

Wannabe Workers Warned Not To Fake Their Credentials

POSTED: 5:47 pm CDT May 25, 2010

UPDATED: 10:45 pm CDT May 25, 2010

MILWAUKEE -- Living a lie can be a costly proposition, but employment experts say faking credentials is common, and the problem is growing in these tough economic times.

An executive placement specialist in Brookfield calls his tally the Liars' Index -- an accounting of credential-stretchers applying for executive positions.

It was an exercise of epic proportion. Shortly before his graduation from one of America's most prestigious universities, police arrested Adam Wheeler for faking the credentials he submitted for admission and financial aid at Harvard University.

"He has lived a life of lies and deceit," the prosecutor said.

The Brookfield executive recruiter is on a mission to stop academic embellishment before it starts, and Jude Werra is taking his message to college.

"When I'm talking to people who are in school, they think it's really important to have experience and credentials and the mistake so many of them make is they trump them up," Werra said.

For the last 15 years, Werra has published The Liars Index, a number that has spiked since the economic collapse. In the second half of 2009, Werra said more than 16 percent of those who applied for jobs through his executive search firm lied about their educations.

"They'll either change the major or the degree or add an MBA or add some other distinction," Werra said.

The Wall Street Journal and the New York Times have featured his Liars Index, which also designates a "Lyn' King" for the most outrageous fabrication of the year, such as the candidate who said Werra couldn't verify his degree because he was in the witness protection program.

"He said, 'I was born in New York, and my dad was rubbed out by the mob. I'll give you a telephone number and you can call, and they'll verify that I got a degree from that university in New Jersey,'" Werra said.

Werra wants the tempted to know that when uncovered, the repercussions are serious.

"I think the two best jobs in America are the head football coach at Notre Dame and the manager of the New

York Yankees," former Notre Dam football coach George O'Leary said.

O'Leary lost his dream job at Notre Dame after a fake master's degree came to light.

Former state Rep. Mary Panzer lost her seat in the state Assembly following revelations she never graduated from University of Wisconsin-Madison as she claimed.

The examples go far beyond the elite and powerful.

Jim Luedtke is a vice president at a West Allis contracting firm. His profile on the LinkedIn page boasts a Bachelors of Arts and Science in English, history and mechanical engineering from Marquette University. But academic records revealed Luedtke attended Marquette for just one school year.

"Where did you get this from, this information from?" Luedtke asked 12 News reporter Colleen Henry.

"I saw your LinkedIn, saw you're a grad from Marquette with two degrees. Did you graduate from Marquette?" Henry asked.

"I don't have any comment for you, thanks," Luedtke said.

Luedtke sent 12 News a written statement: "My LinkedIn page {has} not been used in any way to advertise for a job or advance my career."

Luedtke also said he never submitted a resume to either of his employers and that the skill sets required to do his current and former jobs never required one.

Luedtke has now removed his resume from LinkedIn.

"I'll see LinkedIn profiles of people that I've interviewed and screened in the past. Employers will disappear, positions will change, dates change, gaps disappear," Werra said.

Werra warned the Internet makes the temptation to pad profiles easy to indulge.

"I hope I don't know people who lie, but I wouldn't be surprised," student Kylie Nelson said.

Back in the classroom, businessman Bill Banaszak was studying employment law after 30 years in business. He said the employer who doesn't check the facts is asking for trouble.

"If somebody tells me they're a doctor, and I hire them to do medical work in my facility and lo and behold I check, and now they're a Ph.D, but they're not a medical doctor, I'm going to have a problem," Banaszak said.

Marquette University told 12 News, "Universities nationwide are concerned about any inaccurate reporting of higher education credentials. Marquette and our alumni take great pride in the degrees we confer. The degree is the culmination of the hard work and academic accomplishments of each individual student."

Employers can confirm degrees with the registrars of most colleges or the National Student Clearinghouse, which holds records for more than 3,000 colleges. You can do that online for \$6.50.