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IT'S TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES FOR JOB SEEKERS WHO FIB ON THEIR RESUME

By **BRIAN MOORE**

December 3, 2007-- A resume is a modest document - a dry, page-long summary of achievements that, while failing to capture what writer Richard Price calls "the wonder of me," makes a serviceable introduction between job seeker and job giver.

And according to many experts, it's more often than not a steaming pile of bovine feces filled with fraudulent academic credentials, mysterious omissions and wildly embellished job descriptions.

"When some people start dreaming up resumes, they go into an almost novelistic mode," says Michael Hershman, president of the risk-management firm the Fairfax Group, who cites studies that say fully 70 percent of resumes include a "major misstatement of fact."

"I think there's a lot of fraud, personally," agrees Dorothea Gauden, a former executive and author of the business ethics tome "Right Makes Might." "Fraud is everywhere."

Paul Viollis, the CEO of Risk Control Strategies, a Manhattan security screener for high-end clients, estimates conservatively that six of 10 resumes include "exaggerated or blatantly fraudulent" information. Other experts put the number between 10 and 20 percent.

Some claim resume fraud is on the rise - while others disagree, all concur that people are getting nabbed more often, due to a steep rise in background checks.

And even if claiming a Harvard degree when you actually flunked out of CUNY gets you in the door, misrepresentations can come back to haunt their perpetrators. That's been demonstrated by a number of recent incidents, which experts say have caused employers to look at resumes more closely.

Former MIT dean of admissions Marilee Jones resigned in April after an anonymous source tipped off her egghead associates that she'd fabricated academic degrees when applying for her first job at the university in 1979.

Last year, Radio Shack CEO David Edmondson switched off his career at the electronic retail giant after press reports that he'd fudged information about academic degrees he didn't receive. Ditto football coach George O'Leary, who was hired and then fired by Notre Dame, for citing phony academic credentials.

The most common misrepresentations are academic degrees, previous salaries and haziness about gaps in employment, says Jason Morris, CEO of employeescreenIQ, though he adds that some misrepresentations are honest mistakes or miscommunications.

Kenneth Springer of Corporate Resolutions, a Manhattan-based screening firm, says online degrees are often used to pad resumes. Just hand some cash to certain Web "universities," and you can get any degree you want, he notes, adding that the problem is particularly acute among IT workers.

Military credentials are sometimes fabricated as well - an infantry grunt will miraculously transform into a Green Beret - according to Tim Huhn of Huhn & Associates, an investigative and consulting firm.

Frequent address and job changes may be a sign of deception, says Hershman, since they can indicate that the person has been fired or is dodging creditors but isn't coming clean about it. Another red flag he cites is academic credentials and employment in foreign countries, which is difficult to verify. Morris adds he found one resume claiming a phony degree from a university in Iceland.

What companies have to decide is whether the embroidering is germane to whether the person is qualified for a job, says Peter L. O'Neill, chairman of CARCO Group, a security firm in Holtzville, N.Y.

"In order to hold it against the person, the misrepresentation must be material and relevant," he says. So if a person lies about having an MBA when applying for a job selling cars, it doesn't necessarily disqualify her for the job, at least not legally.

The Fair Credit Reporting allows job applicants to review and appeal resume and other background checks conducted by outside investigators, so a spurned job seeker, even one who exaggerated a tad, could conceivably take issue with the employer's reasoning.

Not everyone submitting a resume gets the document cavity-searched. The rule of thumb is the bigger the job, the harder the search.

"If they're mopping the floor, who cares?" says Morris.

YOU'VE been at a company for years. You've done well both for it and for yourself. And you're on the rise.

The trouble is, when you first applied for work there, you played fast and loose with a fact or two on your resume, perhaps exaggerating a previous job description or claiming a phony college degree. Should you come clean about it? Or should you let sleeping dogs lie?

According to most experts, honesty is the best policy.

"Certainly, I would suggest voluntary disclosure, because something that you did 10 or 15 years ago can be forgiven," says Michael Hershman of The



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- ONLINE PROGRAMS -

ASSOCIATE'S DEGREES

- Associate of Arts in Accounting
- Associate of Arts in Business
- Associate of Arts in Health Care Administration
- Associate of Arts in Information Technology

BACHELOR'S DEGREES

- Bachelor of Science in Business/Management
- Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Administration
- Bachelor of Science in Information Technology
- Bachelor of Science in Management

MASTER'S DEGREES

- Master of Arts in Education
- Master of Business Administration
- Master of Arts in Education
- Master of Information Systems

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Fairfax Group. "Most companies will counsel but not fire."

"Do like I tell my kid - tell the truth," says Kenneth Springer of Corporate Resolutions. "As I've seen in the newspapers from past presidents, it's better to seek forgiveness."

But not everyone thinks it's a great idea. Tim Huhn of Huhn & Associates says if you're looking for a new job, then come clean, but if you're moving up in a company, then keep it under your hat.

"Once you're in, they like you," he says.

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