

Ep #10: Words of Gratitude for Byron Katie



Full Episode Transcript

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Angela Kelly

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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 10. Oh my gosh, I am celebrating 10 episodes of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. And it's really funny because it feels like I have been doing this podcast for way longer than 10 weeks. It feels so natural to me. I love, love planning my topics, researching and especially writing. I even love the recording. I love it now that I understand the technology, but I was a little afraid at first, I have to admit. But I love being able to record from anywhere that I'm travelling. Right now, I'm at home; which is nice, but it's wonderful.

So, for the first few episodes, I had to rerecord often because of sound quality and other technical refinements, I would say, as I was learning. It was not my podcast producer; it was all me. So even though I was slightly disappointed initially, when I was asked to have to rerecord – there was one episode I had to rerecord, I think, six times. I was pulling my hair out. But I know deep down that my podcast producer, Pavel, wants the very best out of me and for me so that you as the listener get to have the best experience possible. So as soon as I push play, I sit back and I just enjoy recording. So thank you for showing up today and for joining me on episode 10. I love it.

I wanted to somehow celebrate this 10th episode. It just feels like a real milestone for me. And what I decided was to take a strategy or an idea that I've heard on other podcasts, which is highlight or interview somebody that is impactful to that person in some way. So from the 10th episode and on,

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every 10th episode, I've decided that I will be dedicating my episode to somebody who has greatly impacted my life.

My goal is to try and schedule interviews with as many of these people as possible if they are still with us here today. But if not – if an interview is not feasible – I think I'm going to just highlight them myself. So today, I'm going to highlight someone myself because I don't, right now in my current life, have access to this person. But my goal is that someday I will. And I fully believe, guys, that acknowledging those from whom I learn sends out an incredible energy to the universe.

You, as teachers and principals, know how good it feels to have parents and kids acknowledge us for the hard work and all of the effort we're putting out into the world by sharing, not just knowledge, but our compassion, our love, for not just learning and teaching but improving the quality of lives. That's really why we do this.

And I feel like acknowledging those that have impacted our lives in a positive way fills the world up with incredible energy, and it fills me up personally with such gratitude that I'm now able to take what I've learned from them and share it onward with my own clients and my own listeners.

So I value taking a moment to say thank you to all of those who've impacted me. I will be sharing people from my life with you; people that are very close and personal with me and who live with me on a regular basis, all the way out to those who have no idea who I am and I've just read their work or I've engaged in their work at some level. So I'll be highlighting different people – I just think this is such a cool idea and I can't wait to share it with you.

So, I'm going to call these my Words of Gratitude, and I'm going to highlight the first of many, many significant teachers in my life – and that is the work

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of Byron Katie. For those of you who don't know Katie, Katie is the birthmother to four questions that she calls The Work.

Her work entered into my life through my close friends, Christian and Sarah, who had listened to her audio-book, titled Loving What Is, years and years ago. It was during this time that I was going through an incredibly painful period of my life and I really had entered into such a depression that I found it challenging to get up in the mornings.

There were days that the only reason I got out of bed – I don't think I've admitted this to anyone, but the days where I got out of bed were only because my dog was either begging me and barking at me to let her out to go potty, or my then toddler would climb up in bed and he would pet my face and he'd say, "Mommy, what are we going to do today? Let's go play."

It was my dog and my child that were the only things I felt were motivational to get up. So on days I didn't have my son, it was a real challenge. It was a real challenge. And I know, all of us have been through personal experiences that bring us to this level and professional experiences that bring us down to this level, that we're questioning our very existence. Why are we even doing what we're doing? Does it even matter? What difference does it make?

You start to question yourself and you get yourself into a point of hopelessness, and I don't want that for anybody. I am sharing my love for Byron Katie's work so that hopefully you can find her work valuable and that you can find yourself out of a very painful situation, whether it's professional or personal.

So I'm going to be really open and honest and authentic and share with you about what I was going through so that you can understand that it feels like it's not going to end. I know you don't want to live like this, but you don't know how to feel better. And in my case, I was playing this façade of this

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cheerful kindergarten teacher by day and then sinking into complete agony and despair by night.

So let me share with you where I was and how Byron Katie's work and my sweet friends, Christian and Sarah, brought her work into my life and how it changed me forever.

So, after a particularly painful breakup – so I was divorced at the time and I was dating. I had been through several dates, several relationships but nothing was going the distance. I was also single parenting and I was teaching fulltime at the time. I was going through a particularly hard breakup in the sense that I thought it was the one; I thought it was everything and it came completely out of the blue. I did not see it coming.

It is what my coach, Stacey, calls the sucker-punch. It took me off my feet. It took my breath away. My friend Sarah made me a copy of Katie's audio-book, Loving What Is. It was on CD back in that time, right. So I popped it into my CD player and I listened with such intention. It was so, so good.

The introduction of Katie's book tells a story about how she was living a life very similar to my own. She too had been divorced. She too had children. She too had a successful career. And she too felt depressed, scared and angry. She was in a situation where she was so desperate, she checked herself into a halfway house.

The halfway house was for women with eating disorders, but I believe, in her book she said it was the only place she could go where her insurance would be accepted. So she went into this halfway house to get some help. She felt like she was crazy. She felt hysterical. She was screaming and angry at her loved ones, her kids, her second husband. She just was feeling hopeless, depressed and just in complete agony.

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She would throw fits of rage so fiercely at the halfway house that she actually was separated from the other residents. They put her up in an attic and they blockaded her in because they were so fearful that she would turn violent because her outbursts, her emotional outbursts, were so intense.

So feeling alone, in addition to these already intense feelings of sadness, paranoia and just basically complete exasperation, Katie did not even feel that she deserved to sleep in a bed. So she slept on the floor in the attic of this halfway house for the first couple of weeks or so that she was up there.

And one morning, as she lay on the floor, a cockroach crawled across her foot. And in the book, she explained that as she opened her eyes that morning and felt the cockroach on her foot and awakened, her depressions and her fear were simply gone. She explained that when she opened her eyes, she, for the first time, felt nothing and realized that before she woke up, she did not have any thoughts.

There were no thoughts about sleeping on the floor; no thoughts about a cockroach crawling across her foot. She realized that before the thoughts, there was nothing; no pain, no suffering, no agony, nothing. This led her to see that thoughts cause pain. Prior to thought, there is no pain. Prior to thought, there's nothing.

And it was from this place that she created in her mind these four questions. I was mesmerized. Katie had me at hello. She started her book with her story; her real-life authentic story about how she lived in torment because of the thoughts created in her mind.

This audio-book continued on and on with Katie coaching individuals on every painful thought; thoughts that spanned all the way from couple relationships to family relationships, thoughts on parenting, thoughts on work and money, addictions and worst-case scenarios – things like death

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and mass destruction. Things like mass shootings and 9/11 – she coached people through their painful agony from this place of four questions.

Now, the base of her four questions, which she calls Inquiry or thought work, revolves around these four questions – is it true? Can you absolutely know that it's true? How do you react when you think that thought? And finally, who would you be without the thought? And she calls this fourth question the Turnaround.

So Katie's work was the first exposure that I had to the idea that thoughts could be questioned. To be honest, I never before had ever considered that I could view my thoughts separate from myself or that I could decide whether I wanted to believe them or not. Just saying them out loud still blows my mind.

I had no idea that I was separate from my thoughts; not even assuming that I could then decide whether I wanted to believe them or not. That was such an awakening for me. I listened to this book on audiotape, basically CDs back then, and I downloaded worksheets from her website.

And believe me, I got to work. I started writing down all of my thoughts that brought me pain and suffering. I wrote down – well obviously – thoughts about this relationship, thoughts about my personal life, thoughts about my family – my family of origin and my current family – my divorce. I worked on thoughts around my job. I worked on thoughts around my friends. I was obsessed with this work.

And what I started to realize was that I was the common denominator. I was the one person, my thoughts and I, were the one consistent situation or circumstance in all of these scenarios. It was my constant barrage of negative thoughts about other people and myself that were the reason behind my unhappiness.

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I believed that other people should behave a certain way in order for me to be happy. I believe that about a lot of people in my life. I also beat the crap out of myself with incredibly hurtful thoughts. Like, I couldn't believe how mean I was to myself.

So, between the negative thoughts about everybody else and the thoughts about myself and what I should be doing and I'm not, we're creating a really miserable life. It was not a happy time for me. So what I want to share with you today is I'm going to share the example of the work I've done using Byron Katie's worksheets, her Inquiry worksheets.

And I'm going to use the example of this breakup because it was such a pivotal moment for me, and that lead me – if I could get through that extreme pain – and let me tell you guys, for anybody who's been through a heartbreak that's unexpected and sudden, it consumes you and it takes your breath away. You cannot breathe. You are so in a state of discomfort, it feels unbearable; absolutely unbearable.

And I knew, if I could find a way through that pain – I thought my divorce was the worst pain, and then this felt like failure number two. It was so painful. And I knew, if I could get through this pain, that I could get through anything related to the rest of the circumstances in my life.

So let me share with you how this went down. So, kind of the prep work that happens with the four questions, with The Work, is about getting your thoughts onto paper. So I'm just going to share with you my answers to her questions. You'll most likely be able to tell, but she's basically asking you questions about your thoughts and feelings in order for you to get down onto paper what your brain is thinking, okay?

Very similar to the STEAR Cycle, but this preprocess allows you to – if you don't know what you're thinking, these questions engage you in a dialogue that puts your thoughts directly down in front of you. So, I love this work

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that she does. Basically, she asks about the situation for you to explain it from your perspective.

So, the thoughts that popped up for me, back in this situation, were, “I am angry at my ex for breaking up with me. I want him to love me and stay with me and marry me. He should not break up with me. He should continue dating me and love me. I need him to love me forever. I need him to see that we have a good relationship. My ex is selfish and unkind. I don’t ever, ever want to be hurt again like this. I do not want to be broken up with again.”

So those thoughts came out of a series of questions that are her pre-work for the Inquiry. So those are what came up, and then what you do for each of these thoughts, then you ask the four questions – is it true? Can you absolutely know that it’s true? How do you react when you believe that thought? And who would you be without the thought?

You ask each of those four questions for every single one of these statements. So, I’m just going to take one of these for an example. So let’s say, in this case, my thought, “I need him to love me forever,” would look like this: is it true that you need him to love you forever? Yes – I felt like it was a yes. But could I absolutely know it was true? Did I need him to love me forever? Do I absolutely know that that’s true? No, I guess not.

How do I react when I believe the thought, “I need him to love me forever and he doesn’t?” I reacted by saying, “I cry, I am crushed, I feel so much pain. I am depressed and I do not want to leave my house or even my bed. I ignore my dog and my son. I want to call him and I search for reasons to connect with him. I stalk him.” Sounds kind of crazy at the time, but this is where I was. I was engaging in these behaviors because I was believing that he should love me forever.

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Now, the fourth question is called the Turnaround. And the question reads, “Who would you be without the thought I need him to love me forever?” The Turnaround is the time in which you really need to sink into what it might feel like to possibly not think the thought, “I need him to love me forever.” Or not believe the thought, “I need him to love me forever.”

And when I sink into that thought, or when I sunk into that thought at the time, my answers were, “I would be less angry. I might accept the breakup a little better and I might be able to move on.” Now, the Turnarounds are basically you’re shifting the thought to the opposite, or you’re turning it around back to yourself.

So the Turnarounds sound like this – instead of the thought, I need him to love me forever, the Turnaround thoughts are, “I don’t need him to love me forever.” Or, “I need me to love me forever.” Or, “I need me to love him forever.” Now, these, at first, are really hard to read because your brain fights back. It doesn’t want to be challenged with new thoughts, especially thoughts that, to the brain, don’t serve you.

Your brain wants to argue that its thought, “I need him to love me forever,” is true. It doesn’t want to be challenged or questioned. It doesn’t want to be proven wrong. So when it reads the opposite, it will recoil. So this work is not easy, especially in the beginning. But it is so freeing. It is so freeing. I am pure testament to how freeing this work is.

So once you do the Turnarounds, Katie asks you to find three examples of where each one might be true. So when I first did this work, I had trouble seeing how I didn’t need him to love me forever because I wanted to believe that I needed him to love me forever. Obviously, ten years later, however long it’s been, I no longer believe or attach to that thought whatsoever. I’m now happily married to the person I was meant to be with.

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But when I first did this work, the only evidence that I could find is that I had lived through a divorce before where I thought the same thing at the time. So, I rationed that it could be true that I didn't need him to love me forever. I could rationalize that possibility, perhaps because I'd been through this before with somebody I thought should love me forever and didn't, that perhaps this too was the same case.

Then the Turnaround, "I need me to love me forever," I could find plenty of examples where that was true. And with that thought, I was able to engage in loving activities for myself during this transition. I spent lots of time with close friends, I slept in, I pampered myself with spa appointments, I travelled when I could, I played endlessly with my son and my dog. I actually took up guitar during that time and I just started doing things for pure pleasure; if for no other reason, just to love on me and that really, really helped.

Now, the third Turnaround, finding three examples of how I needed me to love him forever, especially at the time when I was so mad, was really a challenge. But I was, however, able to see later on that choosing to feel love over hate for him was all about me feeling better. Appreciating him for the time we did have together felt much calmer, more peaceful and happier than choosing to feel disdain towards him. And the best part, guys, he didn't even have to know because, you know what, the ex doesn't know whether you're angry or happy. The only person who knows that is you and the only reason you're either happy or angry is what you're choosing to believe and how you're choosing to feel.

So, over time, I chose to feel love for him in order to feel love within myself. It was such a gift to internally forgive, choose love, and now I see truth in the thought, "I need me to love him forever." Isn't that wild? So wild...

I will say, in all honesty, that Katie's work is not for the faint of heart. Her Inquiry involves questioning your own brain, and not just questioning it, but

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in the deepest part of the work, it is about turning the thoughts completely around so that you can see how you are self-sabotaging. And this can feel threatening if you are new to the work.

The brain takes a bit of an ego blow when it sees that the things it is thinking about, or situations that are in reality truly a reflection of your inaccurate thoughts, that hurts; it stings. But the truth of it is, there's nothing more and nothing less. It's simply that thoughts that are left unquestioned can cause you pain.

My favorite part of Katie's work is that it extends through all of mankind. Every human on this earth, regardless of gender, color, location on this planet, orientation or religious background, has thoughts. We all have them, which means that we all have the capacity to consider evaluating our thoughts that are causing us to suffer. Thoughts about colleagues or staff members, perhaps situations on your campus or current conditions of your workplace – anything, any thought that when you think it brings up negative feelings or thoughts or stress – can be turned around.

I invite you to try doing The Work to see if you can find truth that will bring you peace. The Work works wonders if you choose to be open to finding the turnaround. Katie's work was the miracle I needed to get me from that place of misery to fulfillment, love and gratitude. I would not be where I'm at without that gift of Katie's work.

Katie has not met me in person, but I truly believe that she knows me. She knows me because she has learned that when any of us suffer, it is because we believe thoughts that are not true. She understands me because she knows to be human involves pain and suffering and the only way to free yourself is to question the thoughts and find other thoughts that better serve you, and in turn, serve the world.

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Her words hold so true for me. Every time I suffer it is because I have unquestioned thoughts. And whenever I do decide to do The Work, I see where my thoughts have led me astray, and then I use the Turnarounds to get back on track.

So Katie, thank you. Thank you from the bottom of my grateful heart. Thank you for being so courageous in sharing your story and doing the work that brought The Work into the world. You are forever my hero. I love you so deeply and I thank you for inspiring me to incorporate your work into my work. May our paths cross in person someday soon. You're on my vision board, Byron Katie, and I want to meet you and I want to hold your hand so that I can say thank you.

Byron Katie is truly a gift to this world, as is her work. For more information on her work, you can visit www.thework.com.

Hey there, guys. If you enjoyed this week's podcast, please take a moment to share it with someone who's an aspiring principal or who is currently a principal. I know there are others out there who want to feel better about the work they are doing for children, but they're not sure how. I have learned from some of the most qualified life coaches in the industry and I can help you feel more empowered in your work as a principal and in your life.

You want to know a free and easy way to get started? Just go to my website at angelakellycoaching.com and sign up for my weekly newsletter. I promise you, it is short and sweet with a little splash of sassy and to the point. I try to keep it short and sweet because that's the kind of email that this girl likes to receive.

So please sign up. It's easy, it's free, it will always be free and it's there for you. I love you. I love the work we do. Thank you so much for listening and go have an empowered week. I'll talk to you next week; bye.

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