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# Honoring the Life of Gay Whitney

We often get caught up in the drive to improve our businesses, achieve our goals, make our numbers and so forth. But every now and then, you receive a bit of news that makes you stop and take stock. Last month, I was informed that Gay Whitney, GS1 US' senior VP of industry engagement, was gravely ill with

a rare form of cancer. She died a few days later. Gay was just 49 years old, with three teenage children. How do you make sense of news like this?

In case you didn't know Gay (born Elizabeth Gay Millson), she was smart, energetic and tireless in her pursuit of RFID standards that could foster collaboration and improve the way that companies conduct business. From 2006 to 2009, she was in charge of global strategy and standards development at EPCglobal, which is how I knew her. She helped shepherd in the entire set of Electronic Product Code (EPC) standards, from the tag-data standard to the EPC Information Services (EPCIS) standard.



Gay  
Whitney

Everyone who worked with Gay Whitney was impressed with her intelligence and skills. "Gay will be remembered as an esteemed colleague, a passionate defender of standards, a lovely person and a friend to all," says Dick Cantwell, former president of EPCglobal's board of governors. "She combined intelligence with purpose, in a classy and caring way. The industries she touched are better off today, as are all who came to know her."

Says Chris Diorio, a cofounder of Impinj, "Every memory I have of Gay Whitney is of someone always there, always ready and willing to help. She could solve problems that nobody else could, and lead when nobody else would. Her indomitable spirit guided our EPC industry through years of ups and downs, to the adoption we are seeing today. And she never lost faith. Her last words to me, just a few short days before she died, were

'I wish we were still out slaying dragons.' We have lost a leader, a friend, and a true gem of a person. I will miss her."

Sanjay Sarma, the current chairman of EPCglobal's board, notes, "Like any new technology, EPC went through several twists and turns over the years, but the one paddler on the EPC canoe who never flagged was Gay Whitney. With grace, wit, thoughtfulness—and, true to her name, gaiety—she inspired us all to keep the movement moving. A day after she had her first chemotherapy treatment, she called and exhorted me to 'get on' with a particular decision at the EPCglobal board that was 'holding things up.' A day before she passed away, she texted me to make sure I was watching Wimbledon. Gay was an inspiration and a pleasure. I will miss her professionally—and, more painfully, personally. Rest in peace, Gay."

Gay started her career at Saks Fifth Avenue, as a buyer of men's outerwear. Her intelligence, work ethic and natural charm helped her rise to become the firm's VP of merchandise information and technology. She eventually left to start her own consulting practice, and helped not only Saks, but also Aéropostale, Bed Bath & Beyond, Elie Tahari and Polo Ralph Lauren, implement retail RFID solutions.

When she joined GS1, Gay had a profound impact on the organization and her colleagues. "I worked with Gay for the full 12 years I've been with GS1 US," says Michele Southall, GS1 US' director of community development, "through her pregnancy with Robbie (her youngest), the creation of the first global data synchronization network (UCCnet), and the first work plan for EPCglobal, in 2004. We had dance parties, cooked meals together and prayed together. She has been my inspiration since I met her."

Gay actually worked for Gena Morgan's father at Saks. "The first time I met her," Morgan recalls, "he looked at us and said, 'You two would do brilliant work together.' The many

years I spent working with Gay were some of the most fulfilling I have ever had. She was always a mentor and a friend. What I will always remember about Gay is her strong belief and example that if you are working in good faith and doing the right thing, you will never fail.”

No one can truly take the full measure of a person’s life—not in a short quote, or even in a long book. But I encourage all who knew Gay Whitney to post your thoughts below—for the sake of those who knew her, as well as those who did not. The least we can do is create a small cyberspace memorial to someone who contributed so much to our industry and to our lives.

My thoughts and prayers go out to Gay’s family and her colleagues at GS1. I know this is a devastating loss, but Gay would expect—maybe even demand—that you carry on.

*Mark Roberti is the founder and editor of RFID Journal. If you would like to comment on this article, click on the link below. To read more of Mark’s opinions, visit the RFID Journal Blog, the Editor’s Note archive or RFID Connect.*



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