

HANDLING THAT MOMENT

December 5, 2018 by [Rick Clark](#)- Georgia Tech

After the [Preparation Day blog](#) last week, I got some very positive and encouraging notes. I also got this one, “Sure. It’s easy to write about the kids who still have a chance, but what about those who are denied?” I took this to mean he either thought I was avoiding the subject or I did not have personal experience with it. Well, “Steve G.,” this one’s for you.

She was beautiful. Not Hollywood, head-turning, magazine cover, so-perfect-you-question-if-it-is-real beauty. Truly beautiful—in personality, intelligence, humor, and kindness. Beauty you saw when you met her, but that was made perfect—that you fell in love with—when you got to really know her. And I knew her. In fact, I’d known her since we were five. But we’d never had a *moment* like this.

You know the *moment* I’m talking about, right? You did take that pledge in last week’s post, didn’t you? You’ve prepared yourself for “no”? Well, I hadn’t.

“This isn’t working out.” We were juniors in high school and I was at her house working on math homework. “Don’t worry,” I said. “We will figure it out.” Then she paused and slowly put her pencil down. “No,” she said kindly, but definitively. “This. Us. It’s not working out.”



I could not quote you one thing my kids or my boss or any of my friends said to me in the past week, but I remember her words verbatim. It was like a movie, when all noises suddenly stop and things go black. Yeah... It was *that moment*.

It comes in relationships, jobs, and college admission. At some point, this *moment* comes for us all.

I really can't remember what I said. Maybe nothing. All I remember is getting my bag and stumbling out of the door. Windows down. Music up. I screamed a messy blur of questions, anger, and tears.

Walking into the house, I was hoping to see nobody. Instead, my mom was doing dishes in the kitchen. I wanted to talk to nobody. Instead, we sat on the couch and she told me everything was going to be okay... there would be other girls... and maybe I was better off anyway.

Handling That Moment...

Last week we covered that you need to be prepared to hear “no.” I definitely don't have all the answers but if you open a letter or portal or online account and find yourself in one of those *moments*, here are a couple things to remember.

You're Not Okay. Go ahead and scream, cry, beat your pillow, cook or eat a lot of something (do all of those at once if you're really upset). You do you. Whatever it takes to begin clearing your head. Mad? Sad? Frustrated? Disappointed? I get it. She was beautiful. She was amazing. It takes some time to get over that.

You Will Be Okay. If you are reading this before “that moment” you are thinking, “Yeah, I know.” If you are reading this afterwards, you are probably like, “Just let me keep on beating my pillow while I'm eating.” You are probably thinking what I was with my mom that night, “How would you know? You never had your heart broken. You just woke up one day, married dad, and then had me, right?”

I'm telling you. She was beautiful. But I had convinced myself she was perfect. If you find yourself in that *moment*, I hope you will have the clarity to know—or the willingness to hear your friends or parents or coaches remind you—of the truth: nobody is perfect. No college is either.

Here is the thing: every year—EVERY YEAR—we talk to current students (even tour guides!) who say Georgia Tech was **not** their first choice. They did not get in to their top school, or they could not afford another place, or a myriad of other reasons. But they ended up here and cannot imagine being anywhere else.

I also frequently hear from younger siblings or parents or counselors about a student we denied, and while devastated in the *moment*, is now loving (insert college name here) and doing great.

The truth(s) about being denied...

Note: We are going to move into some statistics and broader forces now, so if you are still in scream-mode, just come back when you are ready.

Truth #1: It's [not fair](#). All metaphors eventually break down, and we've come to that point. When my girlfriend broke up with me, it was personal. She couldn't say, "It's not you, it's me." Nope. It was me. But for colleges it is about *them*. Let's use Georgia Tech as an example. As a public school, we have an obligation to serve our state. Therefore, 60% of our undergraduate students are from Georgia. Ultimately, we anticipate Georgia applicants will only make up about 16% of our overall applicant pool, and their admit rate will be well over double that of students from out of state, and triple that of students from abroad. Translation: it is easier to "get in" from Georgia.

In other words, you may get denied by a school based on where you are from or what you want to study or because they are trying to grow this or that and you happen to be that and this.

Another comment I got after last week's blog was from my friend Pam A., a college counselor here in Atlanta: "the way admission decisions FEEL is so different from how they are MADE." Bam. That is spot on. It is fine to *feel* disappointed or mad or upset. Just be sure you understand a decision is not a prediction of your future success or potential. An admission decision is not an indictment of your character or a criticism of your ability.

Truth #2: Appealing is highly doubtful. Yes, you are entitled to appeal an admission decision. The truth is almost none of these are successful. If you appeal, be sure to read the conditions of a "reasonable appeal." You can use [Tech's as an example](#). Typically valid reasons include not having your correct transcript or receiving inaccurate or incomplete grading information. Major medical situations or severe life circumstances you neglected to include in your application may also be reviewed as valid. "Really wanting to go" or because that was the only place you applied or because everyone in your family has gone there... not valid.

One of my colleagues puts it this way, “If you decide to appeal, you need to be prepared to be denied again.” That sounds cold. But the truth is like that sometimes. Actually, the truth is like that a lot.

Truth #3: You need to be realistic and [move on](#). This may sound familiar but the bottom line is that, if you have not already, you need to submit a few more applications to schools with higher admit rates and lower academic profiles than the one that denied you. Get back to school. Finish this semester well because schools you apply to in Regular Decision will be looking extremely close at final fall semester grades.

Get back to your team, your job, your clubs, and your family. Take some time to look around at practice or over the holiday break at the relationships you have built. Be reminded of the community you created and the bond, closeness, and sense of belonging you feel. They want you with them. They love having you as part of it all. Being denied sucks. I feel your pain (still do, when I really look back on it).

“Preparing yourself for no” means looking at a deny not as a hard stop, but rather as a pivot. People think they are looking for the perfect college. You need to be looking for the perfect mentality.