

Pearls of Leadership Wisdom: Pay Attention to Your Attention

Welcome once again to my backyard and Pearls of Leadership Wisdom. Today the topic is: Pay Attention to Your Attention. So this past weekend I had the chance to watch a movie, The Mister Rogers' movie, in fact, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*. Of course, it took me back to when our boys were toddlers, but more importantly, it reminded me of the power, the power we all have when we pay attention. In the movie, when Mr. Rogers listens to someone or takes on a task, he does it with his full attention and his whole being.

What a great lesson. Right now, I find it, and I bet you may find this as well, that it's easy to get distracted and pulled in so many different directions—that one task, another task, things that you need to do—they're all blended together into one big commotion of activity. But what if you thought about accomplishing just one thing at a time, rather than so many all at once. To help you do that, I have three bywords today and they are:

- Stop
- Look
- Listen

Stop, literally, just stop for a minute. What one thing are you trying to do right now? Play with your child? Help a child with homework? Participate in a work call? Schedule a meeting? Write something that speaks to your team? Play a game with your family? Prepare a meal with your partner? What one thing are you trying to do right now? Then do it fully.

I used to believe that multitasking was a strength and something that I could uniquely do. Now brain research has proved that while you may be able to do things almost simultaneously, the fact is by switching from one task to the other, you lose productivity and effectiveness. Multitasking doesn't work—one thing at one time—just try it. Stop one thing that you're doing right now.

So look. Be aware of your surroundings in the moment. Coming out here in the backyard, I am aware of how the pond is changing. The frogs are getting louder, the ducks land with a splash, the flowers are coming up, the trees are starting to bud. There are things in this moment to see and pay attention to. Those of you who practice mindfulness know this from the practice that is important to be aware of your surroundings. As physician and author Jon Kabat-Zinn says, "I like to practice voluntary simplicity. Voluntary simplicity which is intentionally doing or only looking at one thing and making sure that I am fully present."

Stop, look, and listen. Now this is where Mr. Rogers really excelled. When he paid attention to someone, he heard their every word. You can do that. Even though you may be on a zoom call or you may be on your cell phone, you have the ability to pay attention and listen deeply to the person that you are with or the team members that you're with. Listen to the words that are being said through the pauses. Pay attention to what's not being said. Truly be there in the moment, so that they feel as if you are the only person in the world for them, right now. I hope through this period of time you are paying more attention to your attentiveness.



Sometimes I say to leaders that I work with that you need to be an intentional leader. Today, I want you to be an attentional leader. Remember that people pay attention to their leaders, and often, to their surprise, remember something they said or certainly remember a look that they had. This phenomenon of what you do being magnified is even more apparent right now. People are looking to you, to their leaders, for what to believe, for what things are going to happen, for how they feel, and what they believe about the future. You have the power, truly, through your attention, to influence and to be part of their worlds in a way that's very powerful. So if you can just remember in the midst of everything coming at you—stop, look and listen, and the power of your attention as Mister Rogers showed us—very clearly will make a difference. It matters.