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Jodi Rosenshein Atkin smooths college application process for busy families

Atkin knows colleges inside and out and helps students decide

By: Nicole Sheldon March 9, 2018



Jodi Rosenshein Atkin

As the first generation in her family to attend college, Jodi Rosenshein Atkin has a deep appreciation for higher education. Decades later, she has now found herself in a career centered on helping others navigate their path toward higher education.

Atkin is the proud founder of Jodi Rosenshein Atkin MA LLC. She is an independent college counselor who works with students and their family as they embark on the strenuous task of finding the right university.

Akin holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's in developmental psychology from the University of Rochester. Her first career was as a behavioral specialist for people with disabilities and their families. But after a while she began to notice a shift in the field.

"It started to be more about paper and less about people, and that didn't sit well with me," says Atkin.

She stepped away from working as a behavioral specialist consultant and considered her interests. After successfully putting four children of her own through college, it hit her: She could make a career out of helping other students find the right university. Atkin saw her two eldest children get steered down the wrong path when it came to choosing colleges, so she took matters into her own hands when it was time for her two younger children to find colleges.

"I told the school counselor—who was a different school counselor because my younger kids went to a different high school than my older kids—that I was going to drive the bus and see what happens," says Atkin. "And it was very successful. That is not to say I went into this as a hobbyist; I continued working as a behavioral specialist for a number of years after my kids went off to college."

It was 2014 when she put her nose to the grindstone and established an LLC.

Atkin attended a summer intensive boot camp for college counselors in 2013, hosted by the New York State Association of College Admissions Counselors. She decided from the start that physically touring the colleges she was recommending to students was a vital piece of her business structure. She has since visited over 100 campuses in 10 different states with 30 more tours planned for later this year.

When Atkin tours schools she says that she keeps a look-out for who the "peeps" are. She talks to students and staff in order to get a conclusive sense of the environment and culture. Atkin has seen schools that are quite conservative and other schools that are uber liberal. She has toured schools where kids walk around with pockets full of money and schools where the students' money is tight.

Atkin says she does not believe in categorizing the chances of being accepted at a college as "safety," "likely," or "a reach." She asserts that a student's list of colleges should be composed only of schools that they are really interested in attending. Labeling a college a "safety school" typically puts a bad taste in one's mouth, especially if that is the only school to which they are accepted.

"Your list should be comprised of schools where you have a reasonable chance of admission, and if the world fell apart and you were only admitted to one school you would be really OK with that," says Atkin. "I've never had a student accepted to only one school. Ethics prevent me from guaranteeing people they

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will receive merit money, but I can say that almost every student (that I've worked with) has been offered merit money in at least one place."

Atkin focuses on four core criteria when working with her clients: academic fit, social fit, cultural fit and financial fit. She refers to her process as a sort of "matchmaking" for students with colleges where they will thrive. She is steadfast in her morals, and she is always there to remind students that their qualities are enough, since that is a message that most students do not receive among all of the pressure they face in school.

"I do whatever it takes to get a kid and their family through this college process while following what I consider a very strong set of ethics and moral standards," she says. "There are people that specialize in writing college essays and you can go online and hire them, but I don't do that. I will, however, help clients edit their essay and find their voice.

Atkin finds that the question for students in the college process is not, "What do you want to major in?" High school students have not yet been exposed to all of the different subject areas that colleges offer, so they do not have the tools to decisively answer that question. Rather, she nudges students with questions like, "What kinds of problems are you interested in solving?" and "What makes you curious?"

"Really, a liberal arts education or a college bachelor's education today is not about a straight career path, it's more about learning how to learn and learning how to apply that knowledge," says Atkin. "The millennial generation is going to have on average six jobs in their first 10 years out of school, and they're going to have on average four to six careers in their lifetime."

Atkin works with anywhere between 10 and 20 families at a time. She is intent on giving herself ample time to get to know each family on a personal level in order to effectively guide students on the right path.

Over the years Atkin's number of clients has steadily increased from the handful she started with in 2014, and she is confident that this number will continue to rise as she has grown more efficient and comfortable in her business.

Atkin typically works with students and families at their homes.

"I don't maintain an office; I think families and kids are more comfortable in their surroundings, and I also learn about them by things like their photos or religious icons in their house," says Atkin. "But I'm not looking to evaluate your quality of life or income level."

Although she primarily works with local families, Atkin has also counseled families from as far away as Baltimore and California.

"Technology is a wonderful thing," she says, "so the process can be guided remotely just as efficiently and effectively as in-person."

If you were unaware that independent college counselors like Atkin exist in Rochester, you are not alone. Increasing awareness has been a challenge for Atkin over the past few years.

"Rochester is slow to adopt," she says. "There are cities where there are lots of people who do what I do. But, what I hear when I talk to people in Rochester is, 'Oh my goodness, I had no idea anybody does this.'"

Atkin also finds it tough to establish relationships with public school counselors, but she has managed to generate a network of colleagues around the country.

"I give public school counselors tremendous credit for what they do, but they're not doing just college admissions—they're doing scheduling and fights in the cafeteria and kids whose parents are getting divorced," she says. "They have a lot on their plate, whereas I only do this. Trying to create that network is a challenge."

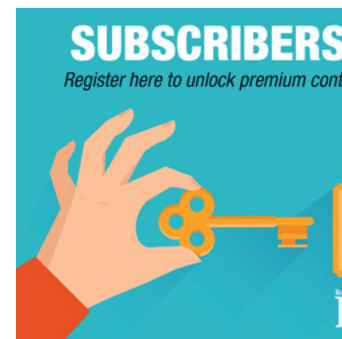
Right now Atkin is a one-woman show, and she intends to keep it that way.

"If you hire me I don't farm out the list creation or anything like that," says Atkin. "If you hire me you get me because this is a very personalized service. I am not a franchise and I am not corporate."

nsheldon@bridgetowermedia.com / (585) 363-7031

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