

Is Your Workplace a “Neighborhood?”

For decades, Donna Mitroff worked directly with Fred Rogers at WQED in Pittsburgh from where his renowned television show originated. More recently, she has come to realize that lessons learned in Mister Roger's Neighborhood apply equally to the workplace and foster cooperation, harmony and productivity. Ms. Mitroff and her husband Ian have authored *Fables and the Art of Leadership: Bringing the Wisdom of Mr. Rogers to the Workplace* (Palgrave, Macmillan) which is based on seven principles that formed the foundation of Fred Roger's philosophy:

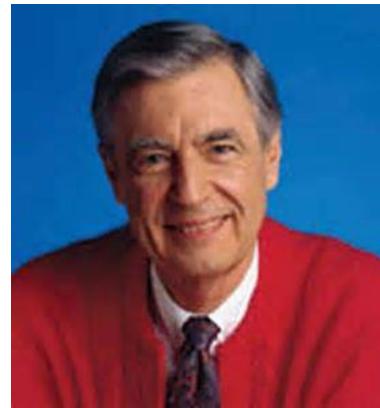
Connect: We grow to our fullest capacity by getting to know and learn from those around us. Skills acquisition is accelerated in an atmosphere of observation, discussion and idea sharing.

Concern: We function at an optimum level in an environment of mutual caring and respect. Toxic workplace behaviors such as gossip or ridicule have no place in our “neighborhood.”

Creativity: When we feel safe and accepted, we are more likely to offer suggestions to improve efficiency because the fear of being “put down” is not a concern.

Communications: “In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts, and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers.”

Consciousness: It may be tempting to hunker down into one's own silo. But by remaining aware of the needs of our co-workers we are assured that they will be there for us when we need advice or assistance.



Courage: We encourage children to speak up when a classmate is being teased or bullied. But do we heed our own advice when a co-worker is subjected to harassment? It's easy to pass this off as “just kidding around” or “relieving some stress” but are these simply convenient excuses for not standing up for a co-worker?

Community: The workplace can be viewed as the place where “I go” each day or as a group endeavor where each individual plays a critical role. As the Mitroffs observe, “A neighborhood becomes a community when people cooperate for the good of everyone and when they accept responsibility for their roles and tasks in support of the neighborhood.”

Organizations frequently train employees in such areas as diversity, conflict resolution and harassment prevention. Workplace behaviors encouraged by these trainings will seem less like “rules” and more as opportunities if we view the workplace as a neighborhood. As Fred Rogers once put it, “There is something of yourself that you leave with every interaction with another.”