

A MILLION LITTLE REASONS WHY

By Meg Salyer

While few of us are likely to be in the middle of writing *My Life*, the next best-selling memoir, we each have occasion to present to the public a written record of our activities and accomplishments – otherwise known as a resume. And while most people would certainly agree that highlighting those accomplishments in the best possible light is a desirable goal, crossing the line, as we recently saw with James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, is a bad decision. The end result might not be a public confrontation on "Oprah," but the outcome, when applying for the perfect job, could be just as devastating.

A study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Managers (SHRM) found that 96 percent of HR professionals always conduct reference checks on candidates; more than half say they are not surprised to find inconsistencies. A similar finding has been reported by InfoLink Screening Services, who found that 14 percent of job applicants had lied about their education. In a very recent incident, David J. Edmondson was forced to resign as Radio Shack's CEO after it was disclosed that he had lied about his college degrees.

The SHRM survey identified the following areas as the most common for containing misleading or inaccurate information:

- ♦ inflated titles
- ♦ inaccurate dates to cover up job hopping or gaps of employment
- ♦ half-finished degrees, inflated education or "purchased" degrees that are of no value
- ♦ inflated salaries
- ♦ inflated accomplishments
- ♦ out-and-out lies with regard to specific roles and duties

The best advice: Just don't do it! It is extremely likely that your exaggerations will be exposed during a background check or during an interview. At a minimum, you are likely to be disqualified from further consideration for the position; a more serious consequence may be the long-term effect on your reputation.

Do create an excellent, one-of-a-kind marketing communication piece – one that accurately and enthusiastically reflects your skills and accomplishments. As the *New York Times* suggested in the Sunday, March 12, Business Section, perhaps employers should advertise for résumés, nonfiction only... ■



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