

Create an Employee Experience Like Mr. Rogers

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"It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood" might not be the first thing you think of when you arrive at work on a Monday morning. As you browse over your daily calendar chock full of appointments, meetings, deadlines and flagged action items, the lyrics of Mr. Rogers' theme song are probably far from your mind. You're not alone. [66% of the workforce](#) report being not engaged at work to some degree. In *Won't You Be My Neighbor*, the recent documentary about Mr. Rogers, viewers were reminded of a time when "being nice" was sufficient. Whereas simply being nice is probably not a sufficient business strategy, that doesn't mean that it doesn't have a notable place in our workspaces.

Mr. Rogers meet Mr. Rogers

Just as the request to *"leave your personal issues at the door when coming to work"* is impossible to fulfill, our social interactions and societal expectations are carried with us over the threshold into our work life on a daily basis. This complexity leaves HR guessing as to what business philosophy to follow and how to advise leaders on the best way of handling employee issues. Driven by a perpetual need to add value through influence we tend to choose action over inaction. But what if inaction is the best answer to increasing the employee experience or facilitating change?

Another Mr. Rogers--Carl--introduced this approach in the 1950s. [Carl Rogers](#) was one of the founding fathers of humanistic psychology. Rogers built his work off of [Abraham Maslow's](#) hierarchy of needs by emphasizing that personal growth, or self-actualization, needs an environment of openness, acceptance, and empathy. Later on this provided a catalyst for the growing movement around the patient- or client-centered approach. Rogers posited a belief that the focus of action should be on the surrounding environment and that every individual is unique and meant to experience growth according to their own personality. This includes the pace of growth, and acceptance of change overall. While a lot has changed over the last 60 years, if we strip the evolving theories of their reiterations we can state that the core belief of recognizing that every person can achieve their goals, wishes and desires in life is still at the center of these concepts.

Does HR overcomplicate things?

Human Resources, as a non-revenue generating department, has the ownership of proving how their services are adding value to the overall company's functioning, whether it relates to human capital or financial capital. This pressure tends to propel our efforts into action oriented recommendations. But if we take both Mr. Rogers' suggestions to heart, there might be times where inaction as exemplified by acceptance, empathy and recognition of the uniqueness of each individual is more successful in developing fully engaged corporate citizens.

To be inactive without feeling like you're apathetic, there are several actions you can take that provide value-add without diminishing the opportunity for each individual to realize self-actualization according to their personalized growth trajectory.

1. Conduct an environmental scan

The key focus of Carl Rogers' theory is on the environment employees find themselves in. Knowing the composition of this environment (as well as the employees' perception of it) and how it impacts each individual's ability to grow is key to understanding how you can remove barriers or facilitate change.

2. Re-evaluate your outcome measurements

Perhaps some of the pressure that forces you to take action is linked to the outcomes you've set for yourself or the organization. If you accept the realization that you can't change people, and can only create an environment where people may choose to be successful, how might this shift in ownership impact your change measurements?

3. Empathic listening

Despite the urge to solve what's immediately in front of you, it is okay to sometimes "just take it in." Acknowledging the difficulties and imperfections in people and situations and reflecting this acknowledgement back through empathic listening can help with creating a safe environment.

4. Engage your team in the problem (not just the solving of it)

As a leader, don't shelter your team from questions you don't have the answers to. Showing vulnerability is a great trust builder. It also exemplifies the need to embrace the discomfort of working through ambiguity. We tend to believe that as leaders we need to protect our staff, and this is true to a certain degree. However, engaging your team in exploring the problems rather than jumping to solutions can be empowering. [And through adversity you can build resiliency and increased connectedness among your team.](#)

Each HR professional plays an active role in being a catalyst for creating a healthy culture. Moreover, there is great value that the HR profession can bring to an organization. While there are many books, recommendations, and suggestions out there that we can offer to our workforce, perhaps the *inaction* of showing acceptance and empathy by simply "being nice" is the most powerful one. "So let's make the most of this beautiful day, since we're together, we might as well say, [...] won't you be my neighbor?"