

## Ep #15: Harnessing Responsibility



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With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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## Ep #15: Harnessing Responsibility

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 15. How is it going? How is the week going? I am feeling absolutely superb. I am so happy. I have to share with you; I am taking so much responsibility in my life and in my business and it feels incredible.

It's amazing to me. I used to think that I wanted to be care-free and flexible and just do things whenever I want to do them. And I've learned that by taking responsibility, I actually have way more freedom and way more joy. So much so that I decided I want to talk about responsibility and how we can harness it into improving the quality of our work lives and our personal lives and improving the quality of our mental and emotional lives; all of it.

Responsibility is so powerful. So if you think about the definition of responsibility, it is the state of being answerable or accountable for something within one's power, control, or management. That's the official definition. And it makes sense why we want to resist or avoid responsibility when we hear that we have to answerable and accountable for something within our control.

So what are some of the reasons that we resist responsibility? I mean, the first reason that comes to mind, for me, is that our initial reaction in terms of resisting responsibility is that we do not want negative feedback. We don't want the criticism or the judgment that comes with responsibility.

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We believe that when you're responsible, that you're going to get negative feedback or criticism or judgments which will bring up negative emotions. It will make it mean something like, gosh, we're not good enough. We didn't do our best job. We're not good enough for this position. We're not capable. We're a fraud. Whatever, we think of all these things that make us feel terrible about who we are as a school leader; who we are as a parent, who we are as a wife.

And so we resist responsibility. We want to push it away, which is what resisting is. Another reason that we resist responsibility is because responsibility requires action. We resist having to take action, right. It's hard to take action in the sense that we think it's hard, we believe it's hard, our brain tells us it's hard. So we avoid and resist responsibility because it requires us to take some form of action. We have to plan out an approach. We have to follow through on that approach in order to get a desired result.

And we don't want to do that – like our brains don't want to do that. we want the end result, but we don't want to have to take the action to get there. And if we take this action, we put in all this effort and then we get negative feedback, that feels like a double-whammy, right. We took the action, we did the work, we did the pain of going through the process of doing the work and then only to be judged, criticized or receive negative feedback.

And we think, like, we don't want this responsibility. Somebody else please take this for me. I don't want this. I want to resist having to take action. Somebody else do it, right.

We also resist being responsible for something that might have a negative impact on other people. We don't want to hurt or harm other human beings. That is not in our nature. It is not in our nature to make tough decisions and be responsible for following through on our approach and a particular result

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if we believe it's going to have a negative impact on other people around us – or even other people that we're not in direct contact with.

We don't want responsibility when we're worried that it could have a negative impact on other people. So we resist because we don't want the negative feedback, we don't want to have to take action and we don't want to be responsible for having a negative impact on other people. So it makes sense why we skirt-around being responsible some of the time.

So, how do we go around this responsibility or how do we resist? What are some signals that you might be avoiding responsibility or maybe neglecting being responsible? Sometimes, we're not aware that we are doing it, so we need to be conscious of situations where we are not taking full responsibility, as people say, for the result or for our own portion of the actions.

So how do we resist? We resist by buffering. So what I'm famous for – and I'm sure other people are too – what I'm famous for is I avoid taking significant action by taking insignificant action. And basically, what that means, is I resist responsibility and avoid it by doing little things to keep me busy to feel like I'm taking action, but I'm really avoiding the significant action that needs to be taken.

I tend to procrastinate or I'll put something off. Like right now, I'm still doing my taxes, guys, because it's taking time for me to set-up-shop for my business. When I was working for somebody else, I simply brought in my W-2s and my tax documents that were mailed to me and I would send them off to my tax attorney and he did the magic. It was not a lot of effort; not a lot of thinking, not a lot of responsibility on my part.

Now that I'm owning my own business and I'm stepping up into greater responsibility for myself, I'm now seeing how I resist and avoid and procrastinate responsibility, but that does not serve me. It does not serve

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my greater good. It does not serve my macro-goal of having a very high-functioning, highly successful, highly profitable coaching business because I really want to contribute in helping other people similar to myself. That's really my goal.

I want to help people who are school leaders because I've been there; I know what it's like and I want to take responsibility and ownership of the role that I've been given this opportunity in my life. And that comes with greater responsibility, such as setting-up-shop, doing my taxes, creating invoices, documenting the mileage in my expenses. All of those things that I'm not used to doing, I'm having to take responsibility for.

So notice when you are resisting by buffering. Another way we resist responsibility – and this is such a common one, it's almost over-obvious – we blame. We blame other people. We blame circumstances. We blame situations. We blame external things outside of us so that we don't have to feel the responsibility of the result.

So basically, what we do is we divert attention away from ourselves and we blame other people. And when we blame others, the problem with this is that we're saying it's someone else's fault that something happened or didn't happen. So it basically just takes us out of the equation and puts it onto somebody else. We also blame because we believe it's out of our control. Like, we honestly feel like, "What can I do? How can I take responsibility for this? This is not my problem. This is outside of my control."

Especially when it's something that's a bigger issue, we want to resist any and all responsibility by blaming other people versus considering what level of control and responsibility we can take. So when there's a large issue at hand, like solving world hunger or stopping school shootings or increasing the number of students that are graduating from high-school and going onto college, we might feel like, "What can I do? That's not my

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responsibility. Or, “I don’t have any control over that. That’s too big of a problem.”

We excuse ourselves from taking ownership, engaging and finding out what we can do and what is within our sphere of control versus just pushing it away and eliminating our input altogether.

So the problem is that when we believe that a situation is somebody else’s fault, we basically just disown all liability associated to that situation. That takes away our capacity for contributing to the solution. You cannot be a contributor to the solution if you’re not willing to take ownership for the problem.

And when we resist responsibility and push it onto somebody else, we’re actually telling ourselves that that person is in control; that that person has the power, that they have the responsibility to solve the problem. And when you disempower yourself from solving the problem and empowering other people to solve the problem – you want them to solve it for you or for the world or for your school – you’re disempowering yourself. You are giving away your responsibility, which means you’re giving away your power.

You cannot lead a school when you are disempowered. We do this by giving away the control that we do have over the situation. I just can’t imagine feeling worse than not having any control. That, for me just saying it out loud, makes me feel hopeless. If I don’t have any control over a situation, or even partial control over a situation, I feel hopeless. I feel helpless. What can I do?

And that is very disempowering and that is not what we’re here to do. We are school leaders. We are here to take ownership. We’re here to take control over what we have control over. So, resisting or handing over your responsibility takes away your ability to lead and to decide. And in last week’s podcast, we discussed what it means to be decisive, how that helps

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you as a leader, how that empowers you as a leader and why your team wants you to lead from a place of decisiveness.

You cannot lead a school from a place of disempowerment and undecidedness. You cannot create the life you want from a place of disempowerment or undecidedness. Both your professional and your personal lives are your responsibility. No one else is to blame and no one else is at fault, you guys. It is up to us to take responsibility for our lives and the results we're getting, both professionally and personally.

Now, understand this, taking responsibility does not mean that everything is your fault. There's a difference between fault and responsibility. And you've heard people say this before, but taking responsibility simply means that you're just taking accountability of your emotions and your actions and that you are empowering yourself to focus on solving your piece of the problem.

You're basically just saying, "Hey look, I'm going to do whatever I can to solve this problem, big or small." You are ultimately responsible for your words, your thoughts, your feelings, your actions and your results. Now, other people are responsible for their words, their thoughts, their feelings, their actions and their results.

So, how do you take responsibility? If you are, in fact, responsible for a situation or an outcome and it was not the preferred outcome of either you or of somebody else, the first thing to do is listen. If you're personally trying to solve a situation or you got a result you didn't want and you want to take responsibility for it, listen to yourself. Drop into heart; listen to what's going on. Look at the facts of how you thought, how you felt, what approach you decided to take and what results you got. And then ask yourself, what worked, what didn't, what can I do differently? How can I take responsibility and adjust my approach? Now, if someone's coming to you – you're responsible and somebody's coming to you – to give you feedback, listen



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to them. Take time to hear their feedback and criticism and their judgments. It's going to happen but honor it by listening.

You don't have to believe that it's true, what they're saying, but it's fair to honor the viewpoint and hear what they're saying. So if somebody's coming and they have a beef with something you are responsible for, it benefits you and them to simply listen. That's step one – and honor their viewpoint.

What I found especially helpful after I would listen – if something was my responsibility and I received feedback on it, I simply agreed. I did not try to defend or shift blame or opt-out; I tried to agree. So for example, I'm thinking about these school shootings. I'm recording this on the day of the one-month anniversary of the school shooting in Florida, and many kids across the country did a walk-out. So it makes me remember that it's our responsibility to provide safe campuses for our students and our staff.

And if a parent comes to you and says, "Hey look, we need to have safer campuses," Your feeling – your thought – might be, "How can I personally do that? I can't be responsible for every nook and cranny of this campus." And then you might feel defensive and you might push back and resist and not want to take responsibility.

However, if you simply drop the resistance and agree – "I agree we need to keep this campus as safe as possible for students and staff. Let's work together. What do you know about school campus safety? Here's what I know. Here's what I see working. Here's where I see more work. I totally agree with you. Let's work together."

It diffuses the criticism and the feedback. They feel heard. You're agreeing with their standpoint because you do have some level of responsibility over that situation. What if you're a teacher and a parent approaches you and says, "My son is failing math. You need to help him in math." Instead of resisting and saying, "Well why don't you help him in math? Why don't you



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do something at home?” You could simply drop the resistance and say, “Look, agreed. I totally agree. I noticed that as well. What are some specific supports you feel he needs? How can we work together in helping him understand this math concept that he’s struggling with? I totally agree with you.”

So you can take a situation and you can own your piece of it. Now, if a parent comes to you and it’s a teacher’s responsibility or it’s your district’s responsibility, you can listen. You can agree. You can own your piece of the situation and you can also assign responsibility when appropriate. So be willing to take action and adjust your approach to your part of the problem. If you were avoiding responsibility altogether, start taking some form of action.

And if you did take action and you didn’t get the result you wanted, be willing to adjust your approach. So for example, let’s say your superintendent has a meeting with all the principals and says, “Hey, I notice that the language arts test scores dropped this semester in fourth grade. What’s going on there?”

Instead of feeling defensive or resisting the comment, you can look at the fact and notice, “Wow, it is true. My fourth-grade group dropped in their language art scores this trimester.” It’s so appropriate to say, “I totally agree. I’m going to check-in with my grade level team to see where we can strengthen our support for kids. We’re going to take a deeper look at what’s going on here. Totally agree with you.”

That – it just dissipates so much stress around the idea of responsibility. Just be willing to adjust your approach. Now, back to assigning responsibility - when you truly are not responsible for a result – if it truly was somebody else’s responsibility, it is appropriate to assign that responsibility to them.

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Now, a caveat here – be sure that you are being responsible for how you feel and act in any given situation. You must remember that you're responsible for how you think, feel, act, and the results you get. But you also need to empower yourself by not taking on other people's responsibilities. So own your part but assign them their part. And if these are people who are below you, subordinates, you can offer support. Allow them to take responsibility in their own way. In fact, you can support – I call it coaching-up, right.

If there's somebody above you in your workplace and it's their responsibility, you can have a conversation with them and say, "I understand that this is your responsibility and you have total control over this, but I am so happy to help you in any way I can." If you truly are...

But offer support when you can but allow them to take responsibility in their own way. It's their job. And remember this, when you assign responsibility to other people when it's truly theirs, you have to remember that you're not responsible for their response, right.

The word response means reaction. If a person reacts to your assigning responsibility to them, that is their responsibility. It's what they're thinking and feeling about having to take ownership or being called to step up and take ownership when, in fact, they're feeling like they don't want to; they want to resist.

So it is appropriate to assign responsibility when necessary, but first, do the work yourself. Own whatever you can in your sphere of control and then, if there is something that is somebody else's responsibility, it's okay to let them know that and offer support in the way that you can.

Okay, so I hope you enjoyed this podcast. If you did, would you please take a moment to write a five-star review on the podcast. And if you want to dive in deeper, you can sign up for a free weekly newsletter. I send out a quick

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update full of inspiration to get you empowered and keep you motivated to keep going and keep leading with passion. Alright, have an empowered week, my friends. I will talk with you next week. Take care; bye-bye.

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](http://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.