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The Top Ten Things I Learned from Mister Rogers

By Susan Dunn

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Mister Rogers makes everyone feel special and valued, and he's one of my heroes.

1. You can never go down, never go down, never go down the drain. When life can involve divorce, layoffs, losing a child, moving 2 weeks before your baby's due and you have a toddler and a dog with a new litter of puppies, working full-time and being a single-parent, or starting a new career at 55, it's good to know you can never go down the drain!
2. You can stop when you want to, stop when you wishEver say to yourself — stop the madness? Mister Rogers reminds us that we can stop when we want to. Make the carousel slow down so you can enjoy the ride. You're in control. Stop the roller coaster and get off. End a relationship that isn't working. Change a career when the passion's gone. Eliminate the tolerations in your life! You can stop when you want to, stop when you wish.
3. It's great to be able to stop when you've planned a thing that's wrong and to be able to do something else instead. Problem-solving! When you're working at a problem and the answer isn't forthcoming, try something new. The solution isn't doubling your efforts at a failing proposition. If you're having the same things happen over and over again in your relationships, stop what you're doing and do something else. Try something new! If you keep doing' what you've been doin', you're gonna keep gettin' what you been gettin'.
4. There's something deep inside that helps us become what we can. Develop your intuition and pay attention to what it tells you. It's the best guide to what's best for you and what will work for you. Listen to that still, small voice inside and let it be your guide ... it's an EQ competency.
5. When the whole wide world seems oh so wrong and nothing you do seems very right, you can punch a bag, pound some clay or some dough, or round up friends for a game of tag or see how fast you can go. Change what you can, and those things you can't ... go chop some wood, or take a bike

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ride, or call your coach and talk the feelings out. You might as well learn to manage those feelings constructively now, because the stakes are just going to get higher in life, so the feelings will too. It's a lifelong mission changing what you can, and finding some play—doh when you can't!

6. What a good feeling to feel like this and know that the feeling is really mine. Knowing what you feel and living in the moment will add much enjoyment to your life. We ARE our feelings, and the more we're able to let them into awareness and accept them fully, the richer our lives will be, and the more US we'll be. If you can't experience your sadness, you can't experience your joy. And don't let someone else's feelings get mixed up with yours. Just because your spouse is having a down day doesn't mean you have to. Just because your co-worker hates his job doesn't mean you have to. Know your feelings and know that they're really yours.

7. A girl can some day be a woman, and a boy can some day be a man. Yup!

8. You know, playing at the computer's different from watching a television program. You can bring your own ideas to whatever happens on the computer, and your ideas are special. So are you! I think the computer is the most wonderful medium for self-expression we've had since crayons and manila paper! I'm watching clients, friends and loved ones blossom and grow through the Internet — learning new things, making new cyber-friends, trying new things, and extending and enriching their lives. It's a great way to share you, who are special, and your ideas too.

9. Some are fancy on the outside/Some are fancy on the inside/Everybody's fancy/Everybody's fine/Discovering each one's specialty/Is the most important learning. Discover and develop the ways in which you're special. You'll reach a higher, more consistent level of performance, feel a deeper sense of satisfaction, and be able to share your real gifts with the world. (See the Top Ten Reasons Why You Should Focus on Your Strengths at <http://www.topten.org/public/AB/AB100.html>.)

10. If you've got a plan/Now's the time to try it/If you've got an airplane/Fly it/This is just the day. When will you start that new career? Ask that woman to marry you? Hug your child? Get online? Have the baby you've been wanting? Find work that feeds your passion? Quit drinking? Stop smoking? Write a teacher who meant a lot to you in the past? This is just the day!

Susan Dunn is a personal and professional growth coach, specializing in emotional intelligence. You can visit her on the web at <http://www.susandunn.cc>.

A Belated Farewell, But He Would've Understood. He Always Loved Me Just the Way I Am.

By Susan Dunn

Ten years ago my sister and I were in a hotel room in the Florida Keys with my sons, one in college, the other in middle school. They'd been horsing around doing macho stuff as we waiting for the dinner hour. Suddenly the trolley car sound ... my younger son froze in his tracks, halfway toward the hotel room door and stared at the television, mesmerized. On the bed, his older brother froze in place, delta waves in his eyes. Locked in. My sister and I poked each one to take note as Mister Rogers wove his

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magic spell.

Henrietta Pussycat, King Friday XIII, Queen Sara, Prince Tuesday, X the Owl, Lady Aberlin, Chef Brockett, Lady Elaine Fairchilde, Mr. McFeely, Daniel Striped Tiger ...

To this day when one of us is on a high-horse, the other will say "Correct as usual, King Friday." "As a latch-key kid in the 80's, I can remember coming in from school and turning on Mr. Rogers," wrote Crystal Thomas, from Statesboro, in the eulogies. "Hearing his voice made the house not feel so empty. I felt very safe. We have lost an angel on this earth."

I wasn't a latch-key kid in the late 60's when my oldest son and I watched "Mister Rogers" every afternoon. I was a young married woman with a husband in medical school who was rarely home except to sleep, with no money, no relief, no car, no dryer, far from family, at home with my first child.

I had the typical days of an at-home mom with a two year old boy - busy, full, emotionally turbulent days as we had friends over or visited and the boys tumbled around, and by 5 pm I was tired of him, he was tired of me, we were longing for "Daddy" to come home, which wouldn't be for hours and he'd be even more tired when he got home and it was, yes, definitely time for Mister Rogers. My son would crawl up in my lap, a tired little bundle, and would stare ... mesmerized.

How did I feel? Mister Rogers made the house not feel so empty. I felt very safe. He was quite often the kindest voice I heard in a day.

Mister Rogers competed with the advent of "Sesame Street," but it was no contest. Mister Rogers was special.

He stood for what he believed in. I have his quote on my website, as he is a standard bearer for me: "At the center of the universe is a loving heart that continues to beat and that wants the best for every person. Anything we can do to help foster the intellect and spirit and emotional growth of our fellow humans beings, that is our job. Those of us who have this particular vision must continue against all odds. Life is for service."

"Sesame Street" hyped up my son; he would run around, yelling. Captain Kangaroo had things that scared him - Town Clown for some reason.

Mister Rogers was honestly considering doing a late-night t.v. show in his later years, reading to put

people to sleep. Now when you think about it, that man's incredible authenticity gave him the courage to meet a need ... do we adults need to be watching violent news before we go to sleep, or cutting comics, hyped-up music, high-voltage super models? Would it not be emotionally intelligent - and good for our wellness - if we had a glass of warm milk and let that incredible voice soothe us on to sleep?

"In a world that prizes macho, he was gentle; in a culture devoted to noise he was quiet; in a country addicted to self-aggrandizement, he was modest," wrote Bo Emerson, for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "His show was anti-television; slow, calm, predictable."

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"What he tried to do was bring human values to a really unhuman medium," said Tom Junod, who profiled Rogers several years ago for Esquire magazine. "And he fought tremendous battles to do so."

Shortly after his death, GPTV broadcast a rerun, a Mister Rogers show on the theme "noisy and quiet" that symbolized his lifelong mission. He told his listeners that sometimes they might see television with people shooting and hitting one another, television that was loud and scary.

"Whenever you see scary television you can do something about it," he said, peering intently at the camera. "You can turn it off. Then you can show you're the strongest of all."

Would that we could, Mister Rogers, would that we could.

"Misser Boggers is dead," Emily Redmon emailed her brother in Canada ... their name for him when they were little. I wonder how many other names he had with the children of the land.

Vincent Woods remembered Mr. Rogers speaking at his University (NCSU) Graduation in 1996. "He had the entire stadium of 40,000 people singing `neighborhood."

When I read the news on the computer, I was at my son's. He's grown now, the father of two, and owns his own business. I stared at the computer ... "What was the name of the ti..." "Daniel Striped Tiger," he said immediately, turning away. I could've sworn there were tears in his eyes.

Simone Presley of Dublin Georgia wrote, "I along with millions of others, grew up in his neighborhood...and we all knew him as the kindest, gentlest man that we would ever meet...who will replace him? America has been so blessed to have one such as he to care enough for the children to give them values that they can rely on forever."

I join Simone Presley from Dublin, Georgia, in saying, "You are remembered dearly, Mr. Rogers...see you in the New neighborhood.... "

©Susan Dunn, The EQ Coach, <http://www.susandunn.cc> . Emotional intelligence coaching for individuals and businesses, distance learning, and EQ Alive! - a coaching school for emotional intelligence, <http://www.eqcoach.net> .

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