

Report on a Case by the Board of Ethical Review

Case No. 72-11

Statements in Employee Resume

Facts:

John Doe had been employed as a design engineer in an aerospace company for twelve years, during which time he had been assigned to the performance of highly technical and complex engineering design work. Along with thousands of other engineers in the aerospace industry, he was laid off when contracts with his company were terminated and new work was not forthcoming. After many months of seeking a new job in his specialized field with no success he was advised by an employment counselor that his only opportunity lay in finding a position involving management and administration of engineering work. Doe had had some managerial and administrative experience of a minor nature in connection with his former employment but felt he could perform satisfactorily at a higher level in that related field of technical activity if given the opportunity. After being turned down repeatedly for technical managerial or administrative positions because his resume showed a lack of such experience, he devised a new resume which played down his technical design experience and expertise and emphasized his minor managerial and administrative function in his former employment as an important responsibility. As a result he was able to obtain a new job which involved responsibilities in his general field of technical expertise.

Question:

Was Doe in violation of the code for rewriting his employment resume to emphasize his managerial and administrative experience and play down his technical experience in order to obtain new employment?

References:

Code of Ethics-Section 3(e)-"The engineer will not allow himself to be listed for employment using exaggerated statements of his qualifications."

Discussion:

We construe Section 3(e) to include employment, although the word "listed" reference to being "listed" for employment, although the work "listed" connotes being placed on the roster of an employment service. Under the stated facts there is little doubt that Doe embellished the facts of his experience in order to obtain new employment, his field of technical expertise having "dried up" during the aerospace unemployment crisis. It would be easy to say that his distortion of his experience was an "exaggeration" of the facts and thus cannot be excused as an ethical matter. In the absence of any previous decisions on this section of the code, however, and under the circumstances stated, we are inclined to the more charitable view that his action can be condoned as something less than an "exaggeration" in that it more nearly might be considered a degree of emphasis. This is an established and accepted form of sales technique in which the seller proclaims all of

the virtues of his product and conveniently ignores its less desirable features. To be sure, what we have said is a matter of degree. The purpose of Section 3(e), we prefer to believe, is to protect a prospective employer from being deceived as to the competence of an engineer-applicant in order that the employer not be tricked into entrusting important engineering decisions to one not qualified to make them. In this case, however, Doe could truthfully show some degree of competence in the managerial and administrative technical area of the employment, even though he strongly emphasized its extent and level. We hold that the word "exaggerated" in the code applies only to deliberate untruths of the facts of former employment rather than the emphasis placed on the degree of experience or other qualifications which may be involved.

Conclusion*:

Doe was not in violation of the code for rewriting his employment resume to emphasize his managerial and administrative experience and play down his technical experience in order to obtain new employment.

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