Resume fraud rampant in the work force

by Michael Kinsman

There are tens of millions of U.S. workers who have lied or exaggerated their accomplishments on their resumes.

Tens of millions. At least.

And, most of them still have jobs.

The news of resume fraud or resume inflation surfaces each time a high-profile individual is accused.

Consider these episodes:

- Marilee Jones is driven from her job as admissions director at MIT after 28 years of presumably good service to the university. She had claimed a college degree she did not have when she applied for her job.

- David Edmondson resigned as chief executive officer of Radio Shack after it was discovered that he misstated his academic record. He had spent 11 years in a variety of jobs with the company, ultimately being named CEO.

- George O'Leary gets a dream job as football coach at University of Notre Dame and has to step down five days later because of resume lies. He claimed a master's degree and college football experience he didn't have.

Estimates range that between 30 and 50 percent of American workers have lies on their resume. Some of those might simply be an inflation of accomplishments, but they are lies anyway.

Let's take the low estimate: If 30 percent of workers have phony resumes, that means about 46 million people in our work force are liars.

Does that mean we have 46 million bad people in jobs who should be fired?

My guess is probably not. I assume that some of those resume cheats are actually very competent and well-respected in their fields. And, firing 46 million people is as improbable as it is impossible.

Yet, clearly we have an epidemic that is out of control and corrosive to the way we do business.

People clearly believe they need to doctor their resumes either because of their own insecurities or inadequacies or because they feel societal pressure to obtain certain job status.

But their acts are like a flesh-eating virus that is still hungry.

Not many companies have the resources, money or time to do thorough background checks to weed out resume frauds. Even if they did, the most clever people would still figure out a way to build a deceitful resume.

No state or federal law will ever be able to stem resume fraud. Think about the silliness of something like "Lie on your resume and go to jail." It just is not going to happen.

That leaves individuals as their own moral compass.

Every individual should seriously consider what they are doing when they lie on their resume, or inflate their accomplishments. Obviously, little lies may seem acceptable, but they aren't.

The lies you make today on your job application or resume can haunt you the rest of your career. The lives of Marilee Jones, David Edmondson and George O'Leary have been changed forever because of what they did.

Resume fraud is inexcusable at all turns. But it is only preventable if individuals look deep within themselves and figure out that it is better to make the right choice and live honorably than to lie to get a job and worry forever that every day in that job might be your last.

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