

John Lazar: Coach and Friend Extraordinaire

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It seems that most who knew John agree on his wonderful attributes – smart, funny, great coach, high commitment to his family, his friends and his profession, prolific writer, early adopter, visionary, articulate speaker/presenter – the list goes on. John could listen deeply, speak expertly, empower others compassionately, and laugh joyfully.

We thought that sharing some personal stories that illustrate some of his stellar qualities would be the best loving tribute to John. We are a small group of executive coaches who met in the 2000's, first through the Newfield Network, and then served in the Institute for Generative Leadership long-term "CEO" coach training program. We have stayed connected for over 15 years, and had our last Zoom meeting with John just weeks before he died.

Sharing what he knew with others; Enjoying the drama of being at the front of the room; Holding the space for teaching/learning

"When I first met John, it was a memorable experience! We were both attending the first year of the Institute for Generative Leadership's "Coaching Excellence in Organizations" in 2008. John was one of the coaches for this brand-new program. Before the meeting began, many of us were milling around the meeting room of the Boulderado Hotel. When he and I met, we initially engaged in typical surface-level pleasantries. However, John didn't stay on the surface very long – he went right to a more meaningful conversation.

"I have no recollection of the topic that led to his next words. I do remember that he asked me - seemingly suddenly - "What are the 4 types of committed responses to a request?" At the time I had no idea what he was talking about. John then proceeded to give me the answer to his question. What was amazing to me is that his comments didn't come across as pedantic or as a classroom lecture. Rather, he wove his words into a series of causal explanations that were engaging, interesting, and memorable. This was a small moment in time. After that, I observed many times how John could weave CEO distinctions and other meaningful concepts into everyday language and casual discussions, whether in front of a large group or one on one. He did this with clear language, vivid images, obvious engagement, and his own distinctive sense of humor. What a gift John was to the world!"

The Ability to Receive

"I was attending a workshop with John, and noticed that he was feeling cold. I had on a bright colorful scarf, and offered it to him. He wrapped himself up in it, at that moment ... and for the rest of the days in the workshop! On the last day, I gave the scarf to him, realizing that he had "owned it" and that it now belonged to him. I sometimes imagine him wrapped up in that pretty scarf, and it makes me smile."

Commitment to His Friends and Willingness to Help

“John and I were in a year-long intensive and advanced coach training program as participants. The course was rigorous and required several hours of homework each week. I was sharing with John that I was behind with the coursework, and concerned that I might not be able to complete the program in time, and thereby not earn the certificate nor receive the full value of the course. John revealed that he, too, was struggling to keep up with the assignments. So together we invented a “buddy system” that we effectively used for the rest of the year. We would both schedule 60-90 minutes in our calendars. At the beginning of the appointed time, we would call one another by phone, say hello and share what we were going to be working on during the rest of that time block. At the end of the appointed time, we would stop working on the assignment, and email each other with what we had accomplished. Then we would schedule our next date to continue working in this fashion. Happily, we both completed the program on time, received our certificates and served as program coaches in the course. I have since used this technique with many of my students in coaching programs, and it has also worked for them. To this day, I don’t think I would have successfully completed the program without John’s help and support!”

Sharing a Hidden Talent

“John was a frequent visitor in our home. One time he asked to go to our local market, saying he was going to make dinner for us. We went to the market and John meticulously selected numerous items. We returned home and he made an incredible fish stew for our family. To this day, my husband’s mouth still waters whenever I mention John’s stew!”

Being Truly Present to Others

“One of my fondest stories is of a time John and I shared on a rental car shuttle bus. If memory serves, we met up outside of Dulles airport on our way to a program coach meeting. I was going through a time of inner tumult and transformation and was mulling on something as we boarded the shuttle bus.

“Once our luggage was secured and we were safely in our seats, John turned to me. Though I hadn’t said a thing about it, he could tell that something wasn’t quite right. As he settled into himself to listen and connect, the space around us seemed to grow, despite the number of riders crowded around.

“I forget exactly what John asked, but whatever was bothering me came tumbling out. He sat silently taking it in, extending the space in which we were simply present with what was. After an appreciative breath, John asked me a single question. I no longer remember what it was, but I clearly remember how quickly and powerfully it blew whatever I’d been mired in wide open!!! I may have sat dumbstruck for a moment before gathering my wits to say, ‘*Thank you, John!*’

“John’s ability to sense into others’ presence, listen deeply and offer from his heart will be with me always.”

Empowering a Beginner

“For several years John published a beautiful magazine, *The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*. At some point he asked me to contribute an article for it. I said, “No, I can’t do that – I’m

not an author.” He persisted in his request, said that I did indeed have an article in me, and that he would support me through the process. He helped me identify a subject I could write about, set up checkpoints with me, and reviewed drafts. The outcome? I am published!”

Intentionally Nourishing His Friendships

“After John and I became friends, he sent me and my husband an email every year on our wedding anniversary. What friend does that?!”

John’s Irrepressible Spirit, Resilience and Optimism

“I had spoken with John about an upcoming visit, and noticed that he seemed to not be as robust as the previous time we had talked. However, he was proceeding with his plans, and we were getting “his room” ready in our home for a several-day visit. He never made that trip. Just days before he would have been traveling to see us, he went to the hospital for the last time. John kept going until he couldn’t, diligently and intentionally nourishing his friendships, and living his life fully until the very end.”

It was our gift to have known, learned, coached and worked with John. God bless you, John. “May choirs of angels sing thee to thy sleep.”