

Ep #11: Why Enthusiasm Matters in Leadership



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With Your Host

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. How are you guys doing? I hope you are having the most beautiful week. Can you believe we are already in the month of March? I cannot believe this. Time is flying. I definitely can feel spring fever in the air; how about you?

Now, the past few weeks here have been really cold and rainy in Northern California. So when the sun peaks out and its rays feel so warm on my skin, I shake like a little puppy with anticipation of summer because I absolutely love summer so much. Probably because I've been a teacher my whole life and we look forward to summer like a puppy looks forward to its bone.

And even though – it's funny, even though I'm no longer on the school calendar, I still feel the buzz of excitement that comes with spring fever and spring break and summer break. So I hope all of you are feeling energized with the changes that spring brings to the school year. And speaking of excitement, that is exactly what we are going to be talking about today.

We are going to discuss the impact that choosing to be enthusiastic has on your work day. And that's right, folks, enthusiasm is a choice. You don't just become enthusiastic or you're not inherently enthusiastic. Enthusiasm is a choice. And today, we're going to talk about how choosing to show up with enthusiasm and energy and excitement will take you miles in your career.

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One of the things that people would repeatedly say to me, as a school leader, was that they loved my energy. They appreciated me being out on the campus, in the lunchroom, on the playground with a smile on my face. I would welcome kids in the drop-off loop in the mornings and I loved saying goodbye to them as they loaded up on the bus or out in the pickup zone. I loved going out before and after school to say hi to the kids. I loved being on the playground and I really loved being in the lunchroom.

One of my favorite things to do was serve lunch to the kids through the lunch-line because I got to know every single name, all of their faces, what they loved to eat, what they didn't like to eat. It was a great way for me to connect with kids. And then once a week, I would eat school lunch and I would sit down with one of the tables and I would just hang out with the kids. It was really fun.

And I used to also love going and hanging out in the office. One of my favorite things to do with the kids was to – I would come in the morning and I would bring coffee for my office staff and I would say, “You are going to need this caffeine to be able to keep up with me today. We are going to kill it.” But I used to love to sit in the office and the kids would come in tardy, and pretty much the same offenders every day, or at least every week. And I would be like, “Why are you guys late?” And we would joke and have fun and laugh about that and I told them, “I'm going to drive to your house and wake you up. I'm going to bring an alarm clock.” And they just got the biggest kick out of that. we had so much fun.

So I have to say, like, I really loved mornings. And I'm a morning person; I get that. And it was funny; actually some people would get a little bit annoyed. You know those people who aren't quite awake in the morning and I would be like, “Good morning, happy Monday; goo to see you.” And then they would kind of look at you out of the corner of their eye and glare a little bit. I could just see them seething with, like, “shut it down, you know, Principal; let's stop the energy.”

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And actually, that fueled me even more. It was so much fun because I absolutely loved spreading cheer across my campus. And here's the thing, what I didn't consciously realize at the time, or at least at the beginning of my leadership tenure, was that I didn't have to know it all about how to be the boss. I didn't have to know exactly how to lead my school and I didn't have to have all the answers and be right.

But when I was new, I was constantly worried about looking new and feeling new and feeling clumsy and dumb and not knowing what to do or how to do it. I was afraid that people were going to think I wasn't good enough. And you guys all know what that feels like; to be worried about not feeling good enough. But the excitement and enthusiasm I had for being on campus and being a principal, I pushed through.

So even though I felt the fear and I was often worried about how to do things, I still showed up excited. I showed interest in learning the job. I would jump in and just engage with others whole-heartedly. And I would acknowledge – like, I had a teacher who said, “One of the things I love most about you is that you're so open and honest.” I would just simply acknowledge when I didn't know something.

I would say, like, “You know what, I don't know. That's a great question. Let me dig into that and get back to you.” Or I'd say something like, “You know, I'm really new at this and I'm still learning. I'm going to have to check with someone else and get back to you. I'll let you know. Okay, please bear with me.”

So people find that completely refreshing. There's just something really refreshing and appealing about someone who's new and exuberant and who's willing not to know and not to be a smarty pants or I know everything. Like, you know that vibe is just so different, but coming in with enthusiasm and whole-heartedness and authenticity; people love that.

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It's kind of like how we love watching young children try something new for the first time. They don't have to know how to do it correctly to be excited about it. And in fact, we don't expect them to know how to do it. We actually embrace just their enthusiasm at trying something new. They just get so excited, and we love not that they can do it or not do it, but we love their excitement about it.

Same holds true with adults. They love having somebody enthusiastic, excited, exuberant. People thrive on that. And when you are a leader, you guys, you're never going to know everything. You're going to gain some knowledge, you're going to gain experience and you're going to gain information through books and training and collaborations. But at the end of the day, you will never know everything, so prioritizing being right or knowing what to do over enthusiasm will only get you so far.

Intelligence and knowledge alone does not a good leader make. You must bring positive energy and passion into the equation, and here's why – enthusiasm is contagious. It attracts other people to you. Enthusiasm, excitement, exuberance and positive energy is like candy to a kindergartener; we all want a taste of it. We all want to be around it. We all want to feel it and be a part of it.

Enthusiasm energizes others. People follow people with enthusiasm. They want to be led by leaders who are smiling, who are positive, who are genuine and energetic.

I had a superintendent that was exemplary at this. He was always smiling, positive, supportive; just a happy guy. He led with genuine enthusiasm and his energy was always a high vibe. Now, it did not hurt that he looked very similar to George Clooney, and I saw some of the younger teachers swooning, but that's not ultimately why people loved him. They loved him because his enthusiasm made them feel good. I know I certainly loved him and I wanted to work with him and I wanted to work really hard for him. I wanted to roll out his ideas. I wanted to do them 100% completely and give

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it a 100% try because I knew he appreciated my effort. And I knew he appreciated my effort because he made himself present; he made himself visible and he was enthusiastic. He was happy, he was positive and he took time to appreciate and to compliment my work. And he really approached every problem with this energy and this excitement. I just really loved him.

I actually had a couple of superintendents who were like this, but this one was with us for several years in the district. His leadership was so infectious and he led our district to a higher level than I had ever seen in my years as a teacher.

Was he loved by all? No. he had his critics. He was human and he made his share of errors along the way. We all do. But what I noticed about his leadership was that he continued to be enthusiastic anyway. It just made him more approachable, more likable. He chose positivity and excitement. Yes, he had some haters, but he still showed up enthusiastic.

So for those of us who really loved him, we loved him through thick and thin. We loved him even more. We loved him because of his decision to show up every day with enthusiasm.

Now, the key to enthusiasm, guys, is authenticity. You cannot fake your way to being enthusiastic; not for the long-haul. You might be able to fake it 'til you make it for a short period of time; which is funny because that was actually one of his infamous quotes. But I honestly do not feel that he was faking it. I believe he authentically loves being a leader.

He loves to solve problems, he loved teachers. He loved teaching and learning. He certainly loved kids and he loved making people feel appreciated and respected. He truly enjoys the work. And even on the hardest of days, he chose to keep his vibe high and his attitude in check.

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So I'm going to do a quick shout-out. Doctor Geizhals, thank you so much for being an enthusiastic leader; a genuinely enthusiastic leader. You have no idea the level of positive impact you've made on my life; so thank you so much. And I know you're still out there doing good work in the world, so continue on, my friend. I love it.

And you guys, you know what else makes an authentic leader – an enthusiastic leader? You know what else it helps you with? It helps you build relationships with people. It helps your teachers and your staff and your school leaders believe in themselves. It allows you to have crucial conversations and remain respected because when people see that you are eager to learn, eager to help and problem-solve and listen and engage with them, they are going to be willing to follow your lead.

They are willing to engage with you on tough issues. Enthusiasm builds the emotional bank account. When you genuinely engage with others on a high, positive vibe for 80% of the time, or more, you can also engage in discourse on topics where the energy may become really intense. So you might not always be liked in the moment but choosing to come from a place of enthusiasm communicates to others that you are here for the people.

As Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Choosing to show up to your day with enthusiasm can be the difference between just being a principal or being a principal who's making an impact.

Now, how do you generate authentic enthusiasm, you ask? What if you're a person who isn't, quote en quote, naturally enthusiastic? Should you just pretend? No, of course not. You all have been around a person who is fake excited. Like, "Oh my god, how awesome. I just love your new anchor chart. How did you do that? You are such an artist. That is so cool." Guys, come on, no one loves a kiss-up and everyone can sniff out a fake. Do not do this or it will break people's trust in you. Authenticity is essential.

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So here's what I did. On days I woke up and felt dread – which was more times than not, to be honest, but you know, those days you wake up and your brain immediately starts thinking about how you have back to back meetings and you are just sure in your mind that they're all going to turn out bad. I've had so many of those. And some days I went in and I just felt the dread. And guess what, I manifested dreadful days.

But what I started doing was trying to find one thing throughout the day that I could focus on that was going to be positive; just one thing that I could look forward to in my day. Now, some days, it was simply like, "At least I have an awesome lunch. I brought an awesome lunch with me today." Or, "At least I don't have meetings past five o'clock."

But other days, what I would really try to do was envision a particular meeting going really smoothly. I would play it in my head and I would envision myself saying the right things, listening to everybody, like really being engaged, having it go better than I expected and everyone walking out and leaving happy. I'd see myself listening intently, taking notes and just rocking out the facilitation of that meeting.

So that got my vibe up. It got my emotional state back up and then my energy followed. And what's really cool is that most times, the one thing that I focused on was the one thing that ended up going well that day. Days that I came into work in a funk turned out funky. Days that I envisioned it going to be a great day usually turned out to be a great day. It ended up being based on my level of energy and excitement for helping others that day. It's really fun to play with.

So give it a try. Envision your day going well – at least a part of it – and bring that energy to the table. At the very least, try to think of a person who you admire, like my awesome superintendent, who's got that charismatic attraction to others and see if you can try to emulate them. What is it that they do or say that makes you like them or makes you feel attracted to their energy?

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I know I certainly did everything I could to channel my inner Beyoncé, or my inner Doctor Geizhals and I would rock the day like a boss should. And I know you guys have it in you. I know you do. I believe in you. You've got this. So, my fellow educators, go get it. Get empowered. Get enthused. Choose enthusiasm and have an enthusiastic week. I love you guys. I'll see you next week.

Hey, if you love this podcast and want more, check out my website at angelakellycoaching.com and sign up for my weekly newsletter. Don't worry, it's a short one. I hate reading long emails and I won't take up much of your time. But I do love to share with all of you all that's going on, my random thoughts on education and the fun life at the beach. So join me on my newsletter at angelakellycoaching.com. You just sign up, pop in your newsletter and it comes to you every week. Have a wonderful week, my friends. Talk to you then; bye.

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