



Mister Rogers' Money Tips

The Motley Foolx

By Dayana Yochim

For more than 30 years, Mister Rogers invited television neighbors into his two-bedroom bungalow in the neighborhood of Make-Believe. During that time — from 1967 to 2001 — the rest of the network TV neighborhood was going to pieces. Fast cuts, frenetic action, and product tie-ins became standard children's programming fare. Through it all, Mister Rogers stayed on message. *His* message. Even when the world beyond the cathode-ray tube got complicated (wars, gang violence, social shifts, school shootings), Fred Rogers kept his cool. His patient, soft-spoken way with children was such a strong influence that he achieved rock-star status for several generations of kids.

His wish, he once said, was that kids who watched *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* would take its lessons of kindness, compassion, and level-headedness with them into adulthood.

Sometimes we have to wonder whether anyone on Wall Street bothered to watch *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. At the very least, did they learn the right lessons from it? (Note to Enron, WorldCom, and **Krispy Kreme** : The Land of Make-Believe does not apply to accounting standards.)

Even if we ignore the sour side of the Street, it's hard to summon the Zen of Mister Rogers with our 24-hour stock quotes, money news, and raging cases of acute BlackBerry carpal tunnel syndrome. But as the market obsesses over the latest earnings news from **Yahoo!** (Nasdaq: YHOO), **eBay** (Nasdaq: eBay), and **Apple** (Nasdaq: AAPL) — if you must, click here, here, and here for the latest — it's the perfect time to call on our neighbor for some financial perspective.

It has been nearly three years since Fred Rogers died at age 74. We interviewed him in November of 2002. (Here's [a link](#) to the audio file.)

There was no separating the TV persona from the man — both were straightforward, reflective, and uninhibited about breaking into song. He had just published *The Mister Rogers Parenting Book* and talked easily about growing up with a Depression-era mindset, about his career (he approached his work as a ministry, not a business), about how to help kids have a good attitude about money, about Eddie Murphy, and even about Enron . What follows are a few excerpts from Mister Rogers' visit to our neighborhood of Fools.

On his childhood

Rogers was born in Latrobe, Pa., in 1928 — one year before the stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression.



“Most of us who grew up in the Depression are quite conscious of being careful with money and other things. Probably the roots of my recycling start in the Depression. I recycle everything I possibly can find. I’ll stop my car and pick up a plastic bottle on the street to take it home to recycle.

“When the tenor of the whole country is such that everything is limited, that sticks with you. I was only 2, 3, 4 years old at that time. And yet you get those attitudes from the people that you live with — those who are closest to you.”

On teaching kids about money

“Feelings about money — saving and spending, holding back and letting go — start very early in our lives. Stingy people have often been forced to give when they were very, very young, when they weren’t ready. And generous people have often been really appreciated when they were very young.

“One of the best things we can do as parents is to remember what it was like to be a child: Get to know who they are. Ask them to help you. Introduce them to people of excellence. Tell them that you expect of them — that you expect their best, but not perfection.”

On work

“[My work] has always been a ministry for me. I felt that people really wanted was to be in touch with somebody who cares about them and appreciates them. And so through the *Neighborhood* we’ve been able to do that a lot. We have wonderful guests. Those people who come to offer their own talents — it’s a great thing to do.”

On the PBS website, Rogers offered parents this advice about helping kids make the connection between work and money:

“It can be helpful for children to know not only what their parents do, but also that working for money can be a part of caring for children. With the money they earn, parents can buy the things that children need. But parents can’t always buy everything that a child wants. None of us can have everything we want! We all have to learn to make choices about the way we spend our time, our money, and our other resources. ...

“One of the ways that children begin to learn about choices is by making decisions in their play — deciding how to use the blocks or what to do with the Play-Doh or finding the best way to make a mountain of sand. Play is so often the way children learn about the world around them.”

On losing his temper

“I wrote a song. [He sings]: What do you do with the mad that you feel, when you feel so mad that you could bite?”



“A little child said that once.

“I get angry when I think that justice hasn’t been served. And to me, justice is taking care of those who aren’t able to take care of themselves. So that’s the kind of thing that can get up my ire.”

On Eddie Murphy’s Saturday Night Live spoof, Mr. Robinson’s Neighborhood

“I met him one time out in the hall of NBC. He said to me, ‘The real Mister Rogers!’ and he threw his arms around me. I think that Eddie Murphy did that takeoff with real affection. He obviously wanted people to know that this was a neighborhood that included all of us. And, in fact, it has been.”

On Wall Street scandal

“What do you think it is that drives people to want far more than they could ever use or need? I frankly think it’s insecurity. How do we let the world know that the trappings of this life are not the things that are ultimately important for being accepted?

“That’s what I’ve tried to do all these years with the *Neighborhood*.

[He sings:] “It’s you I like. It’s not the things you wear. It’s not the way you do your hair ... but it’s you I like. The way you are right now. The way down deep inside you. Not the things that hide you. Not your fancy toys. They’re just beside you. But it’s you I like. Every part of you. Your skin, your eyes, your feelings, whether old or new. I hope that you’ll remember even when you’re feeling blue. That it’s you I like. It’s you, yourself. It’s you. It’s you I like.”

More on kids about money:

[Mom’s Money Tips](#) [First Stocks for Kids](#) [Tell Your Money Secrets](#) [Hannah Gets a Visa Card!](#) [Make “Mini-Me”](#) [Balance the Checkbook](#) [Baby’s First Bill](#) [Money Memories](#) [Dude, Where’s My Retirement?](#)

Dayana Yochim spent her formative years engrossed in Mister Rogers’ neighborhood and then went on to dreaming of becoming a “Zoom” kid. She holds no financial position in any of the companies mentioned in this article. eBay is a [Motley Fool Stock Advisor](#) pick. The Fool’s [disclosure policy](#) is downright neighborly.

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