

## LYING ON YOUR CV OR DURING AN INTERVIEW - SOME POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES

It is never a good idea to lie in the context of the recruitment and appointment process, whether it be on a CV or during an interview. The consequences can be severe. Some examples of lying are discussed below.

### **Altering GCSE, A level, degree or legal practice course grades**

It may be tempting to increase the odd GCSE to a desirable A\*-C grade, inflate an A level grade here or there or improve the overall grade you obtained in your degree or legal practice course. Or, in extreme cases, make up academic achievements altogether. Tampering with your degree certificate or obtaining a fake degree certificate is a criminal offence under the Fraud Act 2006. Typical reasons for doing this are to seemingly improve your prospects for an interview or job offer, or to achieve greater recognition or status in general. But doing so carries a risk which is unlikely to be worth it as can be seen in the two cases presented below:

#### **Case #1**

A qualified solicitor who had studied at The University of West England (UWE) inflated her 2:2 law degree grade to a 2:1 in order to secure an interview with the Army Legal Services (ALS). She was caught. Not only was the offer of an interview withdrawn, but she was also reported to the Solicitors Regulation Authority and received an 18 month ban and a £3,000 fine.

#### **Case #2**

A barrister, who had been described as a “high-flying City lawyer”, claimed he had a number of impressive academic credentials, including a first-class degree from Oxford University and a master’s degree from Harvard. However, an investigation led by the Bar Standards Board discovered these were invented. He was banned from practising. Interestingly, he was a qualified barrister and did have qualifications in order to practise, just not from the leading establishments as claimed.

### **Changing a job title to make it sound more senior**

Changing your job title is also lying and can often be discovered through reference checks. It may be done to inflate your position title or responsibilities but it can quickly backfire once you are questioned about your experience and capabilities.

### **Changing the dates of employment and/or the dates attended at a school/college/university**

Changing dates of employment and or the dates attended at university/college to perhaps mask gaps in your CV is not a good idea. A skillful assessor or screener can quickly become suspicious and reject a candidate based on references/academic checks.

*The changing of dates was famously done by Lee McQueen, the winner of The Apprentice, who admitted his wrongdoing: “It lost me some of my integrity. I got a good grilling and I deserved it, and I learnt from my mistake. It won't happen again.”*

### **Inflating current salary to secure a higher salary if offered a job**

This is also highly inadvisable as the payroll or HR department will be able to calculate your take home pay from your P45/P60. Not only that, but your new employer might check your last salary from your previous employer as part of their reference check.

*That's exactly what happened to "Melanie", a three year PQE lawyer, who got caught exaggerating her salary.*

### **How your credentials are checked**

All law firms take up reference checks because, in the majority of cases, their insurance is conditional upon such checks.

Some law firms check your academic credentials using the Higher Education Data Check and or contacting schools, colleges and universities directly. It is inexpensive for law firms to carry out these checks - typically free or £10. In the majority of cases, all a firm needs from you to check your references and the grades achieved at university, school or college is signed authority from you (which most firms will ask for as part of their post-offer process).

### **Conclusion**

All law firms take up reference checks and some will ask for specific information (such as your previous salary). It is straightforward and inexpensive for employers to check your academic credentials.

If caught lying, an interview or job offer will likely be withdrawn. If you are employed, you may be dismissed if your credentials are found to be incorrect. In addition, if you are a regulated professional (such as a solicitor or barrister) you may be reported to the relevant regulator and investigated. This could result in receiving one or more of the following: a ban, a fine, or ultimately being struck off.