



A 'Beautiful Day'

Leadership lessons learned from Mr. Rogers

THE MOVIE "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" recently played in theaters across the country. The movie calls up childhood memories for many of us. We believed that the TV show "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" was for children. What we did not appreciate was the remarkable wisdom he offered to adults.

Having grown up in Pittsburgh, where it was produced, I have particular affection for that TV show. While we may not have considered Mr. Rogers a leadership guru in the past, we have come to realize that he offers critical wisdom for leaders in any field or discipline.

The recent movie invites us to consider what we might learn from a man whose wisdom continues to shape the minds and hearts of children of all ages. He teaches us the power of forgiveness, presence and acceptance.

In the movie, Tom Hanks plays Fred Rogers. He said that the hardest thing about playing the part of Mr. Rogers is slowing down.

LEADERSHIP LESSON #1: SLOW DOWN

Many leaders suffer from Time Distortion Disease. We create unrealistic expectations with unrealistic timelines for ourselves and our teams. We find ourselves racing from meeting to meeting, catching a cup of coffee here and there, passing those with whom we work as though they and we are invisible.

We lose sight of what is important. We forget that the "what we do" is enhanced by the "how we do and be." As a result, more and more employees feel alienated and unappreciated by their leaders.

"You know, I feel so strongly that deep and simple is far more essential than shallow and complex. In the end, life isn't about material things. It's about the relationships you have with one another and yourself," Fred Rogers once said.

What would slowing down mean for us? What would happen if leaders invested as much energy in presence as strategy? Would

we be more focused? Would we have more ability to support one another? Would the work we do be done with more intention?

LEADERSHIP LESSON #2: I LIKE YOU JUST THE WAY YOU ARE

Leaders have an opportunity to lift others up. We have the ability by our words and our actions to affirm the best in others or to focus our energy on what doesn't go well. Affirming others does not mean that we don't call out mistakes, challenges, poor performance. It does, however, give us an opportunity to decide where we want to shine the light. It invites us to forgive one another when we haven't measured up.

This notion of appreciation was so important to Fred Rogers that he often invited others into a quiet reflection with him. In fact, during the Emmy Awards ceremony in 1997, when he received the Lifetime Achievement Award, he asked that everyone take 10 seconds with him to think about the people in our lives who have "loved you into being." He asked that we think about those who cared for us and wanted only the best for us. It was quite an uncommon way to receive an award, yet it was so consistent with how Fred Rogers lived his life. It was a powerful lesson for those present and for his TV audience.

I suspect this exercise was not only to remember the love given to us, but to encourage us to pay it forward.

What might happen in the workplace if leaders learned to affirm more than criticize, focusing their energy on what goes well?

LEADERSHIP LESSON #3: IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Fred Rogers believed that human relationships are the active ingredient essential to development and success ... at any age.

When we consider the number of times in business that projects have failed or were derailed because there was a breakdown in

relationships, we appreciate the significance of investing in the development of relationships and effective teamwork, focusing on strengths and diversity as keys to success. Like Mr. Rogers, we know that it takes time to build trust. It takes a willingness to risk vulnerability. It requires us to recognize the invisible blinders that keep us from seeing ourselves the way others see us.

So much more is possible!

What skills, then, do leaders need in order to foster a culture in which human relationships are valued as the active ingredient for success? What difference will it make when leaders and employees work together in harmony to support the mission and vision of the business?

We have received the invitation from Mr. Rogers: "Won't you be my neighbor?" If we accept the invitation, we will engage in helping to build a beautiful neighborhood ... in our workplace, our community and our world.

Slow down. I like you just the way you are. It's all about relationships. ■



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