

CONTINUALLY LIGHTING THE WAY: REMEMBERING JERRY BEPKO

ANDREW R. KLEIN*

It is an incredible privilege to be part of a celebration of life for Jerry Bepko. Jerry was an extraordinary leader at this law school, on campus, and across Indiana University. He was an even more extraordinary person, and he touched many lives. I am grateful that mine was among them.

I met Jerry about twenty-five years ago when I first arrived at IUPUI. Jerry was Chancellor, and he made a point of personally meeting every lateral faculty hire. I remember our law school dean at the time, Norm Lefstein, bringing me to the old metal hut that housed the Chancellor's office. Jerry and I found out that we had a lot in common besides being law professors. We were both from Chicago, both sports fans, and both rabid about the Chicago Cubs.

I got to know Jerry better when he left the Chancellor's office (and the IU president's office) and returned to the law school, where he settled for the next decade, teaching classes and supporting any number of colleagues. We became especially close when I was dean of the law school, and I had the privilege of co-teaching a seminar with him that he developed when he helped launch the Tobias Leadership Center at IUPUI. Jerry titled the seminar Leadership and Law.

I describe myself as a "co-teacher," but I was as much Jerry's student as I was an instructor. Jerry used the seminar to introduce law students to his understanding of what it means to be a servant leader. That's a phrase that gets tossed around a lot today. But Jerry was a scholar, and it was not just a slogan to him. Jerry studied the work of Robert Greenleaf, who first developed the theory of servant leadership in the 1970s (and who was a Hoosier, by the way, from Terre Haute).¹ Greenleaf explained—as did Jerry—that servant leaders measure success not by their own accomplishments, but by the achievements of others who they have led.²

Jerry lived that way. He cared deeply about those around him, and it is no surprise that he took a special interest in the people who were part of his professional life. I remember being in his office, talking about work issues, personal issues, you name it. I remember being there on occasional Saturdays when my younger son was playing Little League. We would drop by between games of double-headers, and Jerry was always so kind to him. I think about all the memorabilia in Jerry's office. But the only thing my son asked about was a

* Dean & Professor of Law, Wake Forest University School of Law. Dean Klein was a member of the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law faculty from 2000–2023. He served as dean of the IU McKinney School of Law from 2013–2020. He served as Interim Chancellor of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) from 2022–2023.

¹ *Robert K. Greenleaf Biography*, ROBERT K. GREENLEAF CENTER FOR SERVANT LEADERSHIP (2021), <https://www.greenleaf.org/about-us-3/robert-k-greenleaf-biography/> [https://perma.cc/DB4F-XLKD].

² *See What Is Servant Leadership?*, ROBERT K. GREENLEAF CENTER FOR SERVANT LEADERSHIP (2021), <https://www.greenleaf.org/what-is-servant-leadership/> [https://perma.cc/W5TJ-EDH7].

photo of Jerry throwing out the first pitch at Wrigley Field. (Actually, that might have been Jerry's favorite piece of memorabilia, too!)

Speaking of the Cubs, one story just kept popping up in my mind as I thought about Jerry these past few months. I hope it will make those of you who knew him smile.

I was in Jerry's office one afternoon shortly before a big awards dinner that IU was holding across the street that evening at the Indiana Historical Society. Jerry was an honoree—President Michael McRobbie was awarding him the Indiana University Distinguished Service Medal, one of the highest honors that IU awards.³ But Jerry was a bit agitated. It was October 13, 2015, and the Cubs were playing the St. Louis Cardinals with a chance to earn their first post-season series victory since 1908. Jerry was not happy about missing the game, and as we were walking to dinner, he told me that I needed to keep track of the score for him.

I sat way in the back with Lauren Robel, who was the Provost in Bloomington and (thankfully) also a Cubs fan. So, Lauren understood why I had set up my phone against a water glass with a baseball game streaming on it.

The Cubs won. I walked up to the front table and whispered the result to Jerry. He literally leaped from his chair, pumped his arms in the air, and nearly hit President McRobbie in the head. The look on President McRobbie's face was priceless!

Now, I don't want to leave the impression that the honor Jerry received that night had little meaning to him. Quite the opposite. Because if there was anything—beyond family—that Jerry loved as much as the Cubs, it was Indiana University. In fact, just a month later, there was an event at the campus center where Nasser Paydar was being installed as IUPUI's new chancellor.⁴ For deans and administrators, it was a robed ceremony—we attended in our academic regalia. Jerry and I drove over together, but just as we arrived, he told me we had to turn back. Jerry had left his medal in his office, and it meant so much to him that he insisted on retrieving it so he could wear it with his robes on stage.

As I suggested earlier, though, nothing was more important to Jerry than his family. Anyone who spent time with Jerry also knew Jean and heard about JJ and Mindy and the time they spent together—whether it was during the sabbatical they spent together in Oxford, England, or winters in Naples. Jerry loved time with his grandsons, Bradford and Griffin, who I remember seeing in Inlow Hall during the summertime, heading to Victory Field with their grandfather. Jerry was someone who set a good example for us on a personal level as well as a professional level.

3. See *IU Awards University Medal to Gerald Bepko, President's Medal to Fedwa Malti-Douglas, David Wilkes*, INDIANA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE (Oct. 30, 2015), <https://medicine.iu.edu/news/2015/10/medals-bepko-wilkes-malti-douglas> [https://perma.cc/5QZJ-T6CB].

4. *IUPUI Chancellor Nasser Paydar Installation Ceremony*, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BROADCAST (Nov. 17, 2015), <https://broadcast.iu.edu/events/iupui-chancellor-paydar-installation.html> [https://perma.cc/H5HC-SD87].

When Jerry's health deteriorated during his last few years, I stood in for him and welcomed new cohorts of Bepko Scholars to IUPUI. Being selected as a Bepko Scholar is the highest honor an undergraduate student can receive on this campus.⁵ I shared Jerry's story with the students, explained why they should be proud to hold an honor in his name, and talked about his views on what it means to be a leader. I noted Jerry's reflection that we are in a time where people too often equate leadership with notoriety; where people measure value with the number of clicks they get on social media; where too many people confuse cynicism with intelligence. Jerry knew that none of that was true.

To emphasize these points, I closed my remarks to the Bepko Scholars with a quote from Robert Greenleaf, the scholar whom Jerry admired, and I'll conclude with the same passage here. Greenleaf wrote: "[t]he best leaders . . . continually light the way, and in the process, let each person know that what they do makes a difference. "The best test [as a leader] is: . . . [d]o those served grow as persons[]; do they become healthier, wiser [and] freer."⁶

Jerry Bepko passed that test with flying colors. Like so many of you, I am grateful that he was part of my life. And I am grateful to have been part of today's special occasion.

5. See *Bepko Scholars and Fellows Program*, INDIANA UNIVERSITY INDIANAPOLIS <https://honors.indianapolis.iu.edu/about-us/bepko-scholars/index.html> [https://perma.cc/6RM3-M3YK] (last visited Aug. 13, 2024).

6. ROBERT K. GREENLEAF, *SERVANT LEADERSHIP: A JOURNEY INTO THE NATURE OF LEGITIMATE POWER AND GREATNESS* 27 (1977); *Servant Leadership Certificate*, UNIVERSITY WISCONSIN MADISON, <https://continuingstudies.wisc.edu/classes/servant-leadership-certificate/> [https://perma.cc/T5ZK-NAUE], (last visited Aug. 22, 2024).