

Ep #3: Introduction to the STEAR Cycle and the Power of Thought



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Ep #3: Introduction to the STEAR Cycle and the Power of Thought

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 principals. How are you guys doing this week? I hope you are as amazing as I am. I am recording these first few podcasts here in Iowa, where the majority of my family lives. So for those of you who are from the Mid-West, you know that December is usually not a warm time of year. It's typically very cold and very snowy. So coming from California, I feared I was going to have to pack all of my ski gear and trudge through snow drifts in the subzero temps of December in Iowa.

So I was happily welcomed with temperatures – believe they were in the upper 60s when I landed in Des Moines; which actually isn't much cooler than Santa Cruz this time of year. And, can I tell you, it was an extreme pleasure not to have to de-ice the plane.

For those of you who have flown in frigid temperatures and have had to sit on the airplane while they de-ice, this is not a happy experience for anyone involved. It takes a long time. There was a time I was flying out Minneapolis and we had to de-ice three times because every time we would de-ice, by the time we got back in line to take off, we would freeze up again, we would have to de-ice. I thought it was never going to end.

So, it is getting cooler here. I'm back in Iowa for a couple of weeks. So it's colder, Christmas is in the air, it's really actually very exciting to be back in December. I don't typically come back in the winter because – I just

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described why – I don't like flying during the freezing temperatures. So, I lucked out, guys. It's great here.

Okay, let's get started. So this week, I am sharing my core teaching tool. I love this tool. It is one of the best tools I learned in Self Coaching, hands down. I give kudos to my master coach instructor Brooke Castillo. She developed this model – I tweaked it for my purposes, my teaching and my clients. But what it does, guys, is it provides a concrete way of looking at situations at work or in your personal life, and it allows you to observe your brain in motion.

Today, I'll provide an overview of the tool and then we'll dig deeper into its components in the upcoming podcasts. I also want to mention for that these first few podcasts, it's important to understand that we're learning the foundation of what Self Coaching is; all of the psychology and physiology of how our brain works, and then the tools that are created to help us separate our thinking from our emotions and actions.

And once you understand this core teaching tool, we can then start to apply it to everyday situations of our jobs and in our life. I'm so looking forward to showing you how to address all the wildness that happens at school on a daily basis. And guys, I get it. The day of a principal, no one can even imagine unless they've been in it right? It's wildness, it's craziness.

So we're learning these foundations now so that we develop a shared understanding and we can converse about the way we think and behave using this coaching tool.

So, in the last two episodes, we discussed the difference between cause and symptoms and the difference between pain and suffering. So our goal is to find the source of the pain versus just trying to put a Band-Aid and

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symptoms we are experiencing. And for those of you who were not able to listen to the first couple of podcasts, I use the example of breaking your arm.

If you fall and hurt your arm but you don't know it's broken and the doctor just says, "Take Advil and get some rest." You're actually just treating the symptom. But if you go in and they x-ray the arm and take time to examine what's going wrong, then they can identify the source of what's causing your pain, put a cast on it and then you can start to heal.

That's the difference between finding the root cause and addressing just the symptoms. Because the core cause will not go away, you'll continue to experience negative emotion or you'll continue to have the same problem. The same holds true for pain versus suffering.

So we talked about clean pain and dirty pain. The difference between the two, basically, is this – when you're experiencing pain in the moment, it's in real time. You have to understand that when you're experiencing a painful situation, it's actually our thinking about that situation that sustains suffering and pain, even when the event has already happened.

So suffering occurs in past or present moments. It occurs in the past when we perseverate and think back to a painful experience over and over again. We tend to perseverate on that. Or we anticipate pain in the future; we worry. We're concerned. We suffer preemptively before something's even happened. That is suffering, my friends.

So today, we're going to talk about the source of all this suffering and all this pain and get to the real source. And I'm going to tell you – there's a spoiler alert right here – it all starts in our own brains.

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Okay, so here's my tool I'm super excited to share with you. It's called the STEAR Cycle; it's an acronym. Not the steer that you drive, but a different kind of STEAR. We're going to STEAR our emotions here.

So what we're going to do is we're going to look at S. S stands for situation. A situation is anything outside of our control. It is completely neutral and independent of us. It can be a person, a place, a thing, an event, some kind of circumstance. Examples of situations include things like the weather, a car accident, other people, other people's behavior, money, the economy, the president, our kids, our bosses, our teachers, the curriculum, our test scores. All of that is simply a situation.

The T in STEAR stands for thought. And a thought is a sentence that occurs in your mind. Thoughts pop up in your head thousands upon thousands of times a day. And let me give you some examples. Things that work that might come up for you is like, "Wow, I hope it does not rain during the walkathon." Or, "I wonder how this IEP is going to go." Or, things like, "I need to make more money. Our president is such an idiot. My child should do his homework. My boss is so supportive. I wish staff meetings were more productive. This curriculum is crap. If we don't improve test scores, my job will be in danger."

We have thoughts that appear – 50,000 thoughts per day or more appear constantly. So obviously, we're not very aware of most of them. They're just running through our heads. And when we're not aware of the thoughts, we do not realize their impact on our daily lives. We're not able to consider them and question them when we're not aware of them. So be aware that you have thoughts that are popping in your head all the day long.

Next in the STEAR cycle, E stands for emotion. And an emotion is one word. A single word that describes how we are feeling. Examples include

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disappointed, angry, worried, stressed, frustrated, disgusted, concerned, grateful, happy, reflective, dismissive, sad, scared. There's endless words for emotions and there are varying degrees upon which we experience emotion. But I like to tone it down to just one word. It's much more helpful than having a string, "I feel this and this and this and this." But what's the primary emotion or feeling that you are feeling?

An emotion is simply a vibration in the body, and emotions are triggered by our thoughts. Our emotions are separate from sensations. So we call emotions feeling because we actually feel them in our body. We physically feel emotions. But they are different than sensations. Sensations are involuntary and they start from somewhere in the body and they relay information up to the brain; things like hunger or pain. But emotions start in the mind and relay vibrations down to the body.

I want to demonstrate this. I want to demonstrate the power of how our mind can create feelings and emotions within the body; these vibrations. So let's do this. If you are in a safe location and not driving, close your eyes. If you're driving and listening to this podcast, you can do this later at home.

But what I want to show you is an example of how our thoughts create vibrations in the body. So close your eyes, take a deep breath and imagine yourself on your dream vacation. Let's say you're in the Fiji Islands at a five star resort. This is the dream of a lifetime. You're on the beach, the water is crystal clear, the breeze is gently blowing. There's a steel drum band playing in the background and you have your favorite beverage in hand.

You are with the love of your life enjoying this vacation of a lifetime. What emotions come up for you? What does your body do in response when you think these thoughts, and what emotions emerge? Do you feel yourself smiling? Do you feel yourself relaxing? Are you getting a warm happy

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feeling in the body; a fuzzy feeling, maybe in your chest? Your muscles might be relaxing. You're just taking it all in. I want you to sit in this moment of warmth. You're feeling the sun on your face, the smile on your face, the bigness of your chest, the love you feel for your other person. You're just in it. You're loving life. This couldn't get any better.

Okay, hold on to that. And you're now at the end of your vacation. You're packing up. You fly home. You're in your car. You're driving back from the airport. You turn the corner into your neighborhood and the street's blocked off. You pull up as close as you can, you look around the corner and you see red flashing lights everywhere. There are fire trucks blocking the way. And you look down and they appear to be near your house, so you pull over the car, you get out, you run down the street. You're in an extreme panic and you look towards your house and you see it up in flames. Firefighters are spraying water and flame retardant all over your house. Flames are bursting out of the windows and you see 20 years of your life gone.

What emotions are washing over you right now? What vibrations are happening in your body? What are you experiencing as a result of seeing your house burn to the ground? Is your heart racing? Your breath is rapid. Do you feel your stomach in knots? Do you want to cry or scream out? You feel those negative vibrations, your heart's pounding, it feels like it's going to pound out of your chest. You're holding back tears.

This, my friends, is the power of thought. Without the situation even happening, your brain is able to produce thoughts that stimulate vibrations in your body. Those vibrations are called emotions, and those emotions trigger vibrations; a response in your body.

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Okay, the good news is that's not happening to us right now. So let's go back to thinking about Fiji Island. That's where I'd like to be at this moment in time – other than being with you on this podcast, of course.

Okay, that is the E in STEAR. STE – we're down to A; A stands for approach. The approach is the, action or set of actions, that you choose to take. It is what you do or do not do. And there's either reaction, inaction or taking action. Reaction is an emotional response. It's a reaction to the situation. It's an emotional response – kind of a kick; an automated response to the situation. Inaction, on the other hand, is choosing not to take any kind of action. You're opting not to act. The third is taking action, and this is when you make an intentional deliberate decision to plan and act accordingly in a certain way. So there's action, there's inaction, there's reaction. We'll talk more about those in a little bit.

But, let's get to the end. STEAR – R; R equals result. And results are what comes from your reaction, inaction or taking action. Results are always happening, my friends. It's so funny. So many times, clients will say, "I didn't get any results; nothing happened, nothing changed." And I say to them, "Ah, you did get a result. It may not be the result you wanted, but you got a result." And the result may be no change; that is a result. So, know that results are always happening. This cycle is always, always, always in motion.

So, let's take the STEAR Cycle and look at a common situation at work and see how it plays out when we change the thoughts that happen. So, a situation occurs outside of your control. I tried to think of a problem that's really common, not too stressful; it's just something that happens. And it's pretty relatable. And I came up with this. Let's say two teachers are talking during the staff meeting. I know it happened to me; maybe it doesn't happen to you, but I know it happened to me. And you can respond in all

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these different ways, so let's play this out. I'm going to show you three different ways this might play out.

Okay, so the situation will always stay the same. Two teachers are talking during the staff meeting. That's simply just an event that's occurring; it's happening. It's a fact. You see them talking, you hear them talking, and thought number one appears. Perhaps your thought that appears is, "Those two are being completely disrespectful." When that thought pops up, you see them talking, you think they're disrespectful, you feel the vibration of irritation. I'm emotionally feeling irritated right now.

So, when you're feeling a state of irritation, your approach might be this. I stop my presentation and I ask them to stop talking while you're presenting. "Hey guys, could you please keep it down, let me finish the presentation; you're interrupting."

So, you might get the result that you want. Perhaps if your goal was to get them to stop talking, that worked. That might be a very effective no-nonsense type of approach. However, it could be that there are other results that you had come about that were unintended. Things like this – the room gets quiet, people start to shift in their seats. Those teachers definitely stop talking but they look down and disengaged for the remainder of the staff meeting.

So depending on how you say, "Please stop." But if you're feeling a state of irritation, my guess is you're going to come from a place of irritation. And the result you get might be that they stop talking, but it also might disengage some people. It might make them feel uncomfortable. So, there's one, just one, scenario.

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Two, let's change the thought. Let's have the same situation but we change the thought. Two teachers are talking during the staff meeting. A thought appears, "I wonder if there are questions. I see those two talking. I haven't stopped presenting for quite a while. Let me see. I wonder if there are questions." The emotional vibration that occurs in the body is a little calmer. It's more a sense of curiosity; a sense of wondering, a sense of wanting to ask.

So your approach is to stop yourself and ask, "Hey, I've been presenting for quite a while. Does anybody have any questions? Is there anything I need to clarify or review?" And the result might be actually yes; the people who were talking – a person did have a question, they raised their hand, and there may be a couple of other people raise their hand and a conversation starts to ensue.

So coming from a place of curiosity alters your approach and possibly your result. It could be that you wonder if they have any questions and you ask and they don't and then they keep on talking. You don't know exactly how they're going to respond, and that is outside of your control. But what is in your control is the thought and the emotion and the approach, right.

So let's try it a third way. Two teachers talking during a staff meeting, and if your thought is, "I can never keep my teacher's attention. I'm not a very good presenter. I'm new at this. I don't know what I'm doing." You might feel the emotion of shame or being ashamed of yourself; feeling like you're not good enough or strong enough or competent enough yet as a principal. Maybe you're a new principal.

So when you start to feel ashamed or embarrassed that you're not able to keep attention or hold a really productive staff meeting, your approach might be to cower down and blow off the rest of the presentation, or maybe

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you plough through it as quickly as you can; you just let the staff out early. You're just over it or you're embarrassed, you don't want to take the time to get feedback, right. And the result is going to be that teachers aren't engaged. If you're not engaged, how can they be engaged?

So one situation, three different thoughts that pop up which trigger three different types of emotion, which then alter the approach you choose to take. So changing the thought actually changes the result. And I want you to try this. This is huge. This is everything, you guys. And we are going to dig way deeper into this in a future podcast, but I want you to see that when a thought appears in your head, it's so instant, it triggers an emotion which triggers a response and impacts the result.

This cycle is in constant motion, and I want you just to observe yourself this week. Emotions are there for a reason; they're there to communicate with you. They're there to trigger you. They're there to leverage your behavior. So when you feel intense emotion, stop and ask yourself, "whoa, what's going on here? What am I thinking about? This is interesting. I'm really curious to know where my brain is going with this, right." And you'll start to see that, "Wow, I guess I was making that situation mean they were being disrespectful." Or, "No, I was making it mean that I was talking way too long and I needed to stop and ask a question." Or, "I was making it mean I am no good at this. I cannot handle this. I have got to figure out a way to be a better presenter." But the thoughts shift the emotions, shift the approach, shift the results. Try it; I guarantee it.

So, this example of the two teachers talking is just an example, and the results do vary. What I'm suggesting is that you take a look at your thought. You're not trying to control the outcome. This is not about control. Remember, you cannot control outside circumstances.

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What I am suggesting is that you get to choose how you think about a situation which impacts how you feel and act which then influences the results you get. And the cool thing about knowing this is that when you look at a result and you notice you're not getting what you want, you can step back and take a look at what you're thinking and how you're thinking about this situation; how you're viewing it, to see if there might be a different way to think about it. And it's as simple as that.

It's as simple as that and it is not as simple as that. So what I've learned is that this is a continual process. Your brain does not like to be challenged. It does not want to change it's thought. It thrives on efficiency. So this process of identifying your thoughts is very cumbersome at first. Your brain will push back. It will create new thoughts to protect the old thoughts. It's pretty wild, guys.

I have to say, your brain is so good at protecting itself and its thoughts, because it doesn't want you to feel bad, right; it's your brain. It's taking care of you. So the good news is that you can know with certainty that your brain is going to try and protect your deeply rooted beliefs. It's going to come up with new thoughts and evidence that your old thoughts are true. So it will say things like this, "What do you mean? Of course, it's true. How could it mean something else? I don't even want to think about this. I don't know how to change my thinking. I'm not going to change my thinking. This is absolutely ridiculous."

So basically, your brain is like a toddler. It's going to throw a little tantrum. It's going to get you to try and back off. So if you think about a toddler who tantrums at bed time because they don't want to go to bed, you need to approach your brain with the same love and patience that you would with your child. But don't allow the tantrum to change your mind; to go back to the old thinking.

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Acknowledge the meaning behind the tantrum; understand your brain is just trying to protect you, “Thank you very much.” Understand, hold the space while the tantrum’s occurring in your brain, and you might even feel some vibration in your body on that, because you’re going to have some resistance to it. But then you can follow through with the action of putting that old thought to rest.

I know this is a lot to ponder, guys. It takes our brains time to wrap around new ways of thinking. It actually takes a lifetime, in some cases. So be patient with yourself. We’re going to continue to explore this concept in upcoming podcasts and further explore each of the STEAR components.

As you become more aware of your thoughts, you’ll be able to see this cycle in motion. It is so fascinating to observe your brain; really it really is. I just love doing it. So, that’s what we’ve got for today. We’re going to jump in next week with looking at each of its components a little bit deeper, so that you get a more foundational understanding; a more concrete idea of how this all is interconnected.

So, if you enjoyed this podcast, please, please, please take a moment to share with your fellow principals and post a review on iTunes. My goal is to get over 100 likes by the end of my 10th episode. And actually, if I doubled that, I will do a dance. I want to get as many likes as possible because I know I value other people’s opinion about podcasts that I listen to, so I would love for you guys to give me feedback. How can I improve? Send me comments, send me suggestions. I’m here for you. This podcast is for you. Also, please know, I’m going to make the process a little more enticing by drawing the names of people who’ve left a review for the chance to win a \$100 Amazon gift card. I want to treat you for taking time to give me the feedback that I need to make this podcast as amazing as it can be for you.

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So please, take a moment to share this, to review it, to send me your suggestions. What do you want to learn? What do you want to know? What do you want to be coached on? I'm here for you.

Thank you to all of the people who have already submitted a review. I am so, so, so honored to have you taking time to listen. To leave a review, you can please go to iTunes, The Empowered Principal Podcast. You can also find me on Facebook at A Kelly Coaching or at my website AngelaKellyCoaching.com, where you will also find all of the episodes of the podcast listed. So you can find them on my website or directly in iTunes. Thank you so much for listening. Have an empowered week. I love you guys. I will see you next week.

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