

Ep #14: Being Decisive as a Leader



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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 is it going this week? How are you doing? How are you feeling? Are you practicing your feeling? We talked about feelings last week. I hope you are feeling amazing.

I'm feeling excited because in a few short months, my husband and I will be celebrating our first year of marriage. We are having a big shindig for our one-year anniversary – basically our marriage celebration. So for those of you who don't know, he and I, on a whim, eloped on a Tuesday morning last June.

So this coming June, we are going to be celebrating, with our family and friends, our marriage. And it feels amazing and it feels exciting because there's no pressure about the wedding part or the getting married part or should I or should I not get married and sitting in indecisiveness or confusion or scared. I simply am feeling joy, excitement, anticipation, looking forward to the celebration with all of our loved ones. So that is how I'm feeling today.

And speaking of decisiveness, I want to talk about being decisive as a leader. So let me share with you a story and I will actually – I don't usually do this on my podcast, but today, I'm going to actually give you some step-by-step suggestions or tips for how to work on being decisive and communicating decisiveness.

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So, let me tell you this story. I got a call from a friend of mine who is a teacher. She explained a situation to me that was happening at her school. There was a need for some teachers to move about in their grade levels and the way that the decision about who was going to move was going to be made, based on her understanding, that the grade level was going to decide and then communicate their decision to the school leader.

And that is not what ended up happening. This person was extremely upset and frustrated with the entire process. And I asked her what she was feeling; I asked her what she was thinking about the situation. And what she said was, "I just want my leader to be decisive. I'm feeling frustrated because there was a lack of communication. There was a change in decision-making process and there was some question about who was making the decision; when, how, why, all of those things. I want my leader to be decisive; that's the job of a leader."

And I really wasn't surprised by this answer. I know, from my experience, that teachers want decisiveness. People in general – any job that you're doing out there, people want you to be decisive as a leader. The leader of your home, people want you to make decisions about what's for dinner, where we're going, how we're keeping the house clean, where you put all of your things in your closet or in your office.

People want decisions to be made. They do not want to be burdened with all of the decisions. They want some decisions to be made. So in this case, teachers want school leaders to be decisive. They want them to make the decisions. They feel like that's why you're the leader – make these decisions so I don't have to because I'm busy making decisions for my students all day long.

And they want you to make decisions, but they also want to know and understand and be communicated with about not only the outcome of that decision, but the process of that decision. So, what do I mean by that?

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Let's talk about how you decide. So, the definition of deciding or decision means to cut-off all other options. So once you decide something, you don't go back and forth and hem and haw about what choice you should make or you don't question it and get caught up in, like, what you're going to decide. The actual action of deciding means to cut-off the other options.

So, before you do that – this is why people get stuck in indecisiveness because it does mean to cut-off other options. You have to move forward. But what you want to do first is you want to get information about the decision in order to decide what kind of decision you're going to make.

So you want to understand things like – who is going to be impacted by this decision? Who needs to be involved in the decision-making process? When does the decision need to be made? Because that will, oftentimes, determine what type of decision that you make because some decision-making processes, obviously, take longer than others. And finally, you want to decide, how significant is this decision? How much weight do I need to put into this decision?

Things like deciding what you're going to wear today has a very different level of significance than, say, deciding the vision for your school or deciding your career path for the next ten years. So you need to understand who's going to be impacted, who needs to be involved, when does this decision need to be made by and how significant is the decision; what is its ripple-effect? How magnificent is this decision?

Okay, so once you understand the background of the decision that needs to be made, there are different kinds of decisions. And I like the way – I saw this online and I fail to remember the article. I saw it a while ago, but I like the way they say this.

There are different kinds of decisions. One kind of decision is I decide and I tell you. I just simply decide. And you do this as a leader all of the time.

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There are so many decisions to be made that you are just making decisions because it is your job to make the decision and you move on. I decide, I tell you.

Another type of decision is – we talk and then I decide as the leader and then I let you know. So I might come to you, get a little bit of input and then I go back and I make the decision; I let you know what my decision is.

The third type of decision is that we talk together and we decide together. So this might be a case of a principal goes to a grade level – let's say they go to kindergarten to discuss how they're going to welcome new parents into the new school year. Or perhaps they're going to do a lemonade social at the beginning or they're going to hold some play-dates over the summer in order to get families and kids comfortable and welcomed. You talk, you decide together, you come up with a plan, everybody understands the plan, we talk, we decide.

A fourth type of decision-making process is that we talk together and then you decide and let me know. So as the leader, what you're saying to a group – and I'm going to use a grade level again – you go and you all talk together. But then you hear what they're saying, you hear their ideas, you hear the conversation and then you say, "Okay, I'm going to let you as a team make this decision and then you let me know your decision. I have faith in you. I have heard the conversation. You make the decision. Let me know."

And the fifth kind of decision is, "I'm going to let you guys decide this. You decide and let me know. Grade level, you decide how you want to organize your open-house and let me know. I don't need to be a part of the conversation. I have full faith that you guys can make this decision competently, confidently and you are going to nail it. So you decide and let me know."

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So those are the five ways that you can make decisions. And it's just this level of understanding who is the final decision-maker. Is it you? Am I just going to do it because I need to do it right now or it has to be done out of safety immediately? I'm just going to tell you about it. Is it that we have a little more time? We're going to talk but I still am making the decision because it's on my plate. It's my responsibility so I'm letting you know about it, but I do want your input.

Is it more of a group decision; we're all going to decide together? Is it a matter of, we talk, I hear and I let you make the final decision? Or is it, you get to decide without my input? Just go for it, I've got you on this, I'm hearing you. Just tell me what you need to do.

So, the key to making decisions as a leader – these are things I've learned and through this conversation with this friend of mine, I wanted to be really clear and articulate to people because I don't think we're always aware that one – we're making a decision and two – of how it's impacting people. And it can be harmful to your relationships and your trust building and how you are viewed as a school leader.

So I think the key, the number one key to decision-making is communication. You must first let people know ahead of time as often as possible, guys. I get it, you're making so many decisions that you can't possibly tell everybody everything all the time. But as often as possible, when a decision is coming up, it is really helpful to let people know ahead of time on what method of decision-making process you will be using to make that decision.

Is it going to be a top-down? Fine, let them know that and own that. Step into that. Be decisive in telling them that, but you must communicate that. If you want their input, you really want this to be a conversation, you want to decide together as a group, let them know that because they need to prepare and be ready to have a conversation about what's going on and

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how to make this decision, who's impacted, what's the timeline? They need to know those details as well.

If you are going to let them make the decision, you don't even need to be a part of it because sometimes our teachers just need to be empowered to make their own decisions and run with it and we don't need to spend time micromanaging those decisions. So, this is a really valid use of decision-making time and responsibility; letting people decide for themselves and letting you know.

Now, letting people know that ahead of time is important because the level of preparedness that it takes to make decisions is valuable. People need to know ahead of time if they're going to be responsible or if you're going to be responsible, at the end of the day.

Now, not only must you talk with them about how the communication and how the decision is going to be made, you must communicate the decision. So once the decision is made, you must communicate that to everyone who's impacted. It's very important to let them know directly from you, if you are the person, but whoever is making the decision should communicate to those directly impacted immediately so that they know what the decision is, they hear it coming from the person who made the decision and that they feel respected and thought about when you make this decision. So communicating how you're going to make the decision and then once the decision is decided, communicating what the decision was.

And then, after that, I think it's helpful to communicate that decision out to the greater group. So if you and an individual are making a decision about their job placement for next year, you have that immediate conversation with them, then you communicate that to their grade level and then you might want to share that out with the staff. And then, at a later time, maybe in the fall or summer, you share that out with your parent community, right.

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You share it out as the ripple effect goes on and on – you share it out with those different circles, as appropriate, of course. There are some confidential things you do not share out when you're making, but I simply mean, as appropriate, people like to be in the know. They want to understand. And the more open and transparent you are in your decision-making process and your decision itself and owning that decision, the more people will appreciate you and trust you and follow you and want to believe in you and follow your lead.

So keep in mind that the more transparent you can be, the more authentic your leadership will be in terms of people liking you, trusting you, wanting to follow you, okay. So people will lose trust in you if you do the following. If you do these kinds of things, it puts doubt and question into people's heads.

One – if you don't share how the decision will be made upfront, that creates confusion. When a decision needs to be made but nobody knows who's in charge of making the decision, who's in charge of having input in that decision, they don't know who's in charge, when the decision needs to be made, what's being considered in that decision, people will lose faith in the process if they don't understand what the process is.

So for example, I was asking this friend on the phone, "If you school leader had told you upfront that she was going to make this decision on her own with no input, how would you have felt?" And she said, "Well I might not have appreciated that choice but I would have respected it and I would have known what was going to happen." Okay, fair enough.

So people really want to understand which decision process you are going to choose before you do it, whenever possible. And the more impact it has on a person, a staff member, a student, a parent, the more communication you want to be involved with, with those people.

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Okay, so people also lose trust in the decision-making process if you change the process midway through the process. For example, if you tell them that they are in charge of making the decision, but midway through this process, you turn around and tell them that, wait a minute, I'm going to make the decision and you change the process, people do not like that. that will cause waves for you.

So, when you're going to make a decision, be clear about the decision you want to make and who you want to be involved with that decision-making process and who is the final answer. Because changing that, midstream, is very upsetting to people.

Now, once you've made a decision or somebody else has made a decision, you must effectively communicate that. And when you don't, that also creates confusion. That's where rumors tend to start. People are trying to figure out what happened, how did it happen, who knew, who didn't know. And you'll find yourself in a whirlwind of other people's emotions and you'll have to backpedal a little bit there. So please consider effectively communicating the decision with the people who are most impacted first and you go out to those outer-circles and let them know when it's appropriate.

And finally, this kills a lot of school leaders because if you change the decision – so this is where it gets hurtful. You tell somebody that they are a part of the decision-making process, that they have a voice or it's their decision – go ahead and make the decision. I'll let you handle this decision. You come and let me know.

Let's say they do that and then you say to them, after they've gone through all this work and this process, you say, "Actually, I'm going to make the decision," and you don't tell them why – one, changing it on them is a recipe for disaster and two, not explaining why you're changing the process – because I'll be honest, there were times when you have to stand up and

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say, “You know what, I really wanted to make this decision from a place of, we decide, but we’re getting to a point where I’m going to have to take your input and I’m now going to have to make a final decision because of X, Y, Z.” And you tell them why.

Being transparent in your decision-making process is key. When they don’t understand why a change occurred and they don’t feel they’ve been communicated with effectively, that is when you are going to have problems.

So, my message for you is this; choosing to be decisive is an Empowered Principal. Empowering your staff to make decisions – allowing them to make decisions wherever possible – is also a very empowered leader. I know you want to be liked. I understand you want to allow input whenever possible, but you need to understand that people are okay with you stepping into your empowerment and your decisiveness as long as you’re communicating the process effectively and the decision effectively.

So practice decisiveness, practice empowerment both for yourself and for your teachers. Alright, have an empowered decisive week, my friends. I will talk with you next week. Take care; bye-bye.

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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