

Optimism, Gratitude, and Love Are All Contagious. (What I learned from John Myslak)

Description

My cousin Al says two things, we all want the ability to love and to be loved. John Myslak accomplished both.

John was a good friend to me and many others. He was a great son, father, and husband. Due to cancer, John left this earth on June 30, 2019, at the age of 54. In his last few days, he was surrounded by friends and family. John was an only child. His father said no parent should have to bury their child. How true. John left this earth teaching. He was helpful right to the end.

I first met John in November of 2011. I was speaking at a Community Maritime Park board meeting and shared some personal information about myself. I showed vulnerability. John happened to be there that day. After the meeting, John came up to me and shared about himself based on my sharing. Sharing our stories created an immediate bond that still lasts today. Because we lose people physically does not mean we lose them emotionally and spiritually. They remain with us through our shared experiences and the lessons we learn from them.

John and I ate breakfast together often. We saw each other at least twice a week and talked on the phone four or so times each week.

It is not unusual to meet someone who says John was their best friend. John had the ability to be a friend to many. Many people know who John was. I close most of my talks around the country by talking about John, and the end of my new book, *The Calling*, is also about him.

John, like all of us, did not go through life undefeated. He had personal and professional setbacks. In fact, the setbacks and his recovery from them is what created a magical bond with others. Life breaks all of us, and God enters through those cracks.

Here are some observations about John and then a message he left me with.

John loved to learn. I could count on receiving from John every Sunday an email on his takeaway from this column. (John was also consistent. It was not once in a while; it was every Sunday.) Many of our talks were about what we were learning.

John was impeccable with his word. If John said he would be somewhere, he was there. John respected othersâ?? time. I can never recall a time when John was late.

John was able to take feedback. There were times when he would hear some tough messages that would require him to change. John was in the construction business. I toured with him on a project that was having difficulty. As we toured, John was not very friendly to the workers. John was feeling pressure and was upset. As we ended the tour, he asked me what I thought. I shared with John I felt that he could be more uplifting and warmer to the workers. Soon afterward, I saw John at a Blue Wahoos game with the workers. John thanked me for the feedback. Often we are not aware of things for we are so close to them.

John was grateful. He was grateful for many things. Of course, he was most grateful for his wife, Louise, and children, Will, Jack, and Lilly. He was grateful for experiences.

John was optimistic. He believed life was filled with wonderful experiences and opportunities, and that they were available to him. For example, he was a huge St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan. He grew up in St. Louis. One day at the Blue Wahoos Stadium, ex-Cardinals manager and Hall of Famer Tony La Russa showed up. I quickly called John and said, â??You may want to get to the stadium.â?• John arrived, and I introduced him to Tony. They spent about half an hour together. During the last 24 hours of his physical life, John shared that this had been on his bucket list.

John also loved to golf. When Bubba Watson moved to Pensacola, John became a regular golf partner with him. This was on his bucket list as well.

I know Tony and Bubba have no idea the impact they had on Johnâ??s life. Never underestimate the difference you make.

John had a gift for me. John shared with me that while he did not want to die, he felt good that he had been able to let people know he loved them. He looked at me and said, â??Do not wait to tell people you love them.â?• Since that day, I have told people I love them way more often.

Like any new behavior, telling people you love them is not comfortable at first. With some people (family and friends), I wondered if they would wonder what took me so long. With some I did not know that well, I wondered if they would think it was unusual. I do not know. But I have done it. And it seems the more love I give, the more love I receive.

I am on the board of TriHealth in Cincinnati, Ohio. It is a large healthcare system. The CEO of TriHealth is Mark Clement. I have known Mark for close to 30 years, mostly professionally with some personal overlap. After a board meeting, it is customary for Mark to wait with me while my ride comes to take me to the airport. Soon after Johnâ??s passing, I was at a board meeting. As Mark and I waited in the lobby, my Uber driver pulled up. I decided to go for it.

I looked Mark in the eye and said, â??Mark, I love you.â?• Mark looked back and said, â??Your Uber is here.â?• I get it. After 30 years, Mark was wondering what was going on. A few weeks later, I received a wonderful handwritten note from Mark saying he loves me.

Optimism, gratitude, and love are all contagious. As we close, be grateful for the ability to love and to be loved. Let people know you love them. John, I love you.

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