

John Ruggie: In Memoriam

The legacy that John Ruggie left us is wide and deep. The United Nations Guiding Principles on business and human rights that he authored were not just unanimously endorsed by the Human Rights Council in 2011, but continue to make their way into the business canon: into national and international standards; into the operating procedures of companies, investment firms, and advocacy organizations; and into the syllabi of law and business classes as an essential part of what the next generation of leaders and citizens need to know.

Well before he was appointed U.N. Special Representative for business and human rights in 2005, John had already made an indelible mark on international relations: with the definitive theory of embedded liberalism, and through his teaching and advising of thousands of students at Columbia, Harvard, and elsewhere.

He didn't need another feather in his cap—and used to joke that had he not been heavily sedated while recovering from hip surgery when then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan called with the assignment, he would have turned it down. But what he achieved through his mandate was remarkable, and its impact will only grow over time.

However, it wasn't just what John did but how he did it that we should celebrate. Unlike so many leaders with a busy schedule and impressive credentials, John always had the time and energy to learn. Traipsing around a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Colombia during a U.N. mandate trip in 2007, the rest of us were exhausted by the travel and sickened by the syrupy smell; but John couldn't get enough out of the site's production manager, who was showing him how every chute and gear worked, the two of them gesturing and nodding wildly in lieu of a shared language.

He was equally comfortable with the global elite, with CEOs, activists, and government ministers confiding in him, trusting his judgment, and enjoying his companionship.

In every meeting and consultation, he listened more than he spoke, and in concluding remarks always managed to play back something from everyone, letting them know they had been heard. It was an honor and a privilege to see him operate, whether presiding over multistakeholder fora or strategizing out of public view.

Of course, he wasn't perfect. As with all of us, his greatest strengths were his greatest weaknesses. His love of being right and being clever (which he was, often) occasionally led to snark. His desire to control the narrative meant he was quick on the trigger with his blessed Blackberry—most benignly, resulting in numerous messages to former U.N. High

Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, who was next to his wife in his directory, saying he'd be home late for dinner and sending his love. Thankfully, Mrs. Robinson returned the affection, like most everyone who knew him.

He was by his own admission an awkward manager for the motley, dispersed team that sprung up around him for the mandate. But to be fair, he never asked to lead us: We simply couldn't help but follow him.

For all of his quirks and strengths, we were devoted to John, and he cared for us in return. Though he cared for no one more than his wife and son, who always treated us—John's secondary brood—with warmth and respect.

I still keep my Team Ruggie mug on my desk as a reminder of what we can achieve when we rally around a leader we admire. Thank you John, for the life you led, the example you set, and the legacy you leave.

Christine Bader
McMinnville, Oregon
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