

LYING ON RÉSUMÉS...ALARMINGLY COMMON

By Daisy Wright
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"Official Résumé Wrong"! That was the headline in the Sports section of a popular newspaper a few years ago, when it was discovered that the then manager of major league baseball team had inaccuracies in his bio. He was not an "All-American basketball player" and he did not "play basketball at UCLA prior to signing with the Dodgers". When asked by the sportswriter, the manager admitted the statements were incorrect, and said he should be judged by what he does on the field, not by what's written about him.

Fast forward to 2005 where it was widely reported in newspapers and on the Internet that an individual who was planning to purchase a football team had to revise his Fact Sheet because it contained numerous errors. He did not play in the NFL nor the CFL, neither did he play in the Little League World Series when he was 11 years old. He has a degree in social work, not "a degree in Business Administration with an emphasis on Finance," as his original bio claimed.

Are these occurrences confined to sports? No! There have been incidents where individuals were caught misrepresenting themselves as doctors, lawyers or professors. There was the man who practiced medicine in the US and Canada for ten years before it was found out he never had a medical degree and the politician who had to quit his caucus when it was revealed he never attended law school as he claimed on his résumé.

The offenders are not always men, if you are beginning to wonder. In 1996, a former deputy minister of health in Alberta resigned from her position because she inflated her academic and professional credentials when she claimed to have been "working as a visiting professor at Princeton". Why do people misrepresent themselves on their résumés? Could it be because of increased competition, a desire to stand out, or a longing for prestige?

A study conducted by Infocheck, a reference checking firm in Toronto, found that 27% of applicants embellished their educational backgrounds; 25% lacked job knowledge and 19% were dismissed or not eligible for rehire. The company randomly selected 1000 job applicants on whom they had conducted reference checks and education verifications, and found that 35% of these candidates presented "red flags". These candidates were already successful in the interview process and their positions ranged from general office to senior executives.

"Résumé fraud takes the form of exaggerated skills or duties at a previous job or a concealed termination", said Vincent Tsang, Infocheck's co-founder and Vice President. The company suggests that organizations "check before they hire" as a way of protecting themselves from unexpected court costs, liability concerns and tarnished brand identity.

What should the regular Harry Hardworker do? Protect his brand identity as well. In such a competitive marketplace, it is tempting to twist facts, but think of the consequences when the truth is known. If you are currently pursuing a program at college or university, don't state that you already have the degree or diploma. If you worked on a project as part of a team, be clear about it. Don't give the employer the impression you did it all alone. It's OK to highlight, and sometimes brag, about your achievements, because employers want to know what you have done with your talents, but exaggerating the facts to gain an edge over other candidates, is not OK.

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