

Ep #9: Negating Procrastination



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Ep #9: Negating Procrastination

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. Welcome to episode number nine. How are you guys doing this week? I am feeling amazing. I have to tell you why, though. It is my birthday week and I have tons of fun plans with my friends and with family.

So, a lot of my friends are teachers, obviously. And the cool thing is that they have this coming week off due to President's Day. Here in the Bay Area, we call this break in February Ski Week because so many people use this time to head up to Tahoe and get some skiing in. That is, when we have snow.

So in Northern California, we have not had much in the way of precipitation this winter, so there is not a lot of snow in the Sierras; which is very sad. So this year, my friends and I decided we are going to have a birthday beach party right here in Santa Cruz, and my Sweetheart, Mitch, booked a weekend in San Francisco for us for my birthday. So, we are going to see *The Book Of Mormon*. I am so excited. I love musicals; even though I know I'm behind the times a little bit. I just love going to musicals. I love everything music.

And you know, you guys, it's really tough to get tickets. When the Broadway casts do their initial tours, we cannot seem to get tickets on time here in San Francisco. So we've had to succumb to just waiting and getting the tickets on the follow-up tours. But I have to tell you, nine times out of

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10, the shows are still amazing. So I can't wait to go; really excited about that.

Right, on to the show. Last week, we did some myth-busting on three common thoughts that we have around time. Those thoughts included things like, "I'm too busy, multitasking is more efficient, and I need to find more time." And in Episode eight, I shared with you some alternate thoughts to consider and strategies to experiment with in order to help your brain actually start to believe that there are other ways that it is possible to think about time.

So if you have not had a chance, please catch episode eight, because time management and the thoughts around time and, "We don't have enough time," those thoughts really impede our ability to just get stuff done. So take a look at that.

But today, I want to extend this conversation and talk to you about why we procrastinate and why it feels like we're procrastinating against our own will. I know that you're asking yourself this when you're at work, "Why am I procrastinating this? Just do it," and then you don't do it...

So, let's take a look at procrastination today. Procrastination simply means that you are delaying, or putting off, taking action. When we procrastinate, we avoid taking action by stalling in inaction or buffering with other action that is less productive; such as looking through your Facebook or Instagram, just checking random emails, searching on the web.

And I have to admit, like while I was writing this very podcast, I was looking through my Instagram and Facebook as a buffer. So, no one is immune, you guys. We all do it. You can, however, learn to acknowledge when it is happening and choose to negate the desire to procrastinate.

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So why do we procrastinate in the first place? It's so frustrating, isn't it? We delay taking action because of one reason and one reason only, and that reason is this – we believe somewhere deep in our thoughts that taking action will cause us to experience negative emotions. That's it. That is simply it.

We do not take immediate action because we believe that the activity of choosing an approach and initiating those action steps will bring up discomfort, pain, stress, frustration; all the things, right. So Tony Robbins, one of my favorite people, he says that we will do far more to avoid pain than we will to gain pleasure. Pain is the greatest motivator in the short term.

So when you procrastinate, you believe that deciding on an approach and taking action will cause more immediate pain than choosing inaction or avoidance. It feels better in the moment to play a game on your phone than it does to start building your presentation for the school board. And it is definitely more enticing to watch something like Scandal, which is one of my favorites, than it is to review 500 report cards.

The thought of having to work scares your brain into convincing you that procrastinating is the logical action to take; and boy, do we believe that, guys. We don't even know we're doing it. We're not aware. So, take a moment right now and think of something you have been procrastinating and take a deeper look at why you aren't choosing an approach.

I want you to ask yourself, "Why am I not doing..." Fill in the blank, and then list all the reasons you aren't choosing an approach and taking action. And what you'll find is that your thoughts will involve some anticipated pain, such as, "It will take forever. I don't want to do it. This is such a pain in my backside. I hate making phone calls. I don't know how to use Excel. Learning something new is a challenge; I don't want to do it."

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And if you look into those thoughts, you'll find that you're afraid of pain. You're afraid it's going to take too much time. You're afraid it's going to be uncomfortable doing it. You're afraid that you're uncomfortable making phone calls. You might get somebody on the line that's unhappy with you and that you'll experience negative emotion. You'll experience frustration if you don't know how to use a program; Excel or PowerPoint or whatever. And that learning is discomfort – it's uncomfortable to have to focus and try and fail and try again. We don't like that. The brain doesn't like that, so we list out all these reasons why it's appropriate not to jump in and do the work.

So if we dig deeper into this list, you're going to find that the reason you don't want to do it is that your brain is anticipating pain; that's all it is, guys, so you don't have to freak out. Anticipated pain in our immediate future is the total reason we procrastinate. It's the reason that we don't make the call, we don't get the project started, we don't finish the project, we don't get out of our office and into classrooms, or into the lunchroom, which is scary, but you need to get in there. It's why you don't schedule meetings. It's why you're afraid to talk to your boss. It's why you're afraid to say the tough thing to a teacher or a parent or a kid.

I understand – we don't like pain. And when we understand we don't like pain, but that in order to get things done requires some level of discomfort, we can start to analyze our behavior. So let's look at an example. Many of us, at least in my district, we would procrastinate completing our site improvement plan. So for us, it was this 50+ page document where we had to summarize and analyze our school data. We had to create really specific goals and even more specific action plans with dates and people responsible and the action we were going to take and how much it was going to cost.

I mean, it was just so laborious. Not only did we have to do that, we had to review it each trimester and adjust it, depending on where we were in the

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plan. And then, not only do we have to do that, but then we had to turn this document in towards the beginning of the year, have it approved by our district admin team, and then we had to present it to parents and community members, to the teachers, to the school board. So it was a really big deal and it was a big part of our job as a school leader.

Now, it doesn't mean that we didn't want to do the work, but we didn't exactly enjoy the work while we were in it. I'm being honest; it's not my favorite thing. We didn't get into education so we could fill out documents, but it's part of the job, right. So, the anticipation of completing a large task – something like a big school site plan – puts people into one of two modes. It puts some of you into go mode and get it done, and it puts the rest of us in running away; running for the hills.

So if you are someone who procrastinates especially big tasks like this, you are choosing to believe that working on the plan will be painful. But here's the irony, guys – when you procrastinate something, especially something that requires significant time, you end up having to cram it all in at the last minute, which results in, guess what, pain.

So just by believing that taking action will cause you pain, your non-action also creates the outcome of pain. You've created evidence that the experience will be a painful one. So the next time you are asked to complete the site plan, your brain is going to look back – it's going to push back at you and it's going to say, "Hey, remember how painful that last time was? Let's not do that again."

And guess what, you'll put it off again. And then you'll say, "See, I proved how painful this was." But here's the important piece – and this is where it has a larger impact on you – when you are not consciously aware that you are engaging in procrastinating actions, you develop a habit of procrastination without realizing it.

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Procrastination breeds procrastination. That hit of pleasure your brain receives from playing Candy Crush or watching Scandal, instead of having to expend energy in work, reinforces the brain's efforts in getting you to procrastinate. You strengthen the loop every time you choose to procrastinate as your approach. You provide evidence to your brain that procrastination is a viable choice. And it's just like a toddler who tantrums and gets his way.

So think about it – you're at the store, you've got your little one, they throw a fit because they want the candy. You finally give in, you get the candy because you don't want to deal with the scene and you don't want to leave; you're ready to just get your groceries and go. But when you give in to that desire, guess what, the next time you go to the store, bigger tantrum, more drama – it's going to be a bigger issue. You have reinforced the tantrum behavior.

So the brain is the same way. Its desire for immediate pleasure will be fueled as you gave it the option that any time the brain doesn't want to do something uncomfortable, procrastination is the option.

So here's the bottom line, guys – we procrastinate to avoid pain in the immediate moment, right. And the way you avoid procrastination is to create a tipping point. This is where the pain of not taking the action is actually worse than sitting down and doing the work now.

You can proactively create this tipping point whenever you notice yourself wanting to choose inaction or reaction, which is basically avoiding and buffering. So here's what we do – we procrastinate, we don't want to do something, it's uncomfortable, it's a pain, it's going to take time, and so we don't sit down and do it. But there is some moment at which you flip.

So if we go back to the example of the site plan – let's say you wait until the last minute and then you have to cram all the work in over a couple of

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nights or a weekend or something, but you did the work. There was a point that your brain made a decision that not completing the plan on time would be more painful than not doing the work. That is what I'm talking about. That is the tipping point.

So your brain ultimately decided that, "Wait a minute – the longer-term pain of not taking action is going to be worse than the immediate pain of sitting down and completing the plan. So, if you want to avoid the pain of procrastination, you can preemptively focus your attention on the pain that will occur if you don't take action. So here's what you need to do if you want to be proactive in not procrastinating.

It's really simple, guys, all you need to do is this – I want you to take a piece of paper and write a list of everything it will cost you if you don't follow through. So if you're not going to do that site plan, what are the costs associated with that? What are the consequences, or the costs? Write them all down. And then on the other side, list what it will cost you if you do follow through. So if you do it right now, what is it going to cost you to do it right now? Because there is a cost associated with being proactive as well.

List it down, then, if you want even more benefit to the brain – you want to entice it even more – you can also list the benefits of the immediate follow through to further entice your brain to kick into action, right. So you can say, "Wow, the benefit of sitting down and getting this done, or getting this started will be I'm going to feel great. I'll be ahead of the game. It's going to be done two weeks early. I'll have time to get more input from my staff." Whatever it is, that immediate follow through not only has a cost associated with it, it has a benefit.

So, if you can get yourself into a state where you're imagining yourself and you're feeling the completion, or just that pride you take when you start a task or you get a big chunk of it done – getting yourself in that state before you actually sit down and do the work, it will shift your energy. It puts you in

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this more positive state which ultimately is going to alter the approach that you choose.

So, I know, we all procrastinate from time to time. We all put things off. That's just how we roll, right. And we tend to rationalize it by saying we have other things to do, there's not enough time, we'll get back to it later. We try and trick our brain into believing that the option to put it off is a good decision. And it happens, guys; I get it. So if you have procrastinated, or if you're in the moment where you are experiencing pain from putting something off, please, please go easy on yourself. Don't add insult to injury.

Think about this – you procrastinate; now you're in more pain because now you have to cram and get something done, or you didn't get something done and you're suffering the consequences of not taking action. Don't beat yourself up on top of that. You're already in pain. Just notice – be curious, be aware, ask yourself, like curiously, like why did you not do that or why did you put it off for so long?

And you need to understand what thoughts are popping up around the topic of putting things off and just know that you do have tools available to you to help you avoid procrastinating in the future.

Okay, that's it; simple, simple, easy-peasy-lemon-squeezy, as the kids say. Easier said than done is what I say. Alright, mighty leaders, I want you to forth and continue doing good work and good things for kids. I want you to shine bright as leaders and I want you to lead with love. And I want to take a moment to acknowledge the mass shooting that happened in Florida this past week.

I've been posting on my business page and on Instagram trying to help people understand and process the pain, the grief, the shock, the disillusionment, the just incomprehensibility that is any horrific event;

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especially when it impacts our schools. And I'm trying to get the message out to people the blaming our educators is not the solution; that supporting everyone involved with love, compassion, positive intent, understanding, empathy, that we're all on the same team.

We're all here for our kids and for humankind. And while we can't understand or put our self in the position of the person who committed this scene, this situation, we can go forth in the world choosing love, choosing respect, choosing to process our pain in a way that is respectful and courteous. There is a way to process pain without attacking, blaming, accusing, hating. So please, lead from a place of love. Be the role model that our children need. Be aware of what's going on. Be in tune with the kids and follow your intuition. Follow what you believe to be love and get the support that you need and that kids need to have a safe school. It's everything. That is so important. And I know you guys are burdened with so much responsibility as school leaders. My heart goes out to you. It goes out to every educator – and may you never have to experience the pain that is the reality for the students and families and staff in Florida. My love to them all.

Okay guys, please share this message with anybody you know that it will help. Procrastination is a part of life and we do have ways to avoid it and to negate it. So lead forth, my friends, with love. Have an empowered week. I will talk with you next week; goodbye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principle Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit www.angelacoaching.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.