

Five Minutes to Thrive

Lessons from the Neighborhood, Part II: Mister Roger's Wisdom for Air Force Leaders

Last year, we wrote a piece on the wisdom of Mr. Roger's for military leaders. We're back at it with more lessons and inspiration from the mild-mannered puppeteer from the *Neighborhood of Make Believe*. Cue the trolley music and let's go for a ride, shall we?



Foster Inclusion. Despite his color vision deficiency and inability to distinguish between his red and green sweaters, Mr. Rogers wasn't "colorblind". He embraced people from all backgrounds and experiences. He often said things like, "There's no person in the whole world just like you" and "I like you just the way you are" to children and adults alike. These weren't just clever catchphrases, but genuine expressions that touched, and literally saved lives from ruin. Psychological safety at work starts with acknowledging and valuing people's differences. When Airmen know that their uniqueness is valued and appreciated, they'll give their best to the mission and perform at consistently high levels.

Promote Curiosity. Mr. Rogers modeled powerful curiosity in each of his 895 episodes over 30 years. Through his genuine inquisitiveness about *literally* everyone and everything, he showed us that paying attention to the details of others' lives builds our capacity for empathy and compassion. Our organizations need intellectually hungry and humble people who ask good questions and drive us toward the answers we need. Leaders, we can seek out, model, and foster curiosity in our organizations.

Allow Mistakes. When his show debuted in 1968, Mr. Rogers wore button-down sweaters. In one episode he buttoned his sweater wrong, but instead of shooting another take, he used the footage to show children that people make mistakes. Eventually, the buttons were replaced by zippers because they saved time and didn't bump Mr. Roger's microphone. Leaders who say they crave innovation must be willing to pay for it in the mistakes that will inevitably be made along the way. Innovation, creativity, and learning won't happen without organizational tolerance for mistakes.

He may not have been a decorated Navy SEAL, but when leaders and organizations embrace Mr. Roger's lessons: foster inclusion, promote curiosity, and allow mistakes – we'll not only have a more resilient force, but we will secure our ability to attract and retain the talent we need to ensure future multi-domain warfighting dominance.