Fair winds and following seas, Captain!

Written by Bob Sattler
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There are people who come into our lives who make a profound difference in how we view the world. We lost one of those people on November 14th with the passing of Michael Smull.

For those who knew him, you know of his wit and humor, his kindness, his way of treating people, and his ability to help people look at things from a different perspective. For those who didn't know him, you're probably aware of his work in creating Essential Lifestyle Plans, Person Centered Thinking Training, and the Learning Community for Person Centered Practices—all foundational in supporting people to have positive control over their lives.

Michael's work began over 40 years ago, helping people who faced significant challenges and were often labeled as having severe behaviors and difficult reputations. Many of these people lived in institutional settings. Michael took a different approach, looking beyond those reputations to understand what was Important To and Important For each person and what needed to be present to achieve a good balance between the two. This was a transformational concept for the human service system and provided a new framework for designing services and supports that led to more meaningful lives.

His approach was not about glitz and glamour, but simply about listening, taking notes, asking for clarification, and determining what actions needed to be taken based on what we know. He called them "napkin conversations," and you could have them anywhere. All you had to do was listen, both to what you heard and what you saw, and check for understanding. Michael shared that learning through stories, and those stories attracted others. He influenced people to follow this approach and share their own stories as well. His work has had a global impact, demonstrating the importance of listening and acting to have power *with* people, rather than power *over* them.

Over the past few years, as Michael experienced declining health, he continued to help those supporting him understand what it means to have positive control in one's life, no matter the circumstances. He lived the principles he spent a lifetime teaching.

When Michael wasn't influencing the human service system, he enjoyed his home in Annapolis, Maryland, with his wife, Andy, who passed away in April 2025, his furry four-legged children, and his lifelong passion for sailing. Being on his boat was his happy place, where he could fish in the Chesapeake Bay, teach others to sail, or take people on tours of the area. It was where he could recharge and be at peace.

Michael was born on July 2, 1944, and passed away peacefully at his home on November 14, 2026. He is survived by his sister, Mary, his brother, Dick, his dog, Yumi, and the countless people whose lives he touched and influenced. Devoted long-time friend, Kimberly Youngchild, spent the last several years

supporting both Andy, and, later, Michael to live comfortably at home. We can imagine him now, sailing those heavenly waters with a smile on his face and a cold IPA in his hand.

We invite members of The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices and anyone who feels comfortable doing so to flood social media with pictures, favorite “Smullisms,” memories, and stories about the impact Michael had on your life, your work, or your career. Whether it was a conversation that changed your perspective, a lesson that stayed with you, or a moment that made you laugh, we hope you'll share it. Together, we can celebrate Michael's extraordinary legacy and show just how far his influence has reached and continues to reach through the lives of those he touched.

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