

Ep #19: A Tale of Two Leaders



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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, hello, hello, how are you doing? I'm so happy that spring is in the air, the weather has finally warmed up. The birds are chirping. It's daylight savings time. The rain has stopped, at least for now and we are moving quickly towards May.

So, I have to tell you that my teacher friends, many of them, are on spring break, or they're having their spring breaks, throughout the month of April. And it really struck me that April break, for me as a principal, was kind of like the last leg in a race. So I knew that I was on the sprint to the end of the year and it blew my mind how quickly this school year has gone for me.

So this is the first year as an adult that I have not been in a school system – so I haven't been working based on a school year calendar from – well as a principal, you're working year-round, but basically, you're working from July 1st all the way until June, but you definitely have some down time. Usually, you come back around August. So you're working August through June and then you have July off.

So I'm definitely – my brain is wired to think in terms of a school year calendar and not a regular year calendar. So it has been very odd for me to be not on a school schedule. And I thought time flew when I was a principal, but man, the fact that it's April already, almost a whole school year has gone by, I can't believe it. I don't even know what day it is sometimes or my friends will call and say it's the end of the trimester or it's the holidays. I'm like, "What, I didn't even realize, I've been so busy being a

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coach this year, producing podcasts and writing books and writing email newsletters for y'all. So anyway, just wildness.

I want to do a quick shout out to the podcast listeners who have taken time to write a review. We're gaining reviews; we're getting really good ideas and suggestions. People have been so gracious of their time and their kind words.

I want to highlight one in particular. So today's highlight is from DianaKDS and she writes, "I absolutely love this podcast. I just accepted my first principalship and this kind of support is exactly what I was looking for. Thank you, Angela." Wow, like I'm so, so excited when I read that. This is exactly the kind of person that I want to help in this position.

So DianaKDS, thank you for stepping up, first of all, as a school leader. Your work is so appreciated and it's so needed in the world. And I know that being a new principal can be scary and overwhelming, but I am honored to be here as a support for you and I thank you so much for listening and for taking the time to write this review and letting me know that these topics are helpful to you.

Please keep up the good work with kids. I congratulate you on your first principalship. You are going to love it and you're going to struggle, and that's okay. Please reach out if you need help. I am here for you. I love it; live it, love it.

So she's definitely up in the running for one of the Amazon gift cards, and as soon as we have ten reviews, we'll start doing the drawing. So make sure you're sharing this podcast with your friends and your family and anybody who's in education. And let them know that a simple review will enter them into a drawing for a \$100 gift card to Amazon.

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Alright, so today, I'm going to share with you a tale of two leaders. And I want to tell you, these two tales are actually based on true events from something I've personally experienced in two different situations. And I was thinking about these two scenarios and I was comparing them in my head and I thought this is a fabulous idea for principals to think about. And I want to be able to compare and share the difference in how these two stories go down.

So, I will tell you the meaning of the story – or the moral of the story – before the story because I want you to be thinking about it as you listen. So the moral of the story is this; I want to show you, through these stories, why it matters to take full ownership as a leader, no matter what. And I want to show you the difference between taking full ownership, truly owning it for yourself, and a situation that is so easy to do.

I'm not trying to blame anybody who's done this, because we've all done it, it's just something our brain does. But when we don't take full ownership, it can lead to a very different result. So, let's start with the tale of Principal Posey. I picked Posey because I'm going to the Giants game and I love Posey, and he plays for the Giants.

So Principal Posey started off wanting a warm and friendly relaxed environment for her staff meetings and her professional development days. So you know those days where you have no kids at school and you get together for the whole day. You have this big agenda. You're trying to get through some work or you're providing professional development in some format for your teachers. Those kinds of days and the traditional weekly staff meetings – some people have them every other week, but most people have regular staff meetings with their team after school or before school; whatever.

So Principal Posey really wanted to have this warm, relaxed, friendly, kind of silly and fun environment because when she thought back as a teacher she saw herself wanting the same type of environment. She didn't want to

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have to be 100% professional with her team. She wanted to be relaxed; have some fun.

She remembers dressing down on those days, getting to wear jeans and t-shirts, messy hair, don't care, no makeup, bringing coffee and snacks for her and her teammates. Sometimes, you know, people would take a little bit of an advantage and arrive a few minutes late or take extra-long breaks on those days, maybe whispering once in a while during the staff meeting; being a little off task but nothing too egregious and nothing very disruptive.

And she just remembers how playful that felt and she wanted her teachers to feel this way too with the idea being, like, they work really hard and they deserve to relax when the students weren't around and she could understand that and she wanted to have this very fun, very relaxed, environment.

So she set the stage for the year. And those were the types of meetings that they had and the teachers loved it and they came, participated, and she started no notice though, over time, there was a trend that was evolving. And people were gradually starting to come later to the meetings. Some people weren't even showing up at all or they were claiming, "Oh I'm sorry, I had a doctor's appointment." Or, "I had to pick my kid up early."

And she was noticing that there was less commitment to the staff meeting and less engagement going on. And there were times also when staff members might not have completed assignments. So let's say, at the last week's meeting, they wanted to – they agreed that they were going to get a particular task done and then only half the teams brought their completed work with them. Those kinds of things were happening.

She noticed that attention was dropping during the staff meetings, people were starting to multitask, check emails, you know, look on their phone. And although it wasn't really disruptive and people weren't being rude, she

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was feeling like people didn't care as much. She was kind of annoyed at how they were showing up. She didn't feel extremely valued or paid attention to as a leader and she did not feel that the staff was taking the time together that they had very seriously.

So Principal Posey decided to have a talk with the staff at the next meeting because she was pretty disappointed and annoyed with them and she was not fond of really the behaviors that were going on.

So she shared with them. She shared how annoyed she was. She told them this was going on, "These are my observations. It's bothering me. I don't feel like people are doing the work. This is your staff meeting. You need to show up and you need to get something out of this. It's your responsibility to do the work."

She wanted them to be professional, she wanted them to be punctual and basically asked them, you know, do you understand the request. And as a boss, right, people were like, sure, we get it. No further questions were asked. So Principal Posey leaves the meeting and she's feeling pretty good. She's like, I stood up, I told my truth, I said how I felt, I told them what I thought, I told them what I wanted them to do, I set the expectations and I was really transparent with my feelings.

So that's how she walked away feeling. Now, I'm not going to tell you how this resulted, but I want you to think about how this transpired; what she thought, how she felt, how those feelings made her approach the staff and how she decided to approach them in good faith, thinking that she was doing the right thing, by sharing her true feelings, or her own truth, with them, which basically is her opinion, but it is her opinion, therefore, her truth, right.

So she's feeling good about the meeting, however we're going to pause that story now and I want you to think about how that might end for her and

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the team and the meetings. Now we're going to tell the second tale. We have a different principal.

This principal is Principal Parker. And Principal Parker also started off the year wanting a warm, friendly, relaxed environment for her staff meetings. She too loved being relaxed and comfortable and fun and silly as a teacher and wanted this for her staff. And she also would dress down and wear her hair messy hair, don't care. She would also bring snacks and treats.

So same situation, same desires, same thoughts that she was having. She too, midyear, started seeing a trend in the staff meetings – kind of a change in behavior. It was getting a little too loosey-goosey. People were coming later; some people weren't showing up. They were coming to the meetings without having completed the agreed upon work. Active engagement was dropping down, she noticed people were multitasking; not being disruptive but just not fully present.

Same situation, right. However, Principal Parker noticed that she was experiencing negative emotion. She was getting that vibration in her body that was telling her, something isn't feeling right; I'm not enjoying this. Something feels off. And she was definitely not feeling positive.

So before she decided to approach her staff and blurt out her feelings and how she felt and what she wanted and her expectations, she decided to reflect on these meetings a little bit more with herself first. So, going back to her office, she sat down and thought to herself, "How have I set the tone for the year? What did I do as a leader? How did I show up? What kinds of behaviors did I model? What kinds of words and language did I use to describe how I wanted the tone, the environment, the vibe to be in the staff meetings and the professional development days? How did I show up?"

And she thought about that and she thought about, "You know what, when I first started as a leader, I was that person. I also came in and I showed up

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the way my teachers are showing up. So I modeled that behavior for them.” And she realized too that over the course of time, as she became more grounded as a principal, more committed and dedicated and the more she was learning, she was rising up and up-leveling her game and she was showing up more professionally to her own meetings. So her own leadership meetings throughout the district, she started showing up more engaged, more productive, and therefore, her expectations shifted.

And she was like, “Wow, I’ve moved up in terms of who I am and how I’m showing up, but my staff is floating in the old set of expectations. That’s not their fault; that’s my fault.” So I realized, as a principal – or Principal Parker realized – that she needed to step up and think about how her feelings were going to impact how she approached her staff.

So she decided to think about how she currently felt and how she wanted to feel and what results she was currently getting versus the results she wanted to get. So currently, she was feeling kind of disappointed, right. She wanted to feel energized. She wanted to feel productive. She wanted to feel engaged. She was currently feeling disappointment and she was striving for a more energized productive meeting.

She realized that she herself is responsible for her feelings. Nobody makes her feel a certain way. The way she’s feeling is because she’s thinking that her reality should be different than it is – she has a blueprint malfunction. The way she thinks the staff meetings should be are not the way that they are truly being in reality.

So she wanted to model, for her staff, complete ownership of this because she’s aware that she herself is creating these feelings of negativity. So, if her staff meetings aren’t going the way she thought they should, she needs to own that and she needs to let the staff know it’s not their fault. However, she also wanted to be transparent and open and authentic as the leader.

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So while she was asking herself how could she personally make the staff meetings more engaging and more productive while also maintaining the fun, relaxed environment, she also realized that she's not in control of other people's behavior. So you can do your part and you can fully own it. You can model that for your staff, but you cannot control or manipulate other people to get them to behave a different way.

So with that in mind, she felt like, wait a minute, I can do my work, but I don't think I can assume people will shift just because I want them to or I want the staff meeting energy to shift. So she decided that it was appropriate to open a dialogue and be authentically curious about how they are thinking and feeling about the staff meeting, because it does involve them as well.

So not only did she do her own work; she was curious to find out how they're thinking and feeling. She wanted to understand them and their behaviors. She wanted them to be heard and she wanted to be heard as well. So because she did all this work ahead of time, she was able to decide how she wanted to feel and what results she wanted in order to determine her approach – an approach that she felt good about, an approach that she believed would produce the results she wanted, which was more engagement and more productivity in the meetings within a fun relaxed environment.

So the next day, Principal Parker asked her staff if she could bring up a discussion and gather some input from them. So she shared with her staff her own observations of their work. She told them how she processed her feelings and what her desired outcomes were for the meetings.

But she also wanted them to know, "Look, I'm fully owning my part. My disappointment is on me. I'm owning that. I'm trying to think of ways where I can show up in a more productive engaging way so that I can feel more excitement and energy in our meetings and after the meetings."

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So she said what the staff meeting is lacking is coming from her mind and is 100% on her and she shared how her expectations weren't in alignment and how things were going for her was just a mirror into how others might be feeling. So she was curious to understand what other people's thoughts were regarding the staff meetings.

So she asked for feedback on how they were feeling, how they were thinking and what they thought she might be able to do and what they could do to improve engagement and productivity. So basically, what she did is she had them run STEAR Cycles. So if you've listened to prior podcasts, we've talked about the STEAR Cycle; where there's a situation – and the situation is the staff meeting. There's a thought about the situation. That thought generates an emotion; an emotional response. That emotional state that you're in determines how you will decide to approach this situation in order to get a desired result.

So, the key is knowing that you own those thoughts and emotions. Nobody does that for you and it's amazing how many times we have to run STEAR Cycles because something comes up and our brain says, "It's their fault. They're to blame. They're the reason. It's their behavior that's what we feel this way."

So we're going to have to run STEAR Cycles for the rest of our lives because our brain will continue to tell us that it's outside of us that is the problem. But if you remember and you know and you're aware that you create your own emotions, you can stop yourself, run through the models, run through the cycles and determine your approach prior to reacting on your emotion and just going with whatever emotion is driving you at the time.

So these two stories, as you can imagine, will stimulate different results. And here's the thing, we don't know exactly 100% how people will respond and what result we'll get when we make a decision on our approach. So Principal Posey decided to approach it from a very direct standpoint and a

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very, kind of, step up and own-up standpoint. Principal Parker, on the other hand, decided to come from a very reflective and a very curious standpoint in owning her feelings. And my guess, based on these situations, is that you're going to get a more rich authentic transparent and trusting conversation with your staff when you're modeling and coming from a place of reflection and owning your feelings 100% and owning the outcome of that meeting because you are the leader.

So these two stories are actually simulated from real life situations that I have experienced in different kinds of group settings. They actually aren't – in real life, they're not situations that occurred at school. They're situations that occurred in other groups I've participated in. But I've watched leaders handle situations that they found, basically, undesirable in two different ways.

So in the first scenario, you can see how the situation is exactly the same as the second and how the thoughts and emotions determined how the principal chose to approach the team. And basically, her underlying belief is that it was the staff behavior that was the cause of her feelings, right. She was feeling annoyed and not valued and she believed that the reason she was feeling that way is because of her staff's behavior.

She did not own her own emotions and that led her not own her approach nor her results because she's relying on other people to change their behavior in order for her to feel better about the staff meetings. Basically, she's blaming them for not getting the results that she herself wanted, which is that engagement and productivity.

So can you see how because – one, she didn't own her own feelings and her thoughts, but two – she didn't own the result. She basically put it into their hands. It became their responsibility whether or not she was going to achieve the desired result of engagement a productivity.

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But she also did not approach her staff from an engaged and productive mindset. She approached it from an annoyed mindset. Can you see that? So on the other hand, Principal Parker took her emotional response upon herself. She reflected on her expectations. She noted how she herself set the tone for the environment and how she herself set the expectations and then how her expectations shifted over the course of the year and that, as a leader, she was going to take full responsibility and ownership of her feelings about the staff meetings.

And what I love about this approach is that she was also genuinely curious and interested in knowing how other people were thinking and feeling and modeled for them how to approach the situation with full ownership. So I'm so passionate about sharing this thought work with you because in every situation that you find that's less than appealing to you, you have the opportunity to fully own it as a leader. Because empowered leaders are the ones that share with transparency their process for managing their thoughts and their emotions and their approach.

It is the most powerful thing that you can do as a leader; to be fully owning your thoughts and emotions and approach and results and modeling that for teachers. Because think of what teachers would do if this is how you do business with your team and they see you taking responsibility and ownership. They are going to emulate that. They are going to start doing that. Then they are going to start modeling that for kids.

Do you see the ripple effect that can happen? I find it so, so fascinating how many people are stopped in their tracks and they stunt their growth as a school leader because they believe that other people are responsible for their emotions and for their approach and their results. That's the most disempowered thing you can do. That's why this podcast is called *The Empowered Principal*. It's empowering you to understand that you are the one owning your thoughts, emotions, approach and results, regardless of the situation.

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It's the most powerful thing you can do as a leader, I promise you. I promise you that. So learn from the Tale of Two Leaders and know that the STEAR Cycle, if you want to do the work and you want to be the most empowered leader you can be, you can simply run the STEAR Cycle, put that situation in the S line, put what's going on, what are your thoughts, what are your emotions, what actions are you taking, what approach are you taking and what results are you getting.

And then next to it, do another STEAR Cycle about what you can put – and here's the result I want to happen – or you can say, "Here's the result I want to feel," and then run it and see what comes up in terms of making a decision about that approach. It is so, so, so powerful. I can't tell you enough.

I love this. It changed my life as a leader. It absolutely changed my life as a leader. I used to teach it to teachers, I taught it to parents and I taught it to kids and I was blown away at how people were so shocked by this; it's fascinating.

So, learn the lesson. Enjoy your week. Think about owning it as a leader 100% and feel the shift in energy that you have. Alright, my friends, go on, lead forth, lead from love, lead with passion. I will talk with you next week. Take care.

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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