. Over the past few years, I have struggled to find consistent work in my career field. Should I consider not sharing this truth about my employment gaps? –Sophie**

*Johnny C. Taylor, Jr.:* While it may be beyond frustrating, you are certainly not alone. According to the Anxiety & Depression Association of America, depression affects more than 16 million Americans. With the pandemic languishing, many employers are becoming increasingly aware of and empathetic to mental health issues, though I understand how difficult it can be to secure a job when you have employment gaps on your resume.

You aren't obligated to disclose your struggles with depression in an interview. In fact, I would recommend against it. Instead, focus on the job, why you are a good fit for the position and your value to the organization.

When you're interviewing, honesty is always the best policy. However, you can explain any gaps in employment without going into detail about your depression. For example, you could explain that you were dealing with an illness and had to take time off temporarily, and now you're reinvigorated and primed to re-enter the workforce.

Play up your relevant strengths and demonstrate how you positively impacted your previous employers.

I'll add: Until you re-establish your career footing, perhaps embrace taking a temporary assignment as a trial employment. It would give you an opportunity to assert your value and to evaluate your fit within the company.

Finally, when talking to recruiters, consider putting a positive spin on the gaps in employment. Share what you did during employment gaps to gain knowledge or experience in your career field. Were you able to volunteer during your breaks in employment? Or did you complete any coursework or training related to your career field during that time? Sharing these activities will show that you were still working, even if it wasn't in the traditional sense of the word. Best wishes in your career search.

**During the pandemic initially, I lost my job and my car broke down. I sold it because I couldn't afford the repairs and insurance. I eventually got hired for remote work, but now the company is returning workers to the office. I don't make enough to buy a reliable car yet. Since I have never worked in the office for this employer, can I ask for a cost-of-living raise to return to the office? Or an extension of remote-work authorization? –Earl**

*Johnny C. Taylor, Jr.:* You're probably not the only one facing this type of dilemma, so thanks for asking about it. There are several alternatives you may want to consider before approaching your employer for a cost-of-living raise

or an extension of remote work.

I would start by exploring other commuting options such as public transportation or carpooling. Depending on where you live, there may be feasible van pools or ride-share options. Additionally, your employer may offer commuter benefits toward public transportation costs. Some employers offer an internal company program where employees can connect regarding ride-sharing arrangements.

If you can't nail down a viable transportation solution, then reach out to your employer. Be forthright about your situation. Many employers have become more flexible, in response to the pandemic, as it relates to aiding their employees. Ask your employer if it has an emergency loan assistance program or if there is an option to get an advance on your pay.

If your position continues to be one that may be performed successfully remotely, your employer may also be open to continuing remote work. Remain open-minded and flexible as you search for a commuting solution.

I'll say this: While cost-of-living increases have been provided by employers in the past, they have become less common. Many employers strive to make their pay competitive, and this type of increase is not typically associated with transportation assistance. So you must be extremely careful about how you approach this conversation with your manager. As a relatively new employee, your manager could perceive your request as a sign that you are going to be a high-maintenance employee and could sour on you quickly.

Proceed cautiously. Good luck!

## DETAILS

<b>Subject:</b>	Mental depression; Public transportation; Careers; Employers; Employees; Employment; Pandemics; Cost of living adjustments
<b>Business indexing term:</b>	Subject: Careers Employers Employees Employment Cost of living adjustments
<b>Publication title:</b>	HRNews; Alexandria
<b>Publication year:</b>	2021
<b>Publication date:</b>	Aug 13, 2021
<b>Section:</b>	Organizational & Employee Development
<b>Publisher:</b>	Society for Human Resource Management
<b>Place of publication:</b>	Alexandria
<b>Country of publication:</b>	United States, Alexandria
<b>Publication subject:</b>	Business And Economics--Personnel Management
<b>ISSN:</b>	10473157
<b>Source type:</b>	Trade Journals
<b>Language of publication:</b>	English
<b>Document type:</b>	News

**ProQuest document ID:** 2561086059

**Document URL:** <https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/ask-hr-should-i-disclose-my-history-with/docview/2561086059/se-2?accountid=44910>

**Copyright:** Copyright Society for Human Resource Management Aug 13, 2021

**Last updated:** 2021-08-14

**Database:** ABI/INFORM Collection

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