When I was 6-years-old I wrote a letter to Roy Rogers, the cowboy star of movies and television, asserting that I was his biggest fan. That was the first and only fan letter I ever wrote. When I was invited to speak at a Festschrift for John Bartlett, I quickly replied, “I am much honored to be asked to be part of your proposed celebration of John. I can’t think of anyone in our discipline who has given more or is more deserving of celebration. Thanks for asking me to be part of this wonderful tribute. Others may know John better than I, but I doubt that anyone holds him in higher regard.” One can consider what follows as my second go at fan mail.

I think I was given this privilege because, although I know John and have partnered with him for Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) presentations and committee service, I have enough distance to be objective, so you can be confident that everything I am about to say is true. Also, I have been around long enough to have been able to observe John throughout the entirety of his distinguished career. I have the perspectives of distance, time, and age.

John (Figure 1) is a unique figure in American medicine. Consider this: what other person can you name who could draw to a Festschrift as distinguished and diverse a group as Drs Anthony Fauci, Sherwood Gorbach, D. A. Henderson, and Brad Spellberg? And consider this: What other academic has reinvented himself as many times as John has? He has an unusual ability to shift gears, take up a new issue, and become a leader in the new arena. Very few individuals become known as a world expert in a single area; John is internationally recognized as a leader in at least 6.

He began by defining for us the important roles played by anaerobes in a variety of human infections and by providing exquisite descriptions of the clinical pictures of these infections. Then, in a series of elegant experiments and clinical studies, he showed us that *C. difficile* was the cause of antibiotic-related colitis. He is an authority regarding community-acquired pneumonia and other respiratory tract infections. When the AIDS epidemic hit, John jumped in with both feet along with his heart and brain, established a model care program, and became a leading educator and guideline developer for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). After the anthrax bioterrorism episode in 2001, he helped awaken the medical community about anthrax and other bioterrorism threats. Furthermore, he has been a driving force in getting both the medical community and policymakers to understand the potential devastation that inevitably attends increasing antibiotic resistance. John has reinvented himself more times than the pop singer Madonna.
We should take a moment to review some of the facts of John’s career. John is a graduate of Dartmouth College and received his medical degree from Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, New York. He trained in internal medicine at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston; served as a captain in the US military, including time in Vietnam; and then was a senior medical resident at the University of Alabama, following which he trained in infectious diseases at Wadsworth–University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA). He has held academic positions at UCLA, Tufts, and Johns Hopkins University (JHU) where he served as the Stanhope Bayne Jones Professor of Medicine and was the Infectious Diseases Division chief from 1980 to 2006. His academic output has been prodigious and includes more than 470 peer-reviewed papers, more than 330 book chapters, more than 100 letters and other non–peer-reviewed publications, and about 70 editions of 14 books. His book *Medical Management of HIV Infection* is in its 18th edition. His curriculum vitae is 95 pages long and has a table of contents, and there is no fluff.

Important activities include founding the JHU HIV Care Program in 1984 and directing it up to this year. John was co-chair for the Department of Health and Human Services Guidelines for Antiretroviral Agents in Adults and Adolescents from 1996 to this year and chair of IDSA’s Antibiotic Availability Task Force for 7 years.

John’s honors are many. I’ll mention just a few. The medical students at JHU School of Medicine have honored him for teaching on 8 occasions. He received the Finland Award from the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. John is a Master of the American College of Physicians, a member of the Institute of Medicine, and served as president of the IDSA. The IDSA has conferred an unmatched 4 awards on John including, in 2005, the Alexander Fleming Award for Lifetime Achievement. He has also received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Anaerobe Society, and it was my great personal pleasure to present him with that award.

In every field of human endeavor there are a handful of persons whose names are synonymous with said endeavor. In English literature we think of Shakespeare. In physics we think of Einstein. In basketball you might think of Michael Jordan. In the field of infectious diseases the name John Bartlett is virtually synonymous with the discipline.

John is a truly great educator. He wants everyone to know what he knows; he wants everyone to be a better physician, a better scientist. He will go anywhere to make this happen, no matter how out of the way and modest the host institution or audience. I have witnessed John’s mission to educate first hand. One year when John and I partnered to do the “What’s Hot?” session at the annual meeting of the IDSA, I ran into John in a convention center hallway the day before our session. He asked me if I thought it would be good for the audience to have a handout with the abstracts of the papers he and I had planned to discuss. I said yes, I thought that was a good idea. The next day, I arrived quite early for our session. The cavernous room was dimly lighted. An audiovisual person was at the side of the room fiddling with wires. The only other person in the room was John, pushing a cart containing a very large pile of abstract handouts and placing one on each seat. The night before he had gone to a commercial business center himself to have the handouts made, and there he was distributing them himself.

There is something else that John routinely does that others don’t. When he summarizes a paper as part of his literature review, it isn’t enough for him to report on the scientific content. He calls the authors and gets more information. He follows up and shares new unpublished information with his audiences. Of course, it helps that the person calling is John and therefore, the authors are likely, even eager, to take the call.

John is a great, even visionary, thinker, but he is also a doer. I’ll share a fun example related to me by John’s friend, executive assistant, and sometime editor, Janet Landay. Janet said, “We were expecting one of our first site visits from the Ryan White Group; John called a meeting and said, ‘Okay, we’ll take them over and let them see some really sick AIDS patients on the floor; then we’ll have a nice lunch for them—and for God’s sake—suck up to them like you have never sucked up before.'”

Now we have to admit that John isn’t good at everything. He isn’t good with personal technology. Communications by e-mail usually come from his secretary or executive assistant to whom he has dictated what he wanted to say. I always could tell when John himself sent me an e-mail. It never had more than 3 sentences, and there were at least 2 typos in each sentence.

There are some other surprising things about John. He grew up in Syracuse, New York, where John was the quarterback of his high school football team. He tends to be messy and loses things. He loves to go to antique stores and flea markets. He can upholster chairs. He is a very accomplished painter. He has spent weeks making a home Halloween display to entertain neighborhood children. He drinks a lot of coffee—as many as 20 cups a day. He is very fond of cats. His current cat is named Savannah Elizabeth the Second, and John can entertain her and himself for hours with a feather on the end of a string.

John’s original contributions to science are plentiful and important, but I believe the way he has been so generous and so effective in communicating not only his work but also the work of others to a larger community is equally important. John has been effective in communicating specialty science to a broad audience including generalists, the public, and policymakers. As Charles Darwin wrote in an 1865 letter to Thomas Huxley [1], “I sometimes think that general and popular Treatises are almost as important for the progress of science as original work.” John has given us abundant original work and also many equivalents of general and popular treatises. One of the reasons he is such a good
educator is that he is such a good speaker. He is charismatic, even enchanting. He is entertaining and clear, and his passion makes the listener care about things one never thought she or he was interested in. He is just as effective in his writing, which is cogent, persuasive, lucid, direct, and no nonsense.

John is funny. His humor is never forced and just flows out of him, sometimes in a completely unexpected manner. For example, in another one of his “What’s Hot?” talks, John reviewed a publication in which so-called fecal transplantation was successfully used to halt recurrent episodes of *C. difficile* colitis. At the end of his detailed review of the paper, John concluded, “Well, it looks like it really works, but the aesthetics suck.”

In preparation for this celebration, I wrote to more than a dozen individuals who have served as president of the IDSA, all of whom know and have worked with John. I asked each of them to send me 3 words that come to mind when they think of John. All of them responded within hours of getting my e-mail. One might conclude from this that former IDSA presidents have too much time on their hands, but I know that isn’t the case. Rather, it seems clear to me that their rapid responses were a reflection of the deep respect, admiration, and affection they have for John. The descriptive word that was used to define John and his attributes more often than any other was indefatigable, or tireless. His work ethic is legendary. He accomplishes more in a day than most of us do in a week. I think this characteristic was summarized well by a colleague who recently told me, “The thing that strikes me most about John Bartlett is that I could never believe there was only one of him” [David Schlossberg, personal communication].

John can multitask. Many of us have marveled when, as a session moderator, he introduces a speaker, then works on a manuscript during the talk, and at the end of the talk rises from his seat and asks the smartest question. Furthermore, his questions always come from a place of real curiosity or a need for clarification. They are never those all-too-frequent “see what I know” kinds of questions, nor are they ever patronizing, belittling, or mean spirited. John is always kind. I have watched him stand patiently for an hour after one of his talks as he respectfully answers every question those standing in line had to ask.

I have never heard anyone say an unkind word about John. That, in itself, is a remarkable tribute. Janet said it well, “He is terribly compassionate. He doesn’t have any meanness in him.”

Let me say a personal word about John’s kindness. After several years of sharing the podium with John for the “What’s Hot?” and “Hot Topics” sessions, I was not invited back. John was, John wrote to me of his displeasure saying that we made a good pair and that he thought it was a mistake to break up the team. At the meeting, when John completed his talk, as his last slide and without comment, he showed one of my paintings with my name beneath it. It was an act of quiet protest and extreme kindness.

The IDSA presidents had other words to describe John. Among the words selected by more than one person were visionary, encyclopedic, brilliant, committed, caring, humble, passionate, gentle, and artistic. Quite a list of superlatives, and all deserved. Several of those who wrote to me couldn’t confine themselves to 3 words and had more to say. I’ll share here 2 of the comments. One said, “To me, John is the essence of what a professional colleague should be in any field, and the prototype of an academic physician. He has always been positive and supportive of his colleagues of all ages, and usually finds the best in people rather than dwelling on their deficiencies. He is fascinated by the entire field of infectious diseases, not just his own niches. He wants his trainees, his colleagues, his institution, and all of medical science to be successful” [Henry Masur, personal communication]. Another wrote, “His footprint on the field of infectious diseases and healthcare is deep and likely unmatched. His problem-solving abilities, uncanny ability to predict and solve the problems on the horizon, his organization and communication skills coupled with his unbridled energy and passion truly make him one of a kind. What an honor to know him” [Thomas Slama, personal communication].

Yet, what I myself find most remarkable, most exceptional about John wasn’t mentioned by anyone. And that is John’s sense of awe, his sense of wonder. It would be hard to find anyone more informed, more medically sophisticated than John, yet when he talks about something new he is filled with a sense of wonder. You can feel his excitement. There is kind of gee-whiz quality, a kind of a wide-eyed kid at the circus quality. The French embryologist, Jean Rostand, said, “What a profession this is—this daily inhalation of wonder” [2]. John embodies what Rostand meant, and we are fortunate that he has shared his sense of wonder with us.

I’ll end my remarks with these 6 words: Congratulations, John. Well done. Thank you.

**Notes**

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