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# Don't make the same critical resume mistake as disgraced Florida politician Melissa Howard



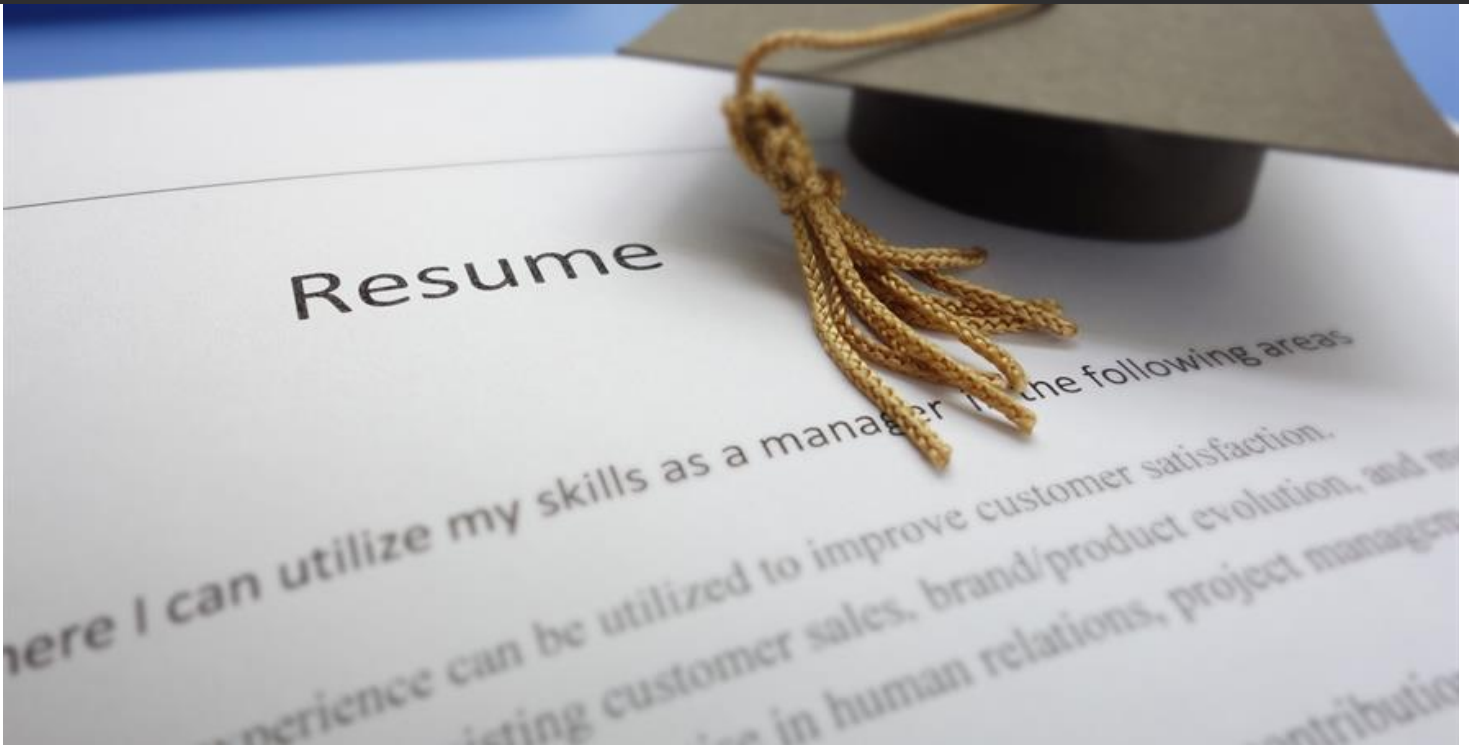
By Nicole Lyn Pesce

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The Republican candidate was caught faking her degree -- something too many potential hires do, experts say.



Don't fake it 'til you make it on your resume -- especially regarding your education.

That's what Florida state house candidate Melissa Howard learned the hard way last week, when she was caught with a phony marketing degree from Miami University in Ohio. Howard, 46, posted a photo of the bachelor of science diploma on Facebook. But local news outlet [FLA News Online](#) reported that while Howard did attend Miami University, she never graduated. The school itself also noted that it has never offered a bachelor of science degree in marketing.



**Jeffrey Guterman** ✓

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Melissa Howard, a [#Republican](#) candidate for the Florida House, lied about having a college degree and posed with a fake diploma after a news outlet questioned her credentials:

[local10.com/news/elections...](http://local10.com/news/elections...)

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She's not the only person to get caught lying about her educational achievements. Walmart spokesman David Tovar **resigned in 2014** over a two-decade-old lie that he had a bachelor's degree from the University of Delaware. Turns out, he never graduated. **Ex-Yahoo CEO Scott Thompson stepped down in May 2012** after an investor determined that his computer science degree from Stonehill College in Easton, Mass. was fake.

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Sarah Johnston, founder of the Briefcase Coach career service, had to ax a new employee last year while she was working as a hospital recruiter. "A candidate lied about a master's degree -- that wasn't even required for the job -- but when it came to verifying it, we found that he never completed the program. We terminated him before his start date," she said. "If you are going to lie about this, what else are you will to lie about? It goes to the core of who you are; if you falsify your information to get hired, I'm not going to trust you with bigger things."

In fact, almost half of workers (46%) polled by staffing firm **OfficeTeam** admitted that they knew someone who lied on a resume -- a 25-point jump from 2011. One-third of these were educational exaggerations, and 38% said that their company rejected the applicant over the lie. A **survey** from employee background checkers HireRight last spring also found that this problem is getting worse; 85% of the employers using its service noticed embellishments on resumes, up from 66% five years before. And **LinkedIn** found that more than half (52%) of hiring managers have turned down a candidate for lying about their previous experience.



Too many people lie about their educational achievements on their resumes. (Olivier Le Moal/iStock)

News flash: Employers *do* often check your education and employment history. Some background checks are more thorough than others, however, which is how some people skate by on their lies for a time. But hiring managers say that the truth comes out eventually.



best, we have seen people buy fake diplomas, claim advanced degrees from universities that have closed ... as well as claim to have worked in firms that have never heard of the applicant,” he said. “We see this every month - a few knuckleheads trying to be better on paper than in real life.

**ALSO READ: [Doing these things on social media could cost you that job that you want](#)**

And as the above examples prove, these lies have major consequences: candidates are rejected; long-time employees are fired; and reputations can be scarred for life. Only 12% of HR managers are likely to consider calling a candidate that does something unusual or outrageous, like fabricate their credentials, [CareerBuilder reported](#). That’s because there’s also major legal and financial consequences for the companies who hire employees who aren’t certified or whose integrity gets called into question.

Johnston recalled a case that she heard about a nurse in St. Louis, Mo. who forged her nursing license to get hired. “She was working on the floor without the credentials that she needed, which put the patients in jeopardy, and also put the hospital’s license in jeopardy,” she said.



The most common things job applicants lie about are dates of employment, their degrees or credentials, their salary and whether they have a criminal record, CareerBuilder said. (Catalin205/iStock)

Dawn D. Boyer, CEO of the D. Boyer Consulting service, told Moneyish that when she worked for a large government contractor as a group HR manager years ago, she was tasked with verifying the degrees of all 4,500 employees for contracting proposals. And she discovered that 10% (or about 450 workers) had lied or implied they had formal college degrees or equivalents.

“We had to terminate them for lying on their resumes, and that included a vice president in the company!” she said. She estimates that the whole fiasco, including the cost of labor for fact-checking thousands of resumes and hiring new workers to replace the liars, was “in the half a million dollar range, easily.”

Some candidates are tempted to fudge their educational credentials because the position that they're applying for requires a certain degree, and competition is fierce. But you can bolster your background by highlighting your real-world experience.

"A degree isn't an end-all or be-all; getting additional educational certification can help. And highlight your experience; if a person has good recommendations, good references, and they have worked in the field -- especially for a long time -- that makes them a strong candidate," Phyllis Hartman, founder of the PGHR Consulting human resources company, told Moneyish. "There's IT people I know who don't have a degree, but they are experienced in cybersecurity and are certified by Microsoft or somebody else, and that often matters more to an employer than a bachelor's degree in IT or math or whatever they would have gotten."



Three in four HR managers have caught people lying on their resumes. (Alija/iStock)

Or just be upfront about why you didn't finish school. "If you have a good reason for not finishing the degree -- maybe there was a family issue that you had to deal with, or you ran out of money (because even an undergraduate degree can be hugely expensive) -- often times, employers will understand that," she said. "Just be honest and authentic."

And demonstrate that you're still dedicated to earning those credentials, such as by enrolling in a program to finish your degree, or getting certified in your field. "Saying, 'I know I don't have the credential right now, but I'm just X-credits away from a master's, and I would be glad to promise you that I will go back to school and finish the degree,' builds credibility," she said. "Or sometimes you can sit for a certification in your industry, where you don't necessarily need to have the full degree. Then you can say, 'I don't have my masters in HR, but I do have my SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management) certification.'"

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