

LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE

What do Early Interventionists Have in Common with Alex Trebek?

Alex Trebek lost his fight with pancreatic cancer on November 8, 2020. Trebek was a star, no question. He hosted Jeopardy for 37 years, or about 8,200 episodes, has a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame and earned seven Emmy awards for his hosting.

There are many reasons Trebek excelled in what he did: his voice, his calm self-assurance, his kindly attitude toward contestants. But here's the real secret to Trebek's long, long career:

He never made it about himself.

Mister Rogers always said that his entire purpose in making Mister Rogers' Neighborhood was to provide just one adult that kids knew they could always trust, one island of stability for children who all too often had none in their real lives. In its own small way, Jeopardy was that for adults, a safe space. We welcomed Alex Trebek into our homes each evening taking a brief break from the chaos of the world. We played along and watched as he smiled when contestants got it right, encouraged them, sulked or teased them when they got it wrong, and laughed in all the right places. In that small way he was a role model, and his legacy matters.

Trebek once said, "I'm introduced as the host of Jeopardy, not the star. My job is to provide the atmosphere and assistance to the contestants to get them to perform at their very best." Trebek's job, he felt, was to make other people successful. And in so doing, he found success himself.

In one of his final interviews, Trebek noted that he wants to be remembered "first of all as a good and loving husband and father, and also as a decent man who did his best to help people perform at their best."

Isn't that the heart of every Early Interventionist— to provide the atmosphere and assistance to promote success while making the parent/caregiver the star?