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Lying on your résumé: A career killer

Here we go again! Just a couple of months ago Doug Martin had to resign from his position as assistant coach at Villanova University after “inaccuracies were discovered in his résumé.” In 2001, George O’Leary, former football coach for the University of Notre Dame, was fired after only five days on the job for lying on his résumé about a master’s degree he never earned and an exaggerated position on the University of New Hampshire football team.

In 2002, the president of the U.S. Olympic Committee, Sandra Baldwin, had to resign because she listed a degree that was not earned. Also in 2002, Kenneth Lonchar resigned as executive vice president and CFO of Veritas Software Corp. after allegations he made up a Master of Business Administration degree from Stanford University. The company’s stock dropped 15 percent after the news surfaced.

According to the “Houston Chronicle,” and reported by Jeannie Kever on June 19, 2010, “A top administrator at Texas A&M University resigned after he admitted lying about his academic credentials and military background.” Alexander Kemos had claimed to have a doctoral degree from Tufts University and to have been a former Navy SEAL. It was discovered both were misrepresentations.

Fabricating, exaggerating, embellishing and falsifying information on your résumé can be catastrophic to your career and jeopardize your future. In many cases, one lie almost always leads

to another and becomes a vicious cycle, which brings about embarrassment to the individual and the company. Employers are looking for candidates they can trust and who will bring honesty and integrity to the job and to the company.

It’s sad to say but, Steven Levitt, co-author of “Freakonomics” and a renowned economics professor at the University of Chicago, cites research suggesting more than 50 percent of people lie on their résumés. A study published in the journal, “Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking,” followed 119 college students ages 18 to 22. Results showed 92 percent of respondents indicated they had lied at least once on a résumé.

Experts in the field continue to point out it’s important to be honest on your résumé because the risk of being caught in a lie is so great it isn’t worth it. Richard C. Bayer, former CEO of the Five O’Clock Club career coaching and outplacement firm, points out, “You really don’t want to lie about anything because people do check, and you can get found out. If that happens, you won’t get hired, or worse, you’ll get fired.”

Two questions to now consider are why do job searchers lie on their résumé and what are the most common fabrications. Based on Internet research, the common reasons why people lie on their résumé are to appear more qualified, show more experience, enhance credibility and cover up gaps in work history. The most common fabrications are falsi-

fying academic credentials, padding dates to disguise work gaps, embellishing job accomplishments and responsibilities, exaggerating job titles and salaries, falsifying awards received and claiming sole responsibility for a team effort.

Certainly, “fibbing” on a résumé can be tempting, especially when you’ve been searching for a job for months. You may believe perhaps a bit of embellishment here and there won’t hurt. But, as you may have observed or experienced, lying, no matter the situation, can get messy. So, why take the chance?

The key is to prepare a targeted, well-written résumé that makes the most of what you have to offer. Your résumé should point out your specific skill set, present your competitive strengths and highlight your accomplishments using the challenge/action/results (CAR) strategy. In addition, illustrate how you have contributed to the efforts of the company. Be sure to honestly quantify your particular achievements — provide metrics such as dollar amounts, number of items/people or percentages.

The primary issue is to consider your résumé as a marketing tool that promotes your talents, skill set and qualities as well as expresses your overall background in a manner that illustrates to the hiring organization that you are uniquely qualified and a great fit for the job opportunity.

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