



TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

During a recent conversation with a candidate, he said to me “I puffed my GPA on my resume and, now that I have an offer, the firm has made the offer contingent upon me providing a copy of my official transcript. What should I do?” It made me think of a childhood taunt commonly used on the playground – “Liar, liar, pants on fire!” What’s the point of lying to people you’re casting your lot with, I wondered?

GPA’s on a resume are a touchy subject, should they be listed on your resume or not? Yes, if they’re great and no, if they’re not. I see plenty of resumes with 3.2 GPA’s listed and I wonder why the candidate thought that was a useful piece of information to put on the resume. Your resume is supposed to set you apart from the other candidates – a 3.2 GPA will surely do that! Setting yourself apart means showing yourself as head and shoulders above the rest, not demonstrating that you were the last kid picked for dodgeball every time as an easy mark!

While I’m on the subject of GPA’s, what’s up with the “overall GPA” and “GPA in major” distinction that I’ve been seeing on resumes? It’s as if the candidate is saying “I’m good at what I want to put my attention on or deem ‘important’ and not the other things.” Firms routinely tell us that they’d choose the best all-around athlete – one that does well and works hard on everything they’re given – over a narrowly focused candidate who slacks when it’s not in his or her interest to give their all. The primary reason is because the market is frequently changing and having a team player with a solid work ethic is critical.

But, back to the question at hand ... what should our puffer-fish candidate do about the lie? If you’ve already told the lie, you’re in the soup and should fess it up before you offer the transcript. Better to start with a clean slate. If it costs you the offer, that’s a valuable lesson.

If it’s a bigger matter that will come out in a background check – maybe a criminal matter, domestic violence or drug charge, bankruptcy or tax lien – go to a trusted member of the new team (or the recruiter) and make your disclosure along with an explanation about what you’ve learned, etc. that shows it’s behind you and it was a one-time exception to your character.

Typically, this trusted member of the firm can gauge how it will play with the other members of the team and how (or when or if) to deliver the message to the other members of the team. In our experience, sometimes this person has chosen to keep that information confidential until the background check clears and then raise it with his partners, explaining that the candidate had confided it prior to the background check. If it doesn’t come up in the check, you’ve taken the high road. If it does, you’ve come clean in advance and, most likely, defused the time bomb. Worst of all solutions is to ignore it, hoping it won’t come out and have it come out during an LP sponsored background check and it tanks your firm’s fundraising some time later. Any explanation then looks exactly like what it is, an excuse offered only when you’re under the gun.

Likewise, a firing in your work history, or a puffed salary, can cost you a job offer or cause your subsequent firing. The best plan is to learn how to be comfortable in your own skin with who you are, your experience to date and what you can offer. Honesty really IS the best policy.

Have a good story about a fast one someone tried to pull on you in an interview? I’d love to hear it! Email me at dpalmieri@pinnaclegroup.com.

