

ProForm U aims to improve kids' personal skills

by Ross Williams

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A flustered college student rushes into Elaine Rosenblum's Buckhead office. She is 10 minutes late for their appointment, and she is apologizing profusely.

Rosenblum smiles and tells her not to worry about it. The student, 22-year-old University of Connecticut biology major Maxene Weinberg, pulls up a chair.

"What are you going to do if this happens in a medical school interview, if you're late," Rosenblum asks, still smiling.

Blushing, Weinberg comes up with a contingency plan: firm handshake, look in the eye, sincere apology. Rosenblum approves.

"I hope you've learned the lesson," she said. "This is the place to make the mistake, but I would get yourself two alarms if that's something you struggle with, and make sure you have to walk across the room."

Rosenblum is the founder of ProForm U, which teaches collaborative communication and negotiation skills to students and professionals. That means teaching people how to present themselves in the classroom, the interview room and the boardroom. In short, teaching them how to sell themselves.

Rosenblum, a member of the New York State Bar with experience in corporate and legal negotiations and conflict resolution, said her services can include mentoring in areas from resume building to salary negotiation to conflict management. For Weinberg, it means preparing for med school interviews.

The Marietta native is planning on applying to a number of schools including NYU, Emory and Yale.

During her session with Rosenblum, Weinberg practices answering questions likely to be asked during interviews at those schools. Playing the role of a professor, Rosenblum asks about topics ranging from current events in medicine (mental health care is a hot issue) to extracurricular activities — Weinberg is a tennis ace at UConn who loves volunteering — to how to handle a hostile interviewer — be polite but unyielding. Weinberg answers Rosenblum's questions ably, and the two often interrupt the mock interviews to talk about what worked and what did not.

Weinberg has worked with Rosenblum before. While studying at Walton High School, she had SAT and ACT tutoring at Access Test Prep, which Rosenblum co-founded with her husband, Charles Mendels.

The two businesses work out of the same Wieuca Road location, and Mendels said they share many of the same clients. For him, it is about helping the whole student.

“The idea is to give them the best chance to move on in their education or move on after their education into jobs,” he said. “Standardized tests are an important part of it, the academic tutoring we do is an important part of it, but so is being able to present themselves to the world.”

Rosenblum said competition for college admission is intense. She said demonstrating the ability to effectively communicate face to face is a significant advantage among today’s tech-obsessed teens.

“There’s a new variable in the equation: this,” she said, holding up her iPhone.

“They’re struggling with their ability to articulate because they grew up texting, and I have so many students come in here that are so accomplished academically who really struggle with the face-to-face conversation.

“It’s simply because they haven’t had much practice, and interviewing takes practice.”

Clients like Weinberg hope practice makes perfect.

Information: www.proformu.com

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