

Could have fooled me

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It was a lovely wedding, and you were so fortunate to be seated next to Bill, who traveled almost 300 miles to attend your niece's happy day. You exchange e-mail addresses and phone numbers as the wedding concludes, and pledge to get together for dinner in the future if your paths cross. A month later, you receive a call from Bill asking if you know of an orthodontist who practices in his hometown to treat his daughter. It seems that the online profiles of the 3 local prospects appear to be so highly credentialed that he is hard-pressed to choose one over the other. One was certified by the Straightline Company for removable appliance care and is listed as Board Eligible. Another claims to be on faculty at Keynote University. The third says she has invented several orthodontic appliances that have "revolutionized" orthodontic therapy. Bill is a savvy guy and seems suspicious of all of these accomplishments. "I don't know what these achievements mean, but I can tell you that in my profession, there's a lot of exaggeration that goes on in an attempt to lure customers. Can you give me some guidance on who we should choose?", Bill requested.

At your next opportunity, you review the list of orthodontists in Bill's area. Not only did one pop up as best and is positioned first on the list, but also her credentials appear to be a mile long. Although she had completed an accredited orthodontic program, it is clear to both you and Bill that the multiple certificates and accolades on her web site were gathered from commercially sponsored weekend courses. Another posted a link to his teaching and lecture schedule with an offer to purchase his textbook. You certainly understand how Bill could be confused.

Corporate executives from prestigious companies have had to forfeit their positions because of exaggerated or fraudulent claims regarding their credentials. A 2014 poll of managers disclosed that 58% have exposed job applicants who embellished their credentials. Upper management personnel including a vice president at Walmart, a US Olympic Committee chairwoman, as well as chief executive officers of Sunbeam, Yahoo!, Herbalife, Bausch and Lomb, and the Intercontinental

Hotel have been accused by these corporations of listing deceptive credentials.¹ Even academia is not immune to this phenomenon. The dean of admissions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology served for 28 years before incongruities on her resume were discovered. All of these individuals resigned or were discharged as a result of the misconduct.

Our parent companies—our bosses—are our patients or the institution in which we hold our academic appointments. Almost every valued relationship begins with trust, and the relationship between a health provider and patient, co-faculty member, or administration is no exception. Trust in health care delivery is established almost instantaneously, unlike the trust developed between friends during repeated interactions over time. The disparity in knowledge between the patient and the clinician places the patient in a position of unique vulnerability. Deception can offer a convenient allure to attract patients or entice a search committee. Claims such as membership on unrecognized boards and maverick study club certificates are in violation of our organization's code of ethics and professionalism.²

After inquiring about the 3 practitioners Bill mentioned, you learned that the textbook one of them promoted was a children's novel. Another's lectures were solely presentations to the local elementary schools. The status of Board Eligible no longer exists. The third was not in practice but manages several large retail clinics; the graduate program in which he claimed to teach closed 4 years ago.

Perhaps a litmus test to discern an appropriate addition to your web site or resume is whether your most revered or esteemed instructor might list the accolades that you plan to project. Regardless of when you completed your speciality program, the value of integrity and the principle of veracity never go out of style.

REFERENCES

1. Restle H, Smith J. Seventeen successful executives who have lied on their resumes. Business Insider. July 15, 2015: Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/successful-executives-who-have-lied-on-their-resumes-2015-7>. Accessed August 10, 2019.
2. Principles of ethics, code of professional conduct and advising opinions of the American Association of Orthodontists, May 2018. Section 5.A(i).