

CASE #6: RESUME & WORK HISTORY ACCURACY

Introduction

Resumes are often the first impression a potential employer has of a candidate. Exaggerations or omissions can lead to ethical dilemmas for both the applicant and the employer. This case examines how stretching the truth on a resume can lead to conflicts between personal ambition, professional integrity, and organizational trust.

Scenario 1: The Restless Resume

Mel, a section manager at a high-tech company in California, wanted to relocate to Massachusetts to be closer to his wife Pat's family. Hearing that Modern Systems Corporation was expanding, he applied for a position. In his resume, Mel exaggerated the scope of some responsibilities and qualifications, though his official application form listed only accurate education and job titles.

Impressed by his interviews, Modern Systems offered him a job with a modest pay increase and support for moving expenses. Mel quickly proved himself to be bright, conscientious, and well-liked. Six months later, his performance review rated him well above average to excellent. After ten months, he was a candidate for promotion

While reviewing files, the Personnel Director, Ed, discovered discrepancies between Mel's resume and his reference checks. Although Mel's official application was accurate, the resume raised questions of honesty. A note on the application stated: "False statements on this application may subject the employee to immediate dismissal." Ed called Mel in for a meeting, just as Mel expected to be offered the promotion.

Questions for Discussion

1. What ethical, business, and personal issues are raised by Mel's exaggerations?
2. Should the company weigh Mel's current performance against the misrepresentation?

3. Does intent—desperation to move closer to family—affect the ethical evaluation?

Scenario 2: The Director's Dilemma

In their meeting, Ed explained the discrepancies and outlined possible options:

- Ignore the resume and base decisions on Mel's strong performance.
- Share the full information with the new supervisor and let him decide.
- Suggest Mel remain in his current role, deferring the promotion but keeping his job secure.
- Recommend termination for dishonesty.

Ed then asked Mel: "If you were in my position, what would you do?"

Questions for Discussion

1. Are these the only options available? What others might exist?
2. If you were Mel, how would you respond?
3. Using a utilitarian approach, what harms and benefits flow from each option?
4. If you were the employer, what would you decide, and on what ethical basis?

Closing Reflections

"There is no path to integrity; integrity is the path." — Michael Dowd

"Intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education." — Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike." — Theodore Roosevelt