

On Lying on Your Resume

By Lancelot Larsen

Lying on a resume is like lying to your grandmother about who broke her favorite lamp. What is the point? You have to continue lying to cover your tracks, you feel guilty after each new lie, and you are fearful that the truth will be discovered and you will be punished. Embellishing your resume might seem like the best way to get the job you want, however, your honesty about your lack of credentials or skills could be the thing that gets you noticed and called back for an interview. Remember, when it comes to writing a resume, honesty is the best policy.

If an employer discovers that you lied on your resume, chances are you will get fired immediately. It doesn't matter how long it took them to find out or how much you have impressed them all along, it's a matter of your credibility. You will also certainly lose your chances of employment over lack of honesty far more than your lack of credentials, if the employer decides to verify the contents of your resume.

Education and compensation are the most common areas where candidates lie on their resumes. Other less than candid information includes:

- False dates
- Fictitious employers
- Incomplete or purchased degrees
- Incorrect facts (i.e.—sales and staff supervised)
- Exaggerated titles, salaries, and responsibilities—if not completely false
- Citizenship

Even if your employers never discover that you lied on your resume, you might find that you'll work in constant fear that you'll be found out someday. You might even find yourself consistently paranoid every time a human resource matter is raised even if it has little or nothing to do with you. Of course, if you have a personality susceptible to guilt, it will make your work life even worse.

One lie makes more lies. If you lie on your resume, you may have to lie at your interview, then about your ability to do task you are assigned, and then perhaps even your boss, co-workers, and clients, if you have them.

In some situations, you might find that you yourself will expose your own lie by not being able to perform the duties assigned. If your lie is not revealed by your poor performance, your employer might just find you incompetent, and you'll be fired anyway. Either way, you may be looking for work again.

If you think getting fired for lying on your resume is the end of it, ponder upon that thought further. The issue will arise again for certain. If you decide to be honest in your next job search, you will have to tell your employer why you got fired. Will you then lie about how you lied? If you decide to lie one more time and cloak how you were fired for lying, the employer might contact that employer, discover the truth, and your application progress will be lost. True, if you were terminated early for lying on your resume, you could easily pretend that you never had that job at all. But what if you had been working there for a year or more? How will you explain that extended employment gap on your resume? And so the cycle continues.

Even if you work at a company for 30 years, if you misrepresent your education by one degree, you may be terminated automatically. In certain industries such as the news media, your credibility is more important than anything else, and it will only take one lie on your resume, no matter how minor (i.e.—stating you have an M.A. in journalism thought you dropped out of graduate school), to make everything you do or say thereafter questionable. Sometimes, you can be a victim of habit. If you lie on your resume because you lie all the time, one fabrication from something years later that has nothing to do with your resume may cause eyes to look into your resume and background. For example, a journalist writes a story with content that's shady or not quite founded, and someone at the office decides to investigate the merits of the report and discovers you invented certain details, it might cause them to wonder what else you invented, and it could point all the way back to your file and the false information on your resume within.

Telling your supervisor that you missed work because of food poisoning instead of alcohol poisoning is fundamentally different than telling your boss that you are something you are not.

If you send your resume to a recruiting firm and do any embellishing at all, be prepared for what could be the inevitable. Recruiting firms, being exclusively in the business of hiring, are more aware than any other business on how increasingly competitive the job market is and that they have far more choices for candidates as a result. More importantly, their reputation is essential to their success, so they will not let even a slightly fabricated resume risk ruining their name. For every steadfast candidate with an upright resume they present, recruiting firms gain potential to secure future business for themselves. Thorough background checks are, therefore, an integral part of their daily procedures and typically done immediately once a candidate applies. In short, recruiters will never attempt to place you again if you lie on your resume.

Likewise, companies in general are practicing similar caution and also actively pursuing background checks before and after you are employed. If a company has a history of employees who have lied on their resumes, they will be more adamant in their background checks. But that is not something you would know without inside information. More often than not, it's not worth the risk.

More than likely, the employer may never look at your resume again or investigate your past. But if you demonstrate significantly poor work quality, they may start to ask questions about your skills, including the contents of your resume. Consider two other realities about the working world. Your company might come under new ownership and do some good old-fashioned downsizing or simply have to replace one employee with another who holds the same position. In this case, you may have to reapply for your job. If your new resume does not level with your old resume, or they discover that you invented or exaggerated certain details, you will find your competitor doing your duties and earning your salary instead of you. Even if you get a job because the company did not conduct a background check, you are never really out of the water. Even if you work at the same company for several years, you might get another manager who simply won't like you, find you shady, might have some reason to want to let you go— like opining that you have burnt out or are making too much money— or is simply hell-bent on profiling everyone, they might check your background and your resume even if the first manager who hired you did not. Many industries are managed by professionals who make it a habit of networking constantly and being active in their respective professional communities. You never know who knows who, and who's saying what about you.

Like being refused credit at a retail outlet because of a poor rating score, you will be refused employment over discrediting yourself by lying on your resume. Both the technology and the results are the same.

On a more positive note, never feel like you have to lie on your resume. You may have taken long hiatuses or did a lot of job-hopping in your life. Maybe you don't have a lot of work experience or never finished a degree you once sought. Maybe you did some hard time or spent a night in jail. These are the most common reasons why people feel like they have to lie on their resume. Be forthright even if one or all of these might apply to your situation. You can always turn it into a positive in your cover letter or at the interview.

If you are looking at a job that seems like the perfect fit for you, but you're missing one skill that they require, you don't have to make up a job duty to fit the bill. Nor do you have to give up on applying for the job. All you have to do is give it a try, and you can use your cover letter to explain that you don't have the required skill but are willing to learn. You'll find that many employers will be impressed with your honesty and PMA (Positive Mental Attitude). If that job description clearly states that they want someone with experience in a particular job duty, it's much different than them asking you if you can do it. Just because you can do it does not qualify you as someone with real experience in that type of job duty. If you got fired from a job that you include on your resume, be open about it in the interview. Stay one step ahead of employers who might find out on their own accord. Simply smile and state that the relationship did not work out as planned, and you are a wiser and stronger employee for it. By telling the truth on your resume, the worst case scenario is that your resume will float into the vast circular file or the wastebasket. But the best case scenario is that the employer will see potential in your resume and consider your eagerness as an asset.

Also, if you cheat, you hurt honest people. Honest job seekers are pushed out of the competition because of your lies. It adds to the general culture of distrust in America.

When it comes to resumes, dedicate your professional life to the truth. It will keep you from worry and termination.

To amend a quote from the movie *Taxi Driver*: "I like to keep my resume clean like my conscience."