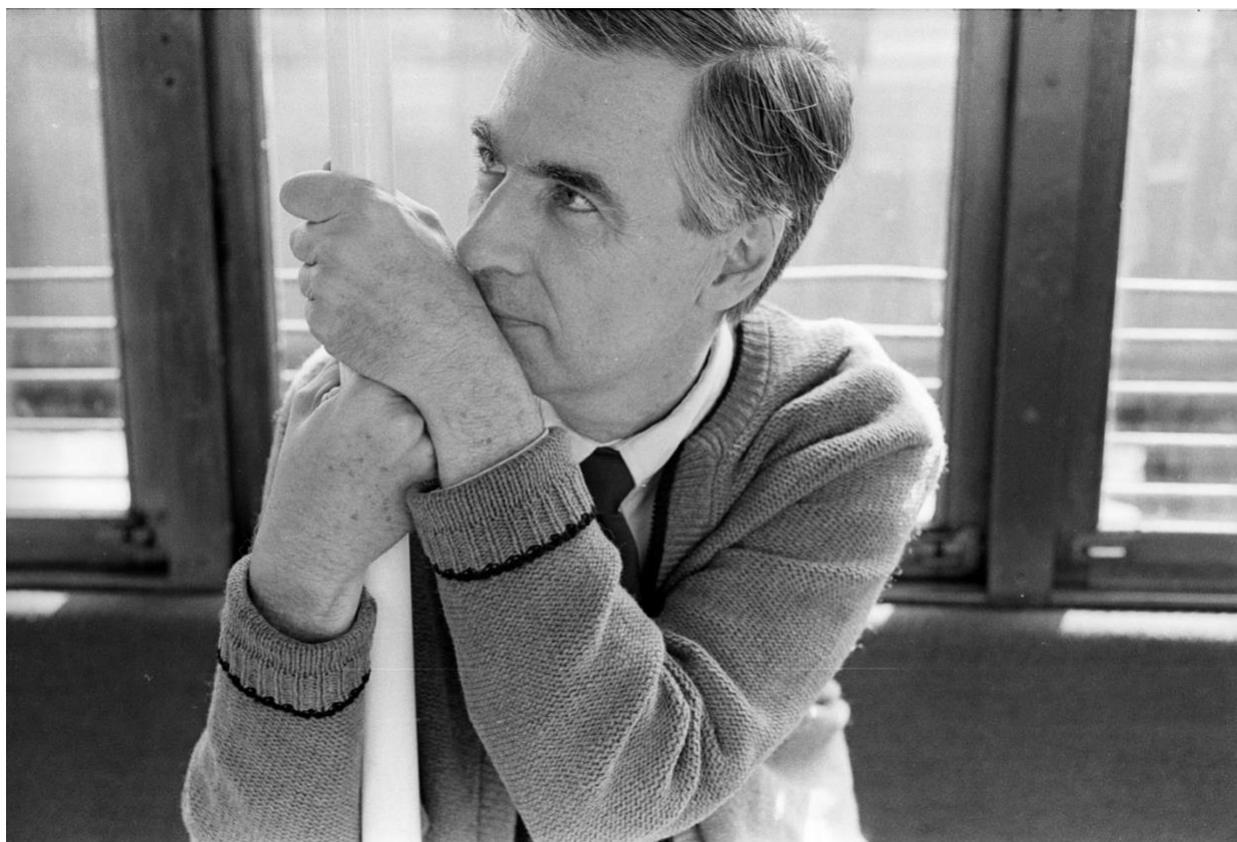


May 2021

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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Slowing Down



Whenever people have asked me what Fred Rogers would say about how to help children through the pandemic, I've turned the question around and asked what they might take from his messages. In a sense, I think that's what Fred hoped, that each of us would take from his work what's most meaningful for our own lives.

That's why, whenever I've shown video clips from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* for professional development, I often ask the participants, "What messages did **YOU** hear in it?" Usually teachers talk about "what" Fred said

or did. But I'll never forget a teacher who talked about "how" Fred said and did things.

What struck her was his slow pace, how comforting and comfortable it was -- and how much it helped her be open to watching and listening. And she added that it was a great reminder to work on slowing down. That calming pace might help us these days, more than ever.

While "Mister Rogers'" pace was Fred's natural pace, I can tell you from working with him over the years that he really worked at that. He understood that a slow, thoughtful pace can help make communication more meaningful, whether you're talking with children or adults. You can look at almost any *Neighborhood* episode and find examples of Fred taking the time to slowly and deliberately explain things...showing something over and over again...letting children look carefully and giving them quiet time to think about what they're experiencing.

Here's an example of that from one *Neighborhood* episode. As you watch, think about Fred's pacing and what makes it so helpful.



Of course it was much easier for Fred to set that kind of a slow, methodical pace because he was talking to a camera in a television studio. In our fast-paced world and with all that's going on in a roomful of young children, that's obviously more challenging. Here are some ideas to keep in mind that I've learned from Fred and others:

Taking a deep breath

Have you been in a workshop when the leader starts by asking you to take a deep breath and slowly let it out? I have, and I'm always amazed at how just that simple "activity" settles me down and relaxes my muscles and my mind – and opens me up for learning. Try it now. And try it *with* the children, especially when you want to help them calm down so they'll be ready to watch and listen to what you have to say.

Giving children quiet time to think

When you give children quiet time to think, you're helping them develop one of the important tools for learning -- reflection. Silence lets them digest, internalize and make connections at their own pace. I know teachers who ask a question and then tell children NOT to reply right away, but to take some time to think. It can take a lot of self-discipline on our part to not jump in too soon to provide answers or even to scaffold too soon. One of my granddaughters reminded me of that, when she said, "Wait, Grandma. I'm still thinking."

Doing it again and again

Part of what makes Fred's pacing so comfortable is that he didn't jump from one thing to the next. Just like you can see in the video, he often demonstrated the same thing over and over again, sometimes with a slight variation so you could understand more about it. We can't assume that children, especially young children, get the full experience from a one-time showing. Just as they like favorite books read over and over again, they gain a sense of mastery – and discover new things in repeated experiences.

Slowing down isn't only for the children's benefit. It's a tool for your own professional growth, too, because it can help you see more and hear more of what's going on around you. It's like taking time to smell the roses. The slower, quieter pace can help you notice things about the children that you didn't see before -- and appreciate more of what they say and do. And that's something that can strengthen your relationship with them and their families – and help all of us, young and old alike find hope and comfort, as we journey through the pandemic.

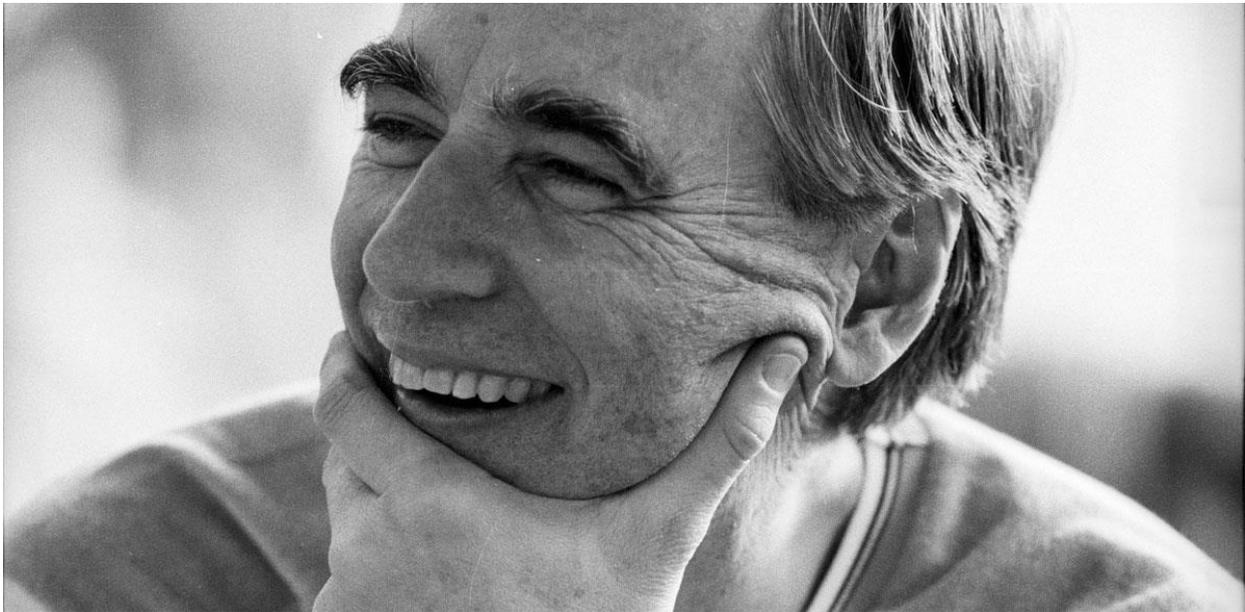
Thank you for being our neighbor,



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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"There's an old Italian proverb: *Chi anda piano, anda sano, anda lontano*. That means: The person who goes quietly goes with health and goes far. Hurrying up and using a lot of shortcuts doesn't get us very far at all."

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