

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers

Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 40.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*, a not so typical, educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy, by refining your most powerful tool: your mind. Here's your host, certified life coach, Angela Kelly Robeck.

Hello, hello, how are you doing? I cannot believe that I am recording my 40th podcast. What is up with that? Oh my gosh, you guys. I remember about a year ago, being on a business accelerator retreat in San Francisco with my coach and I was in full resistance to creating this podcast.

She finally said to me, I have so much content and you really need to use that content and your experience to support the fellow educators and school leaders who are out there suffering just like you did and struggling through the job. She said there were people out there just waiting to receive this support and that she was going to believe in me for me.

She actually made me sit down and write out my very first podcast from beginning to end, and she would not let me go anywhere or do anything else, except maybe use the restroom, until I was done. We just worked side by side in our hotel suite. And guess what – it took me eight hours to write a 20-minute podcast. Can you believe that?

Boy, was I in some resistance? I resisted, I argued with her, I lost track of space and time, I daydreamed, I lost focus, and I was a perfectionist. I was really trying to get the first one just right. You know how that is when you're trying something new? Yeah, that was me, totally.

She actually, like, made me stay in the room, ran to get lunch for us, and I just had to keep working. She was very encouraging and very loving and

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers

she would listen to my drafts and I would rewrite and edit and try it again and I would stand up and read it to her, and she actually cried when I finished.

She was so happy for me, so proud of me, and I loved that she believed in me while I was working to believe in myself. She said, “I knew you could do it.” And that I was going to change people’s lives because of my courage and commitment to starting this podcast.

Now, I didn’t believe her at the time, but I do believe her now. I know that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of fellow school leaders who want to talk openly and deeply about the obstacles that we face as principals. We want to explore our fears, straight-talk about the failures, and admit when we don’t know how to solve problems.

Look, if any one of us had all of the answers, which nobody does, education would be a completely different institution. Now, I certainly don’t believe that I alone can change the face of education as just one person, but I do think that there are many of us out here who believe it’s time we got real with ourselves and got honest about what teaching and learning is, how it’s evolving, and how our approach needs to shift in order to better serve our clients, which are our students.

If we had a 50% success rate as a coach or in another industry, we would be out of business. It is time for us to openly and authentically and courageously have these conversations, not to blame or to feel bad or to feel shame that we have let students graduate without learning to read or not knowing how to understand basic math, but understanding at a deeper level, what our education system is, what it’s not, how it’s supporting, how it’s not, what we can do, what we need to change.

When we neutralize those situations and just make them a topic of conversation, we can better serve our students. The longer that I serve

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers

others in this capacity, the more compelled I am to courageously bring up topics that really challenge our brains as educators. When I first launched this business as a life coach for educators, I was really hesitant to bring up any topics that were highly controversial, or what I saw as highly controversial.

I was afraid that I was going to be attacked or that I wouldn't have an intelligent argument back to somebody or I was going to stir up something bigger than I could handle. I started with real feel-good topics and very easy to talk about topics, and slightly move don over time to more helpful strategies for school leaders.

But more recently, I feel very compelled to bring up more controversial topics. Part of me feels like I'm skirting around deeper issues to avoid haters or avoid complaints or negative comments or, "Well what are you going to do about it?" kind of things when I don't know the answers, I just want to openly talk about it.

But I really have been feeling that I'm not fully exercising the practices that I teach my clients; practices like treat the source, not the symptoms, courageously live your truth, and feel the fear and do it anyway. I mean, I've done some of these courageous things this past year, things like resigning from my job, eloping, selling my home. Some of those were the scariest things I did, for sure, and I've definitely put myself out there as a coach and exposed myself in spite of my fears.

And these actions have resulted in this podcast. It's resulted in writing a book and it's resulted in coaching individual clients. I am achieving results, but I'm also ready to expand my horizons, expand my reach, and expand the depth to which this work asks us to do.

So this is where Mister Fred Rogers comes into my life. For those of you who don't know Mr. Rogers, Mr. Rogers was an American icon. He worked

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers

in public television. He actually was a minister who felt a calling to work deeply with children on managing their emotions.

So recently, I think over the summer, the beginning of the summer, there was a documentary that came out called *Will You Be My Neighbor?* And it was highlighting the life of Fred Rogers. I could not wait to watch it. I was really excited. He was somebody that I grew up with watching in my younger childhood days.

I was begging people to go with me to the movies, but no one really wanted to go and spend the money to watch the documentary. They were like, oh, we'll rent it. But last week, I found myself home alone one night, so I searched to see if the show was somewhere on Netflix.

I think I ended up buying it on Amazon Prime, which, side note here, I actually had to self-coach myself a bit because I had to purchase the documentary. I couldn't rent it. Normally Mitch and I just rent things. We're like, we're not going to pay for it. We don't want to keep it, we just want to rent it. You're not keeping it anymore, it's not a physical item, it's just on your cloud or whatever.

So I actually had to self-coach myself on spending \$14.99 – and let me tell you by the way, the \$14.99 was absolutely worth it. I've already watched it twice and I'm so glad I bought it. It's just an amazing documentary and story about somebody who I think is a legend.

My memories of Mr. Rogers span from being a very safe and welcoming TV personality to a nerdy character that was made fun of on late night TV. I remember watching him as a very young child, and as low budget as he was, I never thought less of him for that. I always admired him and respected him. Of course, I laughed as I got older and I saw what was behind it all and saw the low budget-ness of his productions and just the simplicity of his character.

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers

I still respected him and adored him. I thought he was just such a love and you could tell how authentic he was. I really thought he was an amazing person. I really like the trolley too, by the way, and I always wondered, how did it move on its own? I just couldn't figure that out as a kid.

So I tuned in almost every week. I love that I saw him moving and speaking as the puppets, yet I still believed that their characters were real. Did any of you else watch that? Anyway, really, really good stuff. What I didn't understand until watching the documentary, *Won't You Be My Neighbor*, was how radical his show was in supporting young children in navigating real world problems; real life happening problems and the emotions that come with adult subject matter.

As a child, I had no idea of the strength of his mission and his message and how fiercely committed he was to ensuring all children, in fact all human, how to help them feel capable of loving other people and being loved. The courage it took to speak to the issues at hand in the nation during his programming is fascinating.

There is a scene where he speaks from the heart before John Pastore, I think his name was, and all of Congress, in an attempt to save public television from President Nixon's budget cuts. He decides not to read his 10 minute philosophical statement because Pastore, or whatever his name was, comes across as agitated because had been listening to two days' worth of hearings and statements and he was just kind of tired of it.

So Fred steps up to the podium and this is what he says, "One of the first things a child learns in a healthy family is trust. And I trust what you have said, that you will read this. It is very important to me. I care deeply about children. This is what I give. I give an expression of care every day to each child – to help him realize that he is unique. I end the program by saying, you've made this day a special day just by your being you. There's no person in whole world like you and I like you just the way you are. And I

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers

feel that if we, in public television can only make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable, we will have done a great service.”

He goes on to share the words of a song he'd written about feeling in control of our emotions. The first line of the song came from the words of a child he had been working with. And those words were, “What do you do with the mad that you feel?”

He describes the song and states the words to it. The song is basically describing what a child can do with strong emotions instead of lashing out, instead of biting, instead of hitting, instead of stomping off. Reciting that song to congress saved public television.

Mr. Rogers' calm voice, gentle manner, and positive message left some people believing that he was weak and inferior. Just the opposite was true of this man. It takes incredible courage and vulnerability to be true to yourself while remaining calm and in love in times of trouble.

This person chose love over fear every time. And this certainly does not mean he was a pushover. Just because he was calm and kind does not make him a doormat. He stood firmly for what he believed in. He held tight to serving children in the way that he felt they needed to be served.

I believe his tenacity for building emotional resiliency is needed more than ever, both in adults and in children. We spend our time teaching children information about the world and the skills needed to access the world, but we rarely discuss the relationships and the emotions that come with gaining access to the world around us, let alone how to handle the intensity of those emotions.

So here are some of the most valuable lessons I have taken from the work of Mr. Fred Rogers; you can be passionate as an activist and be calm, cool,

Ep #40: Words of Gratitude for Fred Rogers

and collected. You don't have to agree with your neighbor to be kind to them, every human being, young children included, feel very, very deeply. Fear and worry are always in a hurry; slow your roll, take your time, embrace the one moment you are currently in. It is okay to feel and show emotions. Children are quick to respond to authenticity; adults have learned to question it. Everyone is worthy of having a presence in this world. Approach hatred with compassion. It is possible to live a happy life by doing what you love and loving others for doing what they love. And finally, you do not need approval, status, or the cool factor, to have a massive impact in this world.

Fred Rogers was the ultimate life coach and is one of my ultimate heroes. He lived by doing and was truly an example of what is possible. This week, I invite you to consider the lessons that Fred sought to spread throughout our youth and to see where you can invite someone you work with to become your neighbor.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to empower all those you meet this week. Have an amazing week and I hope you will be my neighbor. Take care, talk to you next week, bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit www.angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.