

In his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey challenges us to “begin with the end in mind.” Now, before you dismiss this seemingly simple idea as elementary, it’s important to understand exactly what it is. Mr. Covey wasn’t talking about how to begin our next project, letter, or email. He was talking about how to begin the rest of our lives. Imagine a gathering of people. Now imagine that it just happens to be a gathering of people attending your future funeral or memorial service. Who will be there? What will they say about you? How will they remember you? What will they say you stood for, and how will they describe your legacy? We should all begin the rest of our lives *right now* by asking ourselves these important questions and living our lives with the singular goal of having them answered the way we’d want them answered. *That’s* what it means to begin with the end in mind.

I think that my friend, Jeffrey Kolodin, lived his life with the end in mind. And I think that, along with his family and many friends, every single member of the international brain tumor community – now and in the future – is a part of his permanent legacy.

Jeff passed away last week, and everyone who knew him, including me, is heartbroken. I met Jeff 10 years ago when he interviewed me to see if I might be a fit for his beloved National Brain Tumor Society’s board of directors, of which he was the proud Chair. We shared stories about our common experiences as brain-tumor survivors, and he spent far more time learning about me as a person than about my credentials to be a board member. He didn’t complain about his tumor, the organization’s challenges, or anyone personally and spoke instead about the great honor he felt in being able to serve the brain-tumor community. I wanted to hug him after the call (and I believe that I actually did hug him every time we saw each other after that call).

That experience, which I still remember in great detail, was my first hint of who Jeff was as a person. For him, everything was about individual people and deep, personal relationships. Sure, he was a strategist, a leader, a fundraiser, a steward, and an advocate; but, above all, he was an emotional, caring person who understood and built relationships based on respect, compassion, and love.

I learned a great deal from Jeff, as did so many others. When he eventually tapped me to succeed him as Chair, he flew to Boston to see me and spend an entire afternoon talking to me in person about everything I could possibly need to know. He also told me that he understood that I might want to do things differently and that he was fine with that – as long as it was for the good of our organization and our community.

Jeff and I were friends, allies, and partners. We did not agree on everything; but, true to his word, Jeff was at peace with that. Consistent with our first conversation, Jeff was more interested in the power of personal relationships and the astounding results that could be achieved when people worked together, which remained his great passion and joy.

So, getting back to Mr. Covey’s questions, who is there to mourn for Jeff now that he has passed? His family, his friends, his colleagues, his fellow board members, and *hundreds of thousands of people* who comprise the community that he spent so much of his life serving, building, and loving.

And what are these people saying about Jeff? He was kind, charismatic, warm, and deeply caring and giving. He worked passionately and relentlessly to find a cure for brain tumors and to comfort so many

others who were suffering – even as he quietly suffered with the circumstances of his own brain tumor. His life’s mission was to serve others, and he achieved that mission again and again each and every day.

How will we remember him, what he stood for, and the legacy he created? He was a father, a partner, a friend, a teacher, a mentor, and a colleague. He was the Chairman Emeritus of the National Brain Tumor Society, the organization that he loved as a proxy for the entire global brain-tumor community. He gave far more than he took. He carefully steered the National Brain Tumor Society through a period of growth, transition, and progressively substantial impact, including:

1. The highly complex integration of the Brain Tumor Society and the National Brain Tumor Foundation to form the current National Brain Tumor Society;
2. The establishment of synergistic, strategic partnerships across the community with numerous like-minded organizations, researchers, and advocates; and
3. The launch of the bold, unprecedented Defeat GBM program.

His legacy will forever be one of deep philanthropy in the truest sense of the word – love for other people. The entire world is a better place because of Jeffrey Kolodin, though the light that shines on it is a bit dimmer with Jeff’s passing.

I love you, Jeff, and I’ll never forget you. Thank you for being part of my life and part of the world. I hope that somehow you know just how many people share those exact same sentiments about you.