



Truthfully, honest resume works best

By: Carol Kleinman (Article also ran in Chicago Tribune Sunday Paper on August 18, 2002)

It's always a sin to tell a lie.

Especially on your resume.

Just ask George O'Leary, former Notre Dame football coach, who had to resign his post because he had falsified his resume.

Is there a lesson in this for all of us?

"O'Leary was stupid," said Nat Stoddard, chairman and CEO of Crenshaw Associates, a New York-based outplacement firm that specializes in planning and managing professional transitions for CEOs and their direct reports.

Whether it's "intentional fabrication or overzealous polishing," Stoddard, who has been in his profession since 1989, firmly asserts that "resume inflation has a tendency to catch up with you. Cheats always get caught. And more and more companies are checking resumes.

"But that's not really the point. Lying on your resume has nothing to do with being caught. What it has to do with is who you are."

I asked Stoddard, who has an undergraduate degree in sociology and an MBA, where he draws the line between "embellishment" and the effort to market yourself effectively. He doesn't.

"Embellishment is not OK," Stoddard asserted. "It's a form of lying. The only rule is that if it's not true, it's false--and it doesn't belong on your resume."

That's why the CEO says you must not take full credit for work that may have already been underway before you took over; that you shouldn't say you went to college for eight years when you only took a couple of night courses during that time; and that you are lying if you change your job title in order to make it more relevant to the job you're applying for.

What about leaving out certain jobs of short duration? Stoddard is unrelenting. "It's a lie," he said. "A resume is a chronological advertisement for yourself. And truth in advertising includes where you've been and what you've done--with no breaks in the action. It's not very complicated."

To help remember exactly where and when you did what, Stoddard urges everyone to keep a file of documents--such as diplomas, awards, pay stubs, IRS returns, military service records, congratulatory notes from employers and the like.

S. Gary Snodgrass agrees that it's a sin to lie on your resume. The veteran human resource professional is senior vice president and chief administrative officer of Exelon Corp., an energy services company headquartered in Chicago with more than 30,000 employees nationwide.

"At the end of the day, you want to stick to the truth," said Snodgrass, who has an undergraduate degree in business administration and an MBA. "What you say is who you are. It might be tempting to fudge a little here and there--salary, dates of employment and education are what people lie about most--but once you've started down that trail it's a slippery slope."

Snodgrass is the author of a new book, "When Your Career Means Business: 12 Guidelines for Managing Your Personal Career and Professional Life." It's self-published and sells for \$15.95. He says he "sadly continues to see an increase of embellishments on resumes, possibly because of a more competitive job market and increased unemployment nationwide."

Telling the truth, Snodgrass says, "doesn't mean you have to disclose everything that's happened to you since the moment you were born. But it does mean you should give the true and relevant facts."

He urges: "Stick to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."