

Q&A Column
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Email Subject Line: Answering “Prohibited” Questions During Interview

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Headline : Coming Clean After Lying In Job Interview

Summary:

Question: I've been hired by a company recently and during the interviewing period the question of age was a concern to me. when asked about the ages of my kids I lied so as to appear younger. I feel ashamed about this. Was this against the law to lie? Should I come clean? Thanks.

Name and Location Withheld By Request

Landing Page copy

Headline : Coming Clean After Lying In Job Interview

Dear Mark,

Question: I've been hired by a company recently and during the interviewing period the question of age was a concern to me as everybody present was younger than me. Although I wasn't asked point blank how old I am, when asked about the ages of my kids I lied so as to appear younger. Of course when I did get hired I had to fill out the forms and felt I had to continue with the lie. I feel ashamed about this. From time to time during conversations the ages of my kids come up. Was this against the law to lie about my age? Should I come clean? Thanks.

Name and Location Withheld By Request

Dear Concerned,

What a difficult and very common dilemma: whether to distort or hide the truth during a job interview, with the hope that this will get you hired; or else be honest and maybe risk losing out on the offer. Plus how to handle things if you *are* the one chosen for the position.

This is a tough question to answer – both in broader terms as well as in your specific case. Let's tackle the more generic issue first: is it O.K. to lie when applying for work? Here I'll have to defer to the Workopolis Employment Law expert, Norman Grosman. In one of his informative articles he states that dishonesty is *not always* cause for dismissal ([see his Q&A on this topic here](http://workopolis.com/servlet/Content/resource/20050606/lqa20050606?gateway=work) <http://workopolis.com/servlet/Content/resource/20050606/lqa20050606?gateway=work>). He does go on to say, however, that “dishonesty is amongst the most severe forms of misconduct in an employment relationship. In many situations involving dishonesty the employer likely will have cause for dismissal. Only where the dishonesty is, perhaps, modest, and not in direct conflict with an ongoing employment relationship, does the employee have much chance of success. Allegations of dishonesty, as with other allegations of misconduct must, however, be proven by the employer.”

So much for the general rule. What about in your particular circumstances? You have already fibbed during your job interview and on the forms you filled out once employed. Obviously this

puts you at risk should your employer find out and choose to pursue action against you. This is particularly true if you signed an employment contract that explicitly states that any untruthfulness on your part may be construed as sufficient cause to terminate you.

Then again, how long can you go on concealing your mistruth? It's likely to spill out sooner or later. Likely when you least expect it. And in a way that will embarrassingly reveal to all your deception. At that point it might be too late to mitigate any resulting damage.

Here, then, are some options to consider for now:

- Come clean immediately. Unburden yourself and hope your employer is understanding and that they value your contribution to their firm. Be honest about your concerns regarding age because they might see that as an extenuating factor.
- Come clean eventually. Build up your goodwill first and show them what a great team player and performer you are. Then when you spill the beans they may be more prone to view your one mistruth as an acceptable anomaly.
- Keep lying, and talk less about your kids at work. This way you conceal the dishonesty. But as I mentioned above, it seems bound to reveal itself at some point in time anyway.

They say that all's fair in love, war and interviewing for a job. Only it often comes down to a question that you, the candidate, owe it to yourself to think about carefully before accepting an offer: if you truly believe you have to lie in order to get this particular job, and you just aren't the type who's comfortable being deceptive, then would you be better off to walk away and continue your search elsewhere? Only you can answer this one for yourself.