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# Atkinson Strategic Communications Has One Goal: To Help You Take Pride in What You Do

Bill Atkinson sweats the small stuff.

Come to think of it, [Bill Atkinson](#) sweats the big stuff, too.

It's what makes him tick — and always has, from his time as a banking reporter and editor at small specialty publications to his years as a business columnist at The Baltimore Sun and for the last 17 years as a public relations professional.

“If you're not sweating it, you're not completely engaged,” says Atkinson, 62. “We go way above and beyond for our clients. It's like my mom always said when we were kids: take pride in your work, take pride in what you do.”

Atkinson is president of [Atkinson Strategic Communications](#), which he launched two months before the pandemic began in 2020. Before starting his own firm, he was a partner in 212 Communications, which he joined in June 2015, focusing on strategic and crisis communications, media relations and grassroots strategies. Before that he was a senior vice president at in the Baltimore office of global public relations giant Weber Shandwick.

Atkinson Strategic Communications is pretty much a family business. Atkinson works with his daughter Emily, 29, and son Will, 27. Another son, Michael, 24, works for a PR firm in Washington, D.C.

“Working with my kids is a thrill,” says Atkinson, who has been married to his wife, Barbara, for 36 years. “I don’t treat them like my kids; I treat them as basically part of me, part of the vision, which is to build a [successful PR and communications firm](#). I want them to learn as much as they can, serve the client, build the business, and give back to their community.”

Atkinson, an avid bike rider who has competed in 100-mile gravel bicycle races, says he’s still learning things, too.

The art of public relations has changed since he started with Weber Shandwick in 2005. The massive decline in “traditional” media has been accompanied by the explosion of social media.

“It’s the age of engagement, where everybody is talking to everybody,” Atkinson says. “Everybody’s using social media platforms to do that.

“Some CEOs are developing an online presence connecting with customers and stakeholders, which is smart. Some are unscripted, which resonates with their readers. It is important to be out there and show you are engaged.”

And by “out there,” Atkinson says he doesn’t mean posting on LinkedIn only about the company’s latest hire or congratulating an employee for a job well done.

CEOs, he says, need to be posting about issues that matter to them and their companies, say the environment, social issues, the future of work or the economy — even if it means ruffling a few feathers. “As a corporation you have to address some of these social issues. You have to work to make our city, state, country, and society better.”

And if you upset someone and they come after you?

“There are voices out there that are strong and can launch an attack against you any day of the week,” Atkinson says. “But you should prepare for that.”

Crisis communications helped Atkinson get his start in public relations. Weber Shandwick presented him as specializing in strategic and crisis communications as well as reputation management. And Atkinson says even now that’s how many of his clients first come to him.

“When I look at our business, that will always be there,” he says. “You’re looking for ways to counter a crisis, to tell your story, to get your people out and explain — really explain — reality. And that’s what we like to do. Some people talk about ‘spin.’ I hate that word. We tell the truth. We tell our side of the story.”

Other firms come to him because their principals want a higher profile for themselves or their companies, he says.

“We always say we make people famous and or we’ll die trying,” Atkinson says.

“Most of the time, if you sit down with a company and start talking, they don’t realize what kinds of stories they have. We have an ear for stories, and we get excited when we hear them.”

“The smartest companies are telling stories by creating their own content hubs, driving people to their website or blog or LinkedIn profile. They become their own news channel and inform their readers with compelling stories and news.”

Atkinson has been writing those stories for all his professional life. And he wants to continue doing so for a while.

“We want to be like a player in town and I think we are,” he says. “We want to be the firm you go to if you really want smart strategy, whether you’re in a crisis or want to get your name out there, you’re going to come to us.”

You know he’ll sweat for you if you do.