

Is Your Résumé a Lie?

By Laura Morsch, CareerBuilder.com

A résumé is a marketing tool – it should showcase your experience and qualifications in the most succinct and relevant way possible. And that often means being selective in the kind of information that you include or crafty in your wording.

But that doesn't mean you should lie. A survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 96 percent of HR professionals always conduct reference checks on job candidates, and more than half say they sometimes find inconsistencies.

Recruiters get so annoyed by misleading information on résumés that “lying or misleading information” ranked as one of the top recruiter pet peeves in a survey by Resumedoctor.com.

According to the survey, the most common misleading commonly put on résumés are:

- Inflated titles
- Inaccurate dates to cover up job hopping or gaps of employment
- 1/2 finished degrees, inflated education or "purchased" degrees that do not mean anything
- Inflated salaries
- Inflated accomplishments
- Out and out lies in regards to specific roles and duties

But what if your job is equivalent to a Vice President of Technology and your job title is “Senior project leader”? Is changing your job title on your résumé to reflect your responsibilities lying?

The crucial line between marketing and lying on a résumé isn't always clearly drawn. But for those wondering how much résumé puffery is too much, heed these tips from 25-year HR leadership veteran and workplace commentator Liz Ryan:

1. You CANNOT change your dates of employment.

Were you a contract person hired on after a period of time? Say so on your résumé. You can also mention you did contract or consulting work after leaving the company's regular payroll. But the dates must match your actual employment dates.

2. You CAN, to a limited degree, change the titles on your résumé.

Ryan suggests that if your company used odd job titles, it's okay to use an equivalent title that most people would recognize. However this does not mean

it's acceptable to inflate your job title to imply you had more responsibility that you actually did.

"You cannot turn yourself from an Assistant Manager to a Manager with a wave of you wand," Ryan says. Likewise, if you worked in the purchasing department, you can't write that you were in marketing.

3. You CANNOT mess around with academic credentials.

If you're two credits short of a degree, say so on your résumé. A professional-development course at a university is not the same thing as an actual academic (for-credit) course – and should not be treated as such. And you cannot change your degree from Chemistry to Business – that is just as serious a crime as inventing a degree, because that's what you're essentially doing.

4. You CAN leave out irrelevant jobs.

If you are willing to explain a three-month gap in between jobs, you don't have to mention that you took a horrible job at a boiler-room sales operation and quit right away. You also don't need to list every job you've had for the last 25 years. Stick with the most recent and relevant experience.

5. You CANNOT get away with lying if your company went under. Some candidates feel that they can take major liberties with their résumés when they companies they've worked for not longer exist. But thanks to Web sites like LinkedIn.com, employers can talk to people who worked at your long-gone company and verify your story.

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