

Five Minutes to Thrive: 6-10 May 19

NEIGHBORHOOD Leadership

Like some of you, I grew up watching *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*. I was an adult before I discovered that my mild-mannered “neighbor” was actually a broadcasting warrior whose leadership is credited for saving a fledgling Public Broadcasting System from financial ruin. Fred Rogers led remarkably harmonious personal and professional lives, and is known for bringing out the best in people and organizations he had contact with. So, what can battle-hardened Airmen learn about leadership from a touchy-feely guy like Mr. Rogers? How about...

Silence & Listening – Commercial TV execs don’t like “dead air”, but Rogers masterfully used walking, sitting, and thinking – silently, or with a little background piano music, to get across important lessons. During several prime-time TV award shows, Rogers stood before star-studded audiences and asked them to quietly think about people in their lives who helped them to achieve success. Silence provides opportunities for quiet reflection – something our busy and noisy lives often prevent. Do we avoid silence for fear of being alone with our thoughts? Mr. Rogers also never interrupted, and when he was interrupted, he listened without the intent of steering conversations. **How can we use silence and listening more effectively in our leadership practice?**

Humility – Mr. Rogers was a servant leader who famously said, “Fame is a four-letter word...what ultimately matters is what we do with it.” We may shy away from the limelight or opportunities to spotlight ourselves, but do we worry that others won’t notice the good work we’re doing? Former President Ronald Reagan famously said, “There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don’t care who gets the credit.” **What examples of humility do you see in your organization? How would greater humility change your leadership practice?**

Curiosity – Rogers was a famously tough interview subject. He had a knack for befriending reporters and asking them personal questions. He was *genuinely* concerned about others and loved hearing their stories. Rogers believed that everyone has something to teach us, especially children. **As leaders, are we genuinely and sufficiently curious about all members of our organizations?**

Pacing – High performing individuals and teams tend to adopt predictable, stable, steady, and even work routines (“Slow and steady wins the race”, “Slow is smooth, smooth is fast”). Setting a good pace means occasionally people will pass us up...only to burn out down the road, as we steadily advance in the pack. Rogers wasn’t a “one-hit wonder”. His pace enabled a record-breaking 31-year run in broadcasting – no small achievement, and only one of many over the span of his career. **How’s your pace? Could you benefit from change? How can you know?**

Routine – Rogers was ridiculously disciplined in his daily routine. He woke at 0500, prayed, studied, made phone calls and wrote letters to every fan who took the time to contact him, went for a swim, and finally – stepped on the bathroom scale for a dose of truth before starting his day. His biographer wrote that Rogers weighed exactly 143 pounds for the last 30 years of his life. Why? Because, “the numbers 1, 4, 3 mean ‘I love you.’” Children and teams alike thrive with consistency and routines because they increase reliability, dependability and reduce anxiety. Any child who has seen more than one episode of Mister Rogers can predict with relative certainty what will happen next. **What routines are key to your organization’s success? What’s at risk by not adopting routines?**

“You Are Special” – Rogers taught that everyone has a role to play. High-performing teams grasp this concept intuitively – they demand expertise and consistently high levels of output from their members. Occasionally, social scientists blame our national self-esteem crisis on Mr. Rogers’ “special” view of people. But we’d ask if the alternatives (e.g. “You’re replaceable, expendable”) are in keeping with our core values? *Hardware* is replaceable; “humans are more important than hardware” (SOF Truth #1). **How can leaders foster this mindset on their teams and ensure mission success?**