

Some Memories of Our Friend, John Lazar

The speaker had a dark beard, a big smile, and an easy manner, making his subject of “evaluation in coaching” both approachable and interesting, as they so often would in later years. His name was John Lazar and his talk on coaching and evaluation was one of my introductions to professional coaching.

More than 20 years ago, when I was first thinking about becoming an executive coach, someone invited me to a well-regarded, special meeting of coaching program leaders in federal agencies, though my job had little to do with coaching at that point. It was intimidating to be in the room because coaching was a deep, incipient desire which I'd only recently admitted to myself.

John brought substantive ideas to the group for our consideration—ever the coach, even from the stage. Most significantly, when I asked John a question in the moments as the meeting wound down after his presentation, he rewarded my interest by offering to share more about coaching. We walked next door for coffee and, for the next hour, John shared his insights and experiences in coaching.

The information in his presentation and our private conversation were really useful—but it was the interest and generosity with which he shared that really made a difference. Because John invested in me—because he so obviously cared, even about someone he'd never met before—he helped make me feel like a career shift into coaching was possible.

That caring was one of John's signature traits: a caring that elevated others and imbued them with more confidence than they had before. Combined with John's insight and experience, it created great coaching moments for clients and colleagues and friends over the years.

Years later, John and I were part of a cohort of coaches in a three-year course on Coaching Excellence in Organizations (CEO). In getting to know John personally as a fellow student and fellow mentor coach, I found he was just as generous as friend. He always wanted to know how you were doing, what he could do to help.

The other thing I learned was that John was both extremely passionate and very intentional. He cared deeply, passionately for people and coaching and ROI and good food and so many other things—and he thought deeply, too, about what he had, what he wanted, and what he wanted to change. He and I would have conversations about life and John's efforts to lose weight, often over plates of good sushi in Boulder, Colorado, during our time in CEO.

In March of 2022, John's paradoxical thoughtful passion showed itself best in the explicit decision to turn his unexpected health crisis into a journey of learning for himself and others. He documented his experience, struggles, and insights in a series of updates which he sent to his friends by email. He'd write about his symptoms and treatments, his family and friends, and what he learned: we were able to accompany him.

You can see the intentionality across his updates. In one update, for example, he wrote: “There is no timeline for when healing time and these interventions will have their desired effect. With a date target uncertain, I get to organize myself differently (but consistent with my approach to my treatment/recovery regimen – focus on what I can control (attitude, focus, targeted activities, ongoing learning, flexibility), and bring my best game as much as possible. Keep the faith. Patience, persistence, and positive attitude shall carry the day and keep me level-headed, hopeful, and resilient.”

These updates, too, came from his desire to be generous and to help, even from his own hurt.

John's generosity and kindness, as well as his passionate intentionality, made his coaching and friendship great gifts for so many. He helped lead me onto the path of my own purpose. He mentored, coached, and trained thousands of people. We'll miss him, and we are grateful for him and his caring contributions to our lives.