M.I.T. Dean's Pants on Fire

George Washington, call your agent. America needs your "I cannot tell a lie" message. A national lecture circuit slot just became available.

A popular dean at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has resigned after admitting resume padding and living a 28-year lie. Ouch. Her sad story is filled with irony—lots of fresh material for your speeches.

Marilee Jones says, "I have resigned as MIT's Dean of Admissions because very regrettably, I misled the Institute about my academic credentials. I misrepresented my academic degrees when I first applied to MIT 28 years ago and did not have the courage to correct my resume when I applied for my current job or at any time since.

"I am deeply sorry for this," she continues, "and for disappointing so many in the MIT community and beyond who supported me, believed in me, and who have given me extraordinary opportunities." {1}

The Boston Globe reports that her resume claimed degrees from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and two other New York institutions, but that she has degrees from none of them. RPI says she attended as a part-time student for about nine months but earned no degree. The other two say they have no record of her attending.{2}

Ironically, as *The New York Times* notes, Jones was widely admired, almost revered, for her humor, outspokenness and common sense. {3} She had won prestigious MIT awards{4} and earned a national reputation as a champion for reducing college admissions pressure on students and parents.

It gets worse. She coauthored the book, *Less Stress, More Success: A New Approach to Guiding Your Teen Through College*

Admissions and Beyond. On integrity, it says, “Holding integrity is sometimes very hard to do because the temptation may be to cheat or cut corners. But just remember that what goes around comes around, meaning that life has a funny way of giving back what you put out.” {5}

Doesn’t it.

Lots of people lie. Some get caught. The US military reportedly distorted Pat Tillman’s and Jessica Lynch’s stories, allegedly to boost war efforts. Enron executives cooked books for personal gain.

Employees falsify expense accounts or call in sick. Kids disavow breaking windows. Adults tell fish stories. Wandering spouses work late at the office.

Distorting the truth can bring esteem, opportunity, money, thrills. One innocent lie can require cover-ups. Soon the web becomes complex.

We’ve all made mistakes. As a teen, I valued my reputation for honesty but made some poor choices, lied about them, and nearly was expelled from school. My confronters forgave me and offered me another chance. The episode helped point me to personal faith. I learned that Moses, the great Jewish liberator, warned his compatriots against violating divine prescription: “Be sure your sin will find you out.”{6}

Mine found me out. Marilee Jones deceit found her out, as readers from *The Times* of London to *The Times of India* now know.

Jones likely needs privacy—as she has requested—plus good friends, close counsel, and lots of prayers. Perhaps, after recovery, she can help others resist similar temptations.

So, President Washington, what lessons from this episode will your lecture tour emphasize? How about these: Tell the truth.

It may be painful but it’s the right thing to do. It’s easier to remember. You’ll sleep better and enhance society.

Pack your saddle bags, Mr. President. Crank up the PowerPoint. Be sure to include a Pinocchio cartoon and some slides of cherry trees.

Oh, but sir, we understand that the cherry tree story might be mere legend. We suggest you explain that to your audiences and give plenty of real-life illustrations.

Notes

1. Statement by Marilee Jones, MIT News, April 26, 2007, web.mit.edu/newsoffice/2007/admissions-jones.html, accessed April 27, 2007.
2. Marcella Bombardieri and Tracy Jan, MIT dean quits over fabricated credentials, *The Boston Globe*, April 27, 2007, tinyurl.com/3ynyhv, accessed April 27, 2007.
3. Tamar Lewin, “Dean at M.I.T. Resigns, Ending a 28-Year Lie,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/04/27/us/27mit.html?hp, accessed April 27, 2007.
4. MIT Admissions Web site profile, www.mitadmissions.org/Marilee.shtml, accessed April 27, 2007.
5. Lewin, loc. cit.
6. Numbers 32:23 NASB.

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