

Ep #1: The Difference Between a Cause and a Symptom



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Ep #1: The Difference Between a Cause and a Symptom

Welcome to *The Empowered Principle 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 empowered principles. How are you today? I am so excited. This is my very first podcast recording. Welcome; I am thrilled that you are here and I am thrilled to be here. I'm so excited right now; I can't even tell you.

My goal in creating this podcast is to be a highlight in your work week by offering you ways to feel better about the work that you do for children. It has been my honor to be an educator for over 25 years and to be serving the world of elementary school principals in this new capacity.

Oh gosh, you guys, I love this. For those of you who are wondering who I am and why I'm launching this podcast for elementary principals, let me start by sharing a little bit about myself and how I personally felt when I was in your shoes. Please bear with me because I'm going to share with you some background and I'm going to share with you how I got into coaching.

So, I've been in education my entire life, of course. I started as a student, naturally, at the ripe age of five. I graduated and I'm proud to say that I'm the first person in my family to attend a post-secondary university. I earned my Bachelor's degree at Iowa State University, and then my Master's degree from the University of Minnesota, and later on I received my administrative credential in California; which is where I currently live.

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My first year as a principal began back in 2010. I was hired as the principal of a brand-new school within my school district. Let me reiterate this: I was new as a principal and placed at a brand-new school. Being a new principal of a new school was truly the blind leading the blind. I was honored that the district staff believed I was capable of this incredible feat, but I wasn't sure how to be a principal, as a brand-new principal, on top of how to create an entire series of new systems for a new school site.

In addition, the staff at this site had experienced multiple upheavals and emotional traumas over the last couple of years. So understandably, they were afraid. They were afraid of me, they were afraid of the new systems, they were afraid to trust. They were not in a place they felt they could trust, which impacted my ability to gain momentum as a new leader. I felt overwhelmed, disillusioned and deflated.

I would go in at 6AM in the morning and, many nights, not leaving until 8PM. I could not keep up with all that I was expected to do. I questioned how I got myself into the situation. And to be honest with you, I was absolutely miserable.

During the same time period I was also working on building up my personal life. I was a single parent who was struggling with committing to a new romantic relationship that had developed in my life. And given the transitions I was experiencing, I sought out all of the personal development information I could find.

In my search I stumbled across Dr. Martha Beck's work. She is the author of several books, including Finding Your Own North Star, and was labeled as Oprah Winfrey's Life Coach. I was like, what the heck is a life coach? I did not know, but I decided I most certainly needed one of these people in

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my life. My life was a mess. So I immediately bought this book and I became obsessed with her and her work.

This woman is an absolute genius. I, of course, stalked her a little bit online and found that not only was she a brilliant writer, she offered a course in life coaching. I was all, what is this work she's doing? I love it, but I'm intrigued and I have no idea and I'm just following my heart.

So even though my brain had a million excuses, including those ever-famous excuses as, time and money, was to why I should even consider this opportunity, I went all in. In September of 2011 I signed up to the program that started in January of 2012. And a shout out to my 2012 Januarys, I love you guys, because this was the best decision of my life; at least one of the best decisions I've ever made.

The program was a combination of life coaching and how to become a coach. And while the thought of becoming a life coach was intriguing at that time, I didn't pursue it right away. I basically used the coaching tools I learned on myself to help me through my transitions with both the school administration piece and my personal life.

I continued on as an elementary principal and was appointed to a different school two years later where I then worked for four years before moving to a district office position for one year.

Although my confidence and my skills as a principal dramatically increased, I continued to feel exhausted, overwhelmed and somewhat disgruntled that all the effort that I was putting into this job seemed to result in little or no significant positive impact. It was that two steps forward and five steps back, right. I never felt traction in terms of making some true significant changes.

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I felt this tug 'o war between really wanting to stay in education, in order to continue serving children, yet I was feeling that I was fighting a losing battle in a system that never really seemed to change. And I began listening more carefully to my essential self and decided, this past year, that it was time to take massive action toward creating real change.

That is when I signed up to The Life Coach School with Brooke Castillo. I completed The Life Coach Program and was certified as a life coach in 2015. And at first, I coached individual people and small groups of women, part time, in addition to my principalship. And I really enjoyed coaching; helping people discover new ways of thinking and feeling was as rewarding as teaching young children how to read. It was the most exciting part of my day and it brought joy back into my life.

Outside of work and coaching, I was juggling my responsibilities as a mom and a daughter. My mom was diagnosed with a non-curable disease and I found myself wanting to spend as much time with her and my family as possible. Unfortunately, I only had so many days I could take off from work. I felt torn. I felt badly when I wasn't with my mom and then I felt guilty whenever I took time off from work to visit her. I needed to take responsibility and control over my own destiny. My soul could no longer let other people dictate how I lived and worked.

Over the last few months, I came to the realization that my personal calling was to leave the system in order to create change within the system. After pondering a leave of absence, my husband and I decided it was time for me to resign and reboot, which has led me to this new calling; life coaching for principals.

Someone who knows both the ins and outs of education and has the tools for creating positive lifestyles for what I believe is one of the most impactful

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positions within a school district. Think of it, if I can serve you in this new capacity and help you manage your mind and get emotionally fit, then we can create a tribe of principals who have the tools within themselves to lead their schools.

Do you guys realize there are over 100,000 plus elementary school principals in the nation? We can become the tribe that become the change. We can create change from the inside out.

Now, I want to be very authentic and transparent with you; this podcast is not another “Five Steps to Becoming an Effective Principal.” I am not coaching you on how to do the job. In my own search for guidance I found several books, workshops and resources that offer tips and action steps toward building leadership skills; most of which were extremely helpful in my years as a principal. And these how-to resources are available all over the place to support you. And many of them served me well during my tenure as a principal.

So I’m not here to criticize the educational system, most of the time, and talk you out of being a principal. That was my calling, it may be yours; that is only for you to decide. The world needs school principals. This is the place where we’re going to talk honestly and openly about the job and how it impacts the way that we think, the way that we feel, the way that we act and the results that we get.

I will speak my truth about my personal experience from my perspective and share with you, as candidly as possible, my thoughts on certain topics. But my intention is not to necessarily talk you out of a career.

I will say that I’m more than happy to help you transition if you do decide that a change for yourself is necessary. I’ve made the change myself and

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I'll help you with that as well if that is your calling. That decision is totally up to you. This podcast is designed to help you understand your own psychology and thinking about the job so that you can either feel better about the work that you do or you can clear your thoughts so that you can make a clear decision about what type of work you'd like to do in your next phase of life.

This is really all about becoming emotionally fit as a human being in order to have an emotionally fit career. I'm going to help you get emotionally fit by providing thought facilitation as a causal coach. This way, you can decide for yourself how you want to serve others in this world.

You may love the field of education and are looking for ways to enjoy the job even more. Or perhaps you are unhappy in your current position and you want to understand why not and what you can do about it. As humans, the most powerful tool we have is our mind. The thoughts we have on a daily basis create and shape how we experience our lives.

As you will learn through this podcast, it is our thoughts that are the source of our painful emotions. Causal coaching focuses on treating the root source of your pain versus treating the symptoms associated with the pain. There is so much content that I want to cover with you that I've had to slow down my planning and think about what concept would be the most helpful right now, right off the bat.

I thought back to my years as a principal and I listed some of the most painful situations I could remember. The pattern that emerged was this feeling that no matter how much effort I put into the job, it seemed like I was getting nowhere. I didn't feel that my actions had significant impact. I was playing the game of Whack a Mole, jumping from one problem to the next without taking the time to look more deeply into why the problem was

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happening in the first place. I suspect most of you can relate to this, and if so, let's take the time now to dig deeper into the why.

Let's start with a tangible example that everyone can relate to. Let's say you fall and break your arm but you have no idea that you've broken your arm. You just know that it hurts, but the thought of it being broken doesn't enter your mind. You go to the emergency room and they give you some Advil, tell you to rest and send you home.

Now, it makes sense to take the Advil, since it's a pain reliever. So you take the Advil, you get some rest, and the next day you wake up in some serious pain. You go back and they increase your Advil dose and tell you to ice the arm; so, put some ice on it. You do this, and the third day you're in so much pain you cannot move. No amount of Advil, ice or rest is healing the broken arm.

This time, the doctor asks you some questions, listens to your symptoms, surveys and x-rays the arm. Now we have some more information. Realizing that it's broken, the doctor can cast the broken arm instead of medicating the symptom of the pain that you're experiencing because of the broken arm. Now the healing can begin.

So my job as a coach is to help you identify the source of your pain versus treating the symptoms you believe are causing the pain.

Now, this work is not easy; I'm not going to lie. I'm not going to sugar coat this for you. It isn't easy because we want to address the symptom – we want the pain just to go away. We don't want to deal with where it's coming from. But it is the only true way to relieving painful thoughts. And there's one thing I've learned for certain, folks, is that what we believe is the problem is never really the problem.

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So could this idea of cause versus symptom be true in all cases? To our brains, it seems that when you're in a situation, it is the situation that causes us to feel a certain way. For example, you have students that continually run down the hall after school, which creates unsafe conditions during dismissal. You believe that it is the running that is the problem, so every day you monitor the halls – you're owning it, right – you're going to monitor the halls at dismissal time and stop as many kids as you can from running down the hall. Seems like a logical response to the problem.

You give consequences to the students who are multiple offenders, yet it does nothing to stop the overall problem of students running in the halls. This drives you to complete frustration because you are spending all of your time after school monitoring the hallway versus finishing your work for the day.

So you finally bring it up to your staff and you ask for solutions to the problem. Your teachers brainstorm a bit and determine that they've never directly really told the students how they expect them to walk during dismissal. They've been opening up the doors and releasing the kids. After all, we are just as done as they are with the school day at times, right. We are like, "You are welcome to go home."

So, they decide to commit to teaching and modeling for the students how to walk through the hallways during dismissal, and that for the first ten minutes of dismissal, all teachers are going to walk their class through the hallways and all the other staff members will help monitor the halls. So it's an all-hands-on-deck approach until this routine is ingrained in the students; to the point they're able to walk without a high level of monitoring and support.

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Taking a step back, that sounds like a fabulous idea, right? It does. But if you do take a step back, your brain saw the situation and thought it was the running students who were the problem. You took action and treated the symptom of the running students by spending your time after school trying to catch the running students. This did not solve the problem because it was not the source of the problem.

But once you decided to ask for support, your staff helped you realize that the students were not the problem. In fact, it was that as a school there was simply not a system in place for dismissal. The lack of system was the cause; the running was simple a symptom of not having a systematic dismissal procedure in place.

So, once you and your staff treated the actual cause, there was no longer a need to treat the symptom. So, although simplistic in nature, I use this example to illustrate how we believe one thing to be the problem when, in truth, it is another. So what I'd like to highlight is the word believe.

In this scenario, I modeled for you how you can take a different action towards solving a problem and getting a different result. Another way to examine this scenario is to consider the way you interpret the problem. You first believed the problem was the running students. You attempted to solve the problem by spending your time stopping the running students. You notice the problem was not solved by your action of monitoring the halls on your own, so then you chose a different action, which was reaching out for assistance. And with the support of your staff, you reexamined the situation and attempted another solution. This alternate action – it may or may not have permanently solved the problem, but both of these actions are external in nature from your thinking. However, if you looked at your belief about the problem as the problem, another series of solutions may unfold.

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Now, hang with me here. I know this sounds confusing, but what is you observed the students running in the halls at dismissal and you think to yourself, what about this situation is stressing me out? Because you're observing a situation occur and it triggers an emotional response – an emotional reaction in your body.

Ask yourself, why am I stressed out? Why do I want them to walk? Should the kids be not allowed to run? Is this expectation realistic? Am I just feeling this way because I'm worried what parents are going to think if they see the kids running? Or is this really a safety issue? What am I making this mean? Are the kids getting enough exercise during the day? Is there something we can do to allow time for running other than at dismissal time? I'm wondering what would happen if kids were allowed to run and be safe at the same time?

These are questions that could all come up when you stop and ponder why you are responding in the way that you are versus making something outside of you be the problem. By considering our thinking as the source of our problem, creative solutions will blossom, my friends.

So our brain naturally laser focuses on how to quickly numb the pain and treat the symptom versus taking the time to research the cause and treat the cause, which ultimately will eliminate that pain from recurring. We have to consciously choose to stop and consider the problem is behind what we think is the problem.

We have to be willing to allow ourselves to feel the pain of the problem as we take the time to explore its source. Just like a broken arm that we do not know is broken. We want the pain to stop immediately, so we take the Advil, even if the doctor does not fix the broken arm.

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What I am offering instead is that we learn to experience the pain of the broken arm long enough to allow the doctor to examine and locate the source of our pain so that she can treat us effectively. We have to endure some pain through the process of the examination, and for a while after the cast is placed on our arm. But ultimately, that source of pain will not continue to hurt us once it's been treated and healed.

We're not always going to be able to recognize the source of our pain or experience negative emotion on our own, which is why I created this podcast for you. We are going to explore topics, situations and thoughts that are causing us pain, learn how to process the pain and dig even deeper into how to determine the source of our pain so that we can develop lasting solutions. And when I refer to pain, I'm referring to any negative or uncomfortable sensation or emotion.

Pain can be physical, mental or emotional. Any time you are unhappy, you are experiencing some form of mental, emotional or physical pain. And unfortunately, they often come in a package of all three – yay.

So think of a time at work that was a really negative experience. Perhaps a parent wrote a bad review about you on GreatSchools, or you received some critical feedback from your superintendent. Or perhaps an important staff meeting took a wrong turn. Take a minute to sink back into that moment – you can literally feel the negative emotion rush through your body all over again. Your heart beats faster, your chest tightens, you feel your throat close up, you feel the punch to the stomach.

Just the thought of emotional pain stirs up actual physical responses. Your mind will also replay it over and over again. I know this has happened to you because it has happened to me 100,000 times, at least.

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You might not be able to even sleep due to mental anguish because you replay it in your brain over again; that's what brains do. This is the type of pain I'm referring to in this podcast.

So the good news is this – are you ready? As human beings, we have the ability to manage our pain by managing our thoughts. So in the next podcast, we're going to talk about how we do this and the difference between pain and suffering.

I know the job of being a principal, guys. I lived it for six years. It is one of the most gratifying and one of the most stressful careers I have ever experienced. I am here to help you; help you improve the quality of your experience. So thank you so much for listening, and make it an incredible week for yourselves.

Hey guys, if you enjoyed this podcast, I kindly ask that you please take a moment to share with fellow principals and post a review on iTunes. I would love to hear your comments and feedback so that I can gear the podcast topics to exactly what you want to know. I believe that we need to build a tribe to empowered principals so that together we can be the change we wish to create in our schools. Yes, yes, yes and yes.

So please, I kindly ask that you take a moment and go to iTunes, The Empowered Principal Podcast, and please leave a beautiful review. I will love you forever and it helps guide my work.

You can also find me on Facebook at AKellyCoaching, or at my website, at AngelaKellyCoaching.com. I hope you have the most amazing empowered week. I have enjoyed recording this podcast immensely and I look so forward to seeing you next week. Have an empowered week my friends, take care.

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