Remembering Malcom Lewis, USGBC Board Member and Green Building Visionary

Published on **18 Oct 2012** | Written by Alex Wilson , **Alex Wilson** | Posted in **Community**

The passing of former USGBC board member and visionary green building leader Malcolm Lewis is a painful reminder that while we pass through this earth in a blink of time, we can choose to leave a lasting legacy. Alex Wlson at BuildingGreen captures Malcolm with the warmth and insight we always look to Alex for and with his permission, we share his thoughts with you. - Rick Fedrizzi, President, CEO & Founding Chair, USGBC

Our friend and mentor, Malcolm Lewis, has passed away. Malcolm Lewis will be sorely missed.

Malcolm Lewis, Ph.D., the founder of Constructive Technologies Group, a member of the EBN Advisory Board, and long a quiet leader in the green building movement, died on October 13th of bladder cancer.

I first got to know Malcolm when I served on the U.S. Green Building Council board of directors and observed his ability to craft consensus and find agreement on often-heated issues. He was the soft-spoken trouble-shooter on whom the board came to rely to get us out of trouble.

Along with serving on the USGBC's board, Malcolm chaired the Council's Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee (TSAC), which was charged with defusing tense issues, such as whether LEED should include a credit for avoiding PVC and how to factor in both ozone-depletion potential and global warming potential of refrigerants.

He took on these tasks with a skill and sensitivity that I don't think I've ever seen before. And I saw that work up close, since he tapped my colleague Nadav Malin for the PVC Task Force. Malcolm shepherding that process through contentious meetings—always with tact and respect for the views of others. (How much our politicians would have been able to learn from him!)

Malcolm grew Constructive Technologies Group into a firm of 30 engineers and other technical staff in two divisions, CTG Energetics and CTG Forensics. CTG Energetics handled LEED certifications for over 150 buildings—including many of the earliest. Under his leadership, CTG Energetics helped USGBC develop a scientific framework for distributing points among credits in LEED, created a LEED Volume certification program for the U.S. General Services Administration, developed a carbon accounting tool for California communities, and wrote the Reference Guide for ASHRAE Standard 189.1, among many other accomplishments. In December, 2011 he sold the company to The Cadmus Group, not long before being diagnosed with cancer.

My one chance to work directly with Malcolm on a project was in 2002 when we were part of a team that helped Stonyfield Yogurt come up with a strategy to reduce its carbon emissions. A handful of us spent an engaging two days crawling through the Stonyfield plant in New Hampshire identifying opportunities for savings—and there were many. It was a privilege to see Malcolm's brilliant engineering skills tackle this challenge after seeing him in action on the more abstract issues of toxicity, ozone depletion, and group dynamics.

Malcolm will be sorely missed by all who knew and worked with him, and also by those who didn't know him but nonetheless benefited from his often-anonymous efforts. Fortunately, we still have the fruits of his labors as the foundation on which we can continue to build a greener world.

Alex Wilson
Integral Contracting INc.

Member employees

13 comments

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Annie Argento 2 years 37 weeks ago
Principal, Argento / Graham

I first met Malcolm in 2007 in a board room at a project kick-off meeting. Newish to the industry and not coming from a technical background, I was so fortunate to have had the opportunity to collaborate with and more importantly learn from Malcolm so early in my career. Malcolm was a natural teacher -- his ability to explain a complex mechanical system to a room of people with varying levels of expertise and with divergent project interests and goals was inspirational. Outside of these project planning sessions, I always enjoyed seeing Malcolm at the CTG booth at Greenbuild, passing out party tickets and hugs. The tallest guy in the room, he was not hard to spot at that party tearing a rug on the dance floor and celebrating the green building movement he was so dedicated to. A real super-star! My thoughts are with his family and all his colleagues at CTG/Cadmus and USGBC.
Annie

Heather Rosenberg 2 years 39 weeks ago
Principal, The Cadmus Group

It is very hard to imagine or accept a world without Malcolm Lewis. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the time I did have with him, for the person that he was, and for the person he helped me become.

I met Malcolm in 2001, when, as I was coming out of grad school, he hired me to work at CTG. I was not an obvious fit for the company--I was not an engineer and had no direct experience with the building industry. But Malcolm and I established an immediate rapport. During my first interview we began a dialogue about the meaning of sustainability, about systems and leverage points and how to really make a difference in the world. We continued that dialogue for over a decade. His faith in me helped me have faith in myself.

For all his brilliance and degrees and knowledge, Malcolm never spoke down to me. Never one of those engineers who only really speak "Engineerese," his mind was always flexible and expansive. He was always asking questions about ecology and biology and permaculture and social justice, and wanted to explore how these ideas fit into the larger green building world in order to make the world a better place. He really listened, and he challenged me to seek new ideas and bring them back to our group. No one could ask for a better mentor. Working at CTG turned out to be one of the biggest blessings of my life.

Malcolm enabled a team of brilliant, creative and FUN people who loved a challenge, worked hard, and enjoyed exploring new concepts and technologies. We were looking for solutions that worked, rather than getting attached to any particular theory or technology. Malcolm could imagine the most complex systems in his head, but he also wanted to be able to get out in the field and kick the tires. Customer service was important, but never at the expense of professional integrity. He led by example, demonstrating that humility trumped arrogance and collaboration trumped hierarchy, always making sure there was room at the table for all. He was genuinely curious about who we were as people, not just as workers. I never felt that I had to hide parts of my personality or be someone different at work.

Malcolm was very much a father figure to me. His office was a welcoming and safe place. If I shared with him the burdens of my heart (be they work related or personal), he would be the first to have tears in his eyes. He took true pleasure in my successes, and provided refuge in my trials. I have never met a more empathic, open hearted or caring man.

Malcolm was inspired and full of hope. He truly believed that good science and honest, creative and integrative problem solving could lead to a better world, and time after time he demonstrated how this could be the case. He was a tireless champion for good work of all kinds, propelled not by glory but by making a difference.

I am heartbroken by the loss of Malcolm--my mentor, my leader and my friend. He reflected to me--and to countless others--my greatest potential, and gave me permission and space to find my way. As I sit at my desk now, I imagine him rooting me on, rooting on all of us who continue the work of green building and sustainability, the work of world mending.

Daniel Whittet 2 years 38 weeks ago
Sustainability Consultant, AHA Consulting Engineers, Inc.

Your comments are perfect Heather, you captured exactly what I felt about Malcolm as well. His quality of bringing out the best in all of us, with that incredible ability to make us feel like we CAN make a difference. This was sad news indeed but I bet Malcolm would tell us to carry on his legacy and that's the best tribute we can make to his work and generosity. Thanks for saying it so well.

KRISHNAJI PAWAR 2 years 39 weeks ago
CEO/Principal Sustainability Consultant, Arab Engineering Bureau

Dr.Malcolm Lewis was a great person and his encouragement towards learning building commissioning and green building design was amazing. his death is big loss to all green building community. I wish his family peace in this time.

Ryan Gaylord 2 years 39 weeks ago

Principal, Altura Associates, Inc.

It's fitting that I first met Malcolm in a classroom. I was working on finishing my engineering graduate degree thinking about how little I cared about fluid dynamics; thinking about how the hell I was going to make a difference in the world. That's when Malcolm walked in and starting talking about green buildings. It was everything I could do to contain my excitement - my passion was born. For six years at CTG, Malcolm continued to be a mentor in various shapes and forms. I feel lucky to have worked alongside such an incredible visionary. Along with so many others, I also feel lucky to have captured that spark that will enable each of us to continue working on the mission - to make the world a better place.

Emily Turk 2 years 39 weeks ago

Malcolm was brilliant, cheerful, and inspiring. I will always remember his gentle encouragement and humble manner. He treated everyone with respect and dignity, regardless of age. I will never forget the confidence he gave to both me and Brendan over a decade ago, when we were starting out as the young LEED Architect and LEED Engineer, respectively--back when USGBC was just getting started. Over the five years I was honored to work closely with and learn from Malcom and his wonderful team at CTG, I will never forget the wisdom he gracefully imparted or his smile which illuminated the room. He is truly missed. May his family be comforted by loving memories. After all, what other kind is there for Malcolm?

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john irvine 2 years 39 weeks ago

I was lucky enough to have worked for the last 10 years in the office next to Malcolm's at CTG. He helped make them the happiest years of my life. We'd see that incredible smile daily (when he wasn't on the road spreading the word—which he frequently was). He was so thrilled to be doing the work he did. Often he would stride into my office just beaming--saying excitedly "Isn't this great?!" He was that enthusiastic about daily life and the mission we all shared. Whether at CTG or at Greenbuild, Malcolm was like a kid in a candy store.
We all have lost someone so very special and so very dear that words fail us. I've found some comfort in realizing that he carried away something special from each of us and gave something to each of us that will always remain. Love and Joy.
Malcolm you will continue to inspire us.
-john

Daniele Horton 2 years 40 weeks ago

Founder & President, Verdani Partners

I was so sad to hear about Malcolm's passing. Robert F. Kennedy once said that "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation." Malcolm was one of those people that bended history himself. I met Malcolm in 2007 when David Gottfried recommended him to help us with one of Thomas Properties Group Green Building projects. Since then we knew that when we needed help exploring cogeneration or any more advanced mechanical systems that Malcolm was the person we needed on our team. He was brilliant and one of the most qualified engineers in the country. Malcolm became a good friend over the years as we met during work meetings and many events and conferences such as Greenbuild. He was caring, always had a smile on his face and gave me a nice hug when we saw each other. Malcolm was indeed a great mentor, a friend and one of my heroes in the green building field. His kindness, work and legacy have impacted the green building industry forever. I know that he is in a wonderful place right now! I am thankful for all he has done for a more sustainable built environment. My heart goes out to him and his family. The world needs more people like Malcolm! He will never be forgotten!

Saulo Rozendo 2 years 40 weeks ago

Strategic Marketing Analyst, EJ

Malcolm Lewis, thank you for inspiring all our lives in making buildings better, in transforming our industry to be greener, and for sharing your vision of LEED buildings with a positive impact.

I had the privilege to meet you in this past couple of years at the Regenerative Network and to nurture my strategies at the company with your wisdom. One of the most intellectual people I ever had a conversation with.

Hope his family finds in these messages our true sentiment of gratitude and respect for a fantastic friend.

Chris Pyke 2 years 40 weeks ago

Chief Operating Officer for GRESB.com / Vice President for Research, USGBC, U.S. Green Building Council

The world needs many more people like Malcolm Lewis. With his passing, I've lost a friend and the green building movement has lost a visionary leader.

There are too many important things to say, but it may suffice to note that Malcolm inspired those around him to be better, as engineers, as scientists, and, most importantly, as people. He provided a warm sense of optimism and opportunity -- a feeling that so much more is possible in the world and the conviction that the world can and should be a better place.

I find myself selfishly wishing for one more conversation, one more chance to be inspired, one more smile. I take it as a profound challenge to live up to the example Malcolm Lewis set for all of us.

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