

Ep #20: Words of Gratitude for Martha Beck



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 20. Hey guys, how are you? How is it going? I'm great. It is dumping rain here right now so I hope that the noise is not picking up in the background. We are having a late spring storm and it's just pouring buckets out there.

So I'm grateful for the rain and I'm grateful for the sun. I'm grateful for it all. We do need a lot of rain here in Northern California, as y'all know, so it's a good thing. Hey, I want to call out and give a shout out to one of my podcast listeners and share with you the review that he or she left for me – and I am super grateful.

So I want to call out and say thank you to JGPrincipal. And this person wrote, "A great podcast for us principals to reexamine how we look at things we encounter on a daily basis. The topics are real and pertinent to what we face as a school principal; definitely worth your time to listen." JGPrincipal, thank you, you are going to be in the drawing for a \$100 gift card to Amazon, which is the most amazing company I can think of right now. I love Amazon.

So you are in the drawing for \$100, and I want to say thank you so much for the work you are doing in the world. I know it's tough and I'm trying to make this podcast as real, as relevant and as helpful as possible. So thank you so much for taking the time to leave me a review. It makes my day. It makes me feel so good.

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So speaking of that, I'm going to shift into today's topic. And for those of you who've been listening, you know that every 10 episodes, I'm going to highlight somebody who has had an impact on my life.

Last episode, which was 10, I highlighted the work of Byron Katie and I have extreme love and gratitude for the work that she's put into the world. And today's love and gratitude is for one of my personal favorite people on this entire planet, Doctor Martha Beck.

So, if you don't know who Martha Beck is, you will definitely be Googling her by the time you are done listening to this podcast. So who is Doctor Martha Beck? I will try and be brief because I'm a little obsessed with her and I know a lot about her, so I will keep my comments to a minimum.

But basically, she is a professor, she's an author, she was deemed one of America's first life coaches in the world. Before life coaching was even a thing, somebody labeled her as such and she's like, "What's a life coach?" I found her through Oprah. So Oprah found her through Martha's books and her articles.

She became coined as a life coach and she actually mentored Oprah and became Oprah's life coach. So she wrote articles and she did shows for the O Magazine. She was on Oprah's show for a long time. She did appearances on the Oprah Winfrey Network and she has been attached to Oprah for so long. So that's how I first was introduced to her.

So I was just mesmerized by her from the very beginning and I thought she was so clever and so unique in her perspectives and opinions that I started looking for her work. I ran across an article in a *Redbook Magazine* years and years ago. And her article – she writes so well. She's such a gifted writer and what I love about her is her sense of humor. She is hilarious as a writer. I laugh out loud when I read her books.

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So I think I own every single book she's ever written, to my knowledge. I mean, let's see, I have *North Star* – you know, *Finding Your Own North Star* was her big book, but she had a ton of books. She had *The Joy Diet*, *Leaving the Saints* and *Expecting Adam*; two amazing books.

Leaving the Saints was about her breaking away from the Mormon Church. *Expecting Adam* was a story about her expecting her child, Adam, who was diagnosed with Down's syndrome and then her transformation through that process. She has *Steering by Starlight*, *The Four-Day Win*, *Diana, Herself*, *Finding Your Way in a Wild New World*.

I have all of them and I've read all of them. I just fell in love with her; so much so that in January of 2012, I'll be honest, I was looking her up online like what does she do – how does she do what she does? And I found her website and she was offering life coach training. And I was all, what?

So I signed up in January of 2012. At that time, it was a nine-month program and it was pretty much done over the phone. We had coaching calls weekly and we had practice calls and we had master coaching calls, but she did six of the trainings herself. So she did six classes, taught specifically by her, and then – which was really cool – at the end of it all, we got to go to – at the time the conference was in Phoenix, Arizona. And she called us cadets, because we were the new learners; the new life coaches.

We all went and we personally met her. We had our photograph taken with her one by one individually. She did a whole entire day of training in live person for us and I just – I've been a raging fan ever since. So that's how I know her. I've met her personally. She's probably one of the most famous people I've ever met in person, I think. I don't know, maybe not. But I adore her.

So I'm going to share with you a couple of things that she teaches. Now, she teaches so many things, I could only highlight a couple of them. But I

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want to share with you some of the tools that she taught us that changed my life. So some of them are more conceptual and some of them are actually really tangible tools you can do.

So one of the things she taught us was that people go through these mini cycles throughout your entire life. Life isn't just one big cycle, you go through a series of them and she calls them the cycles of change. So there are four steps within the cycle of change. There's death and rebirth, that's square one. Dreaming and scheming, which is step two. The hero saga, which is step three and the promised land, which is step four.

And we are always, in all the different areas of our life, whether it's our physical health, our mental wellbeing, our relationships, our career, our relationship with money, spirituality, our kids, all of those components of our lives, we're going through these different cycles of change. And she compares this cycle of change to that of a caterpillar to butterfly lifecycle.

You know, when the caterpillar is entering into the cocoon, that form is dying. So the caterpillar, as it knows itself, is going through a death and a rebirth. And many of us go through these changes, like when we have a status change in our life, when we go from being single to being married or we go from being dating to breaking up, back to single, or we get married and then we get divorced; that is a status change in our life and that's a death of who we once were.

If you change careers or you change jobs or you get fired or you get promoted, you are no longer who you were in that particular position, you are somebody new. I, this year, have gone through several status changes in my life. I went from being single to married, again. I was single, married, divorced, dating, single, dating, single and then back to married.

So I went from single to married. I went from working at a job in my school district for the last 22 years and resigning from that position. So I went from

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being an employee to not. I went from living in the Bay Area to moving to the beach. I went from being a mother with a child at home to a mother who has a child in college; so lots of changes in my life. And I keep this cycle in mind because even though there is a death of who I used to be, there is also the rebirth.

So once you're reborn and the butterfly starts to come out, it can't quite spread its wings yet to fly. It takes some time and that's when you step into stage two, which is dreaming and scheming. Dreaming and scheming is like when you're planning and you're thinking. You're not taking a lot of massive action at this point, you're just dreaming about what you want, you're kind of scheming of all the ideas you're thinking, but you're getting a sense of possibility, a sense of hope.

You see that there is something in front of you that is new and exciting and you are getting your body and your mind ready to move forward. Stage three is a hero saga. This is when you have a calling. You might deny the calling. You know in superhero movies where, you know, the hero is being called upon to step into the greatness that they are and they're like, no I'm just an ordinary person doing my thing and eventually they step into that.

So stage three, the hero's saga, is that moment where you step into the new person that you are, you're starting to take massive action towards new goals, new dreams, new desires, new experiences and you're hustling. That's really when you're in it and you're in it to win it.

Then, obviously, stage four is the promise land, and that's where you're looking around, like, "Damn things are good. Things are feeling good. This is what I'm talking about." And just as you know, the moment you hit promise land, you're only there for a period of time before something changes and you're back to square one.

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So, that cycle of change really helps me keep perspective on my life when I'm starting to feel transition and shifts and changes coming in my life. I keep in mind that it's just a cycle. It continually goes round and round, so no matter what stage I'm in, I know it will be moving and that's okay.

So that's one of her most powerful tools she taught us as cadet coaches. Another tool I love that she uses is called the body compass. And what I love about Martha's work is that she's very in tune with herself. She's the one who defined essential self and social self. I know Byron Katie also talks about, you know, we are separate from our story and who would you be without your story. That's like the mind creating a story versus the intuition of our bodies.

And the body compass is basically a tool where you can step back into your body. So when you are feeling chaos in your life and you're feeling jolted and discomfort and you're feeling overwhelmed or not sure what to do, confused, all of those things, she teaches how to drop into the body.

And when you drop into your body, basically she has you start with your toes, feeling your toes, the ground underneath your feet, all the way up. And you can feel the energy and the electricity because you are a magnetic field. You are a magnetic field of energy. You can feel the energy when you're concentrating on it and focusing from your feet all the way up, body part by body part, in through your core and up into your shoulders, your heart, your neck, all the way up into your brain.

You can feel that energy and when you do that, whenever you are confused, whenever you have overwhelm, whenever you have anxiety, you will drop into a calmer state. Try that sometime. It's amazing.

The third tool she teaches of so many, but I want to tell you this one because I just heard her talk about this again recently. It was on either Youtube or a TED talk or something. She was sharing with an audience

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how every single thing in your physical world is a manifestation of your internal or mental world.

So she was using the example of your living space and she was asking people to share a space in their home that they are least happy with, that they dislike the most. For most people, it was like a closet, a garage, an office, somewhere that they were describing as disorganized or messy, cluttered or overwhelming.

They were talking about things, you know, a part of their physical world and she was explaining to them how your physical living space, your home, wherever it is that you reside, is like a direct mirror into your soul. So when things are neat and tidy, you are feeling neat and tidy. When things are chaotic and disorganized and shoved and crammed and cluttered – you know those closets I'm talking about. Those are pockets within us that are also feeling crammed and cluttered and overwhelmed and, you know, just stuffed to the gills.

So be thinking about your home. Be thinking about an area that is less than desirable for you and see if there is a way you can get to that space and create it into a space that feels better for you. You'll be amazed how it makes you feel better internally. It's pretty fascinating.

So, Martha – I'm just so in love with her. I could go on and on. I want to share some of my personal gratitude for her, my personal love for her and some lessons that I've learned. One of the most valuable and most life changing lessons that I've learned from Doctor Martha Beck was a process called shackles on, shackles off.

And this is a decision-making process to help you follow your north star. So I believe it was in her north star book that she explained shackles on and shackles off. And what she suggested was that you think about all of the areas in your life, your job, your marriage, your home, your family, your

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friendships, your personal health, your physical health, your mental health. And when you think of the things you do in those areas of your life – so I'll use my job, for example.

So my career, back when I was teaching, definitely shackles off. It felt exciting, fun, it did not feel like I was shackled and chained, you know, like ball and chained to that job. I enjoyed my job, I enjoyed the kids, I loved my colleagues. Oh my gosh, you guys, a little side note here, I have girls weekend coming up here in two weeks with all of my teacher friends.

I met them 20 years ago. We all have moved out of the Bay Area apart from one or two of us. There's six of us total. We get together twice a year at somebody's home or location and we just have a wild wonderful time. We've been doing this for the last ten years.

Anyway, so that job was definitely shackles off because it was so much fun and I loved doing it. Did I have bad days? Absolutely, even I had bad school years, you know. Some years just not as smooth as others, but in general, shackles off. Got to my principalship – I loved the idea of the job, but it definitely felt like shackles on. I felt chained to the job. I felt dragged down by the job. I felt heaviness from the job. That was a shackles on job.

That's what she's describing, you know, is your marriage shackles on or shackles off? Do you love it; does it feel good to you? Does it feel freeing or do you feel bound and chained and are struggling? Your home, your family, think of all the areas in your life and you can make decisions with shackles on and shackles off to help you follow your north star. And basically, your north star is your true calling.

And here's the cool thing, guys, there is no one path to your north star. You can make all kinds of paths, detours – the shackles on shackles off is meant to guide you like a compass. So when you're starting to feel more things in your life that feel like shackles are on then you know you're getting

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a little off course and you need to redirect your compass. When things are feeling better and you have shackles off and you're feeling freedom, you're feeling gratitude, you're feeling like this is actually fun, I'm enjoying my life, then you're on the path; one of the paths to your north star.

Another area of gratitude for Martha is called the ring of fire. Stick with me on this one, guys. Imagine three rings. There's a center ring, a middle ring and a third ring, a really shallow narrow ring on the outside. Like of like if you drew a circle, then a bigger circle around that one and then even a bigger circle around that.

So the very external circle is called the shallows, and that is what she defined as our outer shell and our material reality; the material of our life. Like the very surface of who we are, our homes, our car, our clothing, our watches, our wedding rings. You know, all of those things that we have and who we are and how we identify ourselves on the surface, that is called the ring of shallows.

And then, if you skip over to the center, the very middle circle, that is our core of peace. That is our center. That is our grounding and that is the place where our souls truly want to be. It is our core of peace. And here's what's interesting; the shallows are on the outside and the core of peace is on the inside. And the shallows cannot penetrate the core of peace because there's something in the middle; there's another ring. And that ring is called the ring of fire.

I think that's a song, right, Johnny Cash, maybe. So the ring of fire separates the shallows from the core of peace. And the ring of fire is the emotional process that we must go through in order to reach the core of peace. Most humans are so afraid to experience intense negative emotion, that they would rather stay in a place of less intense, but still negative, emotion.

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So the shallows have this heartache and heartbreak, but we're comforted by our little external pleasures, so we decide to stay there because the ring of fire looks too scary. It's going to burn us, literally and figuratively. We're going to feel the burn of negative intense vibrations in our body. And most people don't want to do that.

But Martha says there's only two ways to get through that ring of fire into the core of peace. Number one, you have to disbelieve any idea that causes unnecessary pain. And we've talked about this in past episodes, but it's about questioning your thoughts, especially the ones that are causing you pain and being willing to be wrong and being willing to allow yourself to disprove them.

The other way is to allow ourselves to actually grieve any unavoidable pain, such as the death of a loved one. So for example, I got some heartbreaking news just yesterday that one of my close friends lost their infant. She was very prematurely born. She was just over a pound and she fought for three weeks, that sweet little angel, and I received word yesterday that she got her angel wings and went to heaven.

And that type of pain is caused by a thought, but it's not a thought I choose to change. I don't choose to feel happy about the loss of a child. I choose to feel the pain. And when you lose someone you love and you're in real grief, in real serious emotion, you don't dismiss that. You allow it to happen. So you're going to feel pain whether you grieve a real necessary pain or you challenge a thought that's just causing you suffering, but it still feels the same because the body can't tell the difference between real pain and perceived pain. It feels the same inside the body.

So, when we avoid going through the ring of fire, either the actual grieving process where you say, "Oh we're fine, it's no big deal, it doesn't matter." You see people who are in shock over an unexpected death just try to blow it off or it's not happening, they try to pretend it's not real. Or you see people just choosing to allow the suffering to happen by continuing to

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believe thoughts that cause them pain. You can tell that they are not allowing the feeling to occur. They're resisting it. They are pushing back on it and just allowing yourself to resist versus allowing yourself to feel will still cause you pain.

So this is why I believe it's really important to go through the ring of fire. Here's a couple of reasons; when you allow yourself to feel the negative emotion of grief or feel the negative emotion of having to let go of old belief systems, old stories that you tell about yourself or about others when you drop the story and you experience the death of that story, it teaches you how to – every time you do it, it teaches you how to go through it again.

And you will start to build evidence for your brain that you can get through the ring of fire again and again and again. Martha tells a story of a client whose life on the shallows looked perfect. And to everybody else looking at her, she had, you know, the dream job, the dream car, the dream husband, her kids were great, they had all the material things, they went on the vacations; like looked really good.

And as this client started to age physically, she had a breakdown because she was so upset that her physical appearance was no longer what it used to be and she felt she was finished with her life because she didn't look the same and therefore she wasn't going to be treated the same and she really had intense emotional response to basically her belief system of how she looked was going to be how she lived.

Her story was all around that her beautifulness in terms of her physical appearance was in charge of how her life was going to go. And as she was aging, that she was over. And it's interesting because Martha talked about how she had never allowed herself to experience all these little mini deaths that had occurred in her life. And when she got to the end of her life, she had a massive struggle. She had a massive challenge to go through that ring of fire.

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So allowing yourself to have the experience of these little mini cycles and these little mini deaths will allow you to build more evidence so that when the big stuff comes, you do know that even though it's painful at the time, you will be able to weather it.

Why are we so afraid of the ring of fire? Why? We're in pain in the shallows and we want to get to the core of peace but that darn ring of fire is in the middle. Why are we so afraid? So it is the space where our brains do not believe we are capable of surviving the intensity of our emotions. So the ring of fire is a big space. It's a long way from the shallows to the core of peace and when you're in that space, the brain is freaking out because it doesn't think it's going to make it.

Have you ever felt something so painful – perhaps a divorce or the loss of a loved one or even the loss of a beloved job or a pet – something you cared about so intensely and you had to go through that grieving process and the intensity of those emotions felt like you almost could not handle them? That's what we're afraid of.

So we're not uncomfortable only when we experience negative emotion, we're also uncomfortable when we observe others around us in negative emotion. It's agonizing to see somebody in such negative space and negative emotion. We do not like to see other people in physical pain or emotional pain.

So we avoid the ring of fire because we don't want to experience it ourselves, but we don't want to be in there and experience it or see other people going through it, so we avoid it. Finally, we don't like the ring of fire because it means a death to our prior belief systems. And people underestimate what a challenge this is because the story of who you are and who you think you are and who you present yourself to be, when you have to change all of that, it is painful.

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It causes distress. I have gone through distress this past year because I had so many massive changes. My marriage status changed, my parental status changed, my career status changed, my home status changed, my location changed, my last name changed. So I was in complete identity crisis this fall, really figuring out who am I, you know, who is this woman on this earth trying to live on her north star path and doing the things she wants to do in this world? Who am I?

And so it takes time to walk through that ring of fire because it means we have to let go of our old selves. But I want you to keep in mind that when something terrible, quote en quote, happens from a shallows perspective – so on the surface, when we're like, "Oh my gosh, that's so terrible," be reminded that something, quote en quote, wonderful is happening from a place of the core of peace perspective.

So when it appears on the outside that it's terrible, from the core of peace perspective, it's something wonderful because you are getting closer to your core of peace. So this is why I strive to lean into the fire. Living through divorce and resigning from my beloved school district of 22 years were probably the biggest acts of walking through the fire that I've done.

I think parenting and dog raising are up there too. My dog was so naughty when she was alive. But parenting was easy, Alex is amazing. My dog was very naughty. So I had one good kid and one naughty kid, but they definitely weren't on the same level as divorce and leaving my job. I just had to put some humor in there, guys because this stuff is heavy. Keep with me; we're almost home. We're almost circling to the end. Keep up.

Okay, so while neither of those experiences for me were comfortable at all, going through the process allowed me to burn up those old thoughts that were keeping me out of my core of peace. The thoughts I had around my divorce were, "I can't get a divorce. I'm a failure if my marriage fails. I'm not a good wife. I'm not a good mother. Divorce will ruin my child. People will hate me."

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That was a whole belief system I had; a story about who I was or who I would be if I allowed myself to divorce my husband. And this is the thing, those thoughts were the ring of fire because I was feeling horrible about not just the actual experience of divorce but the lingering thoughts and guilt trip that I kept replaying in my mind about who I was now. And I was having to let go of being a wife and being a family that was all combined to co-parenting and living separate lives from my former husband.

And here's the thing, guys; none of those thoughts served me well. And actually, none of them were true. Like, I could get a divorce because I did. I'm not a failure, it's just my marriage failed; so what? I am a good wife. I'm a very good wife now because I went through that divorce. I'm even better at being a wife now.

I'm certainly a good mother, you can ask Alex; I'm sure he'll agree. And divorce did not ruin my child. It may have caused him some pain, it may have caused him some distress, but it did not ruin him. He's just fine and he's probably stronger for it anyway. And I'm pretty sure that people don't hate me. And those who do probably would have hated me in or out of my divorce and that's okay and the people who don't, don't.

So those thoughts were not true, but I was torturing myself with them through the ring of fire. So Martha taught me that the more times I navigate the ring of fire, the more I am willing to lean into it by choice. And once you've experienced the ring of fire, it builds up your confidence in your ability to handle it again.

It is the key to being a lifelong learner. So we say, as adults, that we want our kids to grow up being lifelong learners – and educators, I'm talking with you. We're always saying that the goal is to be a lifelong learner. But think about it; most adults stop taking emotional risks around the age of about 30. Once we settle down, we get a job, we get a person, we kind of slowdown in our risk-taking when it comes to our emotional being.

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And at the age of 30, we have about 60 to 70 years ahead of us. So that's a lot of life ahead of us, folks. We have to be willing to continuously go through the change cycle and the ring of fire, whether it's career, whether it's anything, your money fears, your time fears, your status fears – like how you fear people's perspective of your statuses; those kinds of fears. That's what I was referring to. You have to continuously go through the ring of fire in order to grow. So when we walk through the ring of fire and we arrive at the core of peace, it's only a fragment of time before that becomes the new normal and then we find ourselves with new goals and new dreams.

And you can sit there, but life will evolve whether you want it to or not. And each new ambition that we set for ourselves will require us to lean into the ring of fire. So how do you get through the ring of fire? Are you feeling scared? Here's Martha's answer; simply surrender.

When you fight the feelings, you will feel them more intensely. But when you allow them to be present, you are going to experience a calming acceptance. Let me share an example with you right now. I, right now, just in the last couple of weeks, chose to enter into an intense nine-week program to complete my first book as a life coach. I made a conscious decision to do this because I wanted to learn from one of the best coaches in the industry and I want the book to be done in a short amount of time so I can enjoy my wedding in June and my trip to Sweden in July.

And I knew that if I tried to do it on my own, the book would take months or years or even worse, it would never happen, right. So I definitely had to lean into the ring of fire. I paid a lot of money for this program because I value this person's experience and her professionalism and her expertise in this area. I want the book done in nine weeks. I want it done well. I want it to be a tool to help me reach more people in my movement to improving the emotional fitness of educators so that we can then improve the emotional fitness of children, meanwhile taking on some of the ridiculousness that happens in the current school systems.

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It's time for a change, people. But being in this intense program, I had to really lean in the fire and I'm feeling the burn, guys. It feels like an intense college course with a professor that loves you to death, has your best interests at heart and is relentless on you. They want you to push, they want you to be your best, give your best and write your best.

It's intense, but I know I can do it. You know why I know I can do it? Because I've been through the ring of fire before so many times I'm willing to do it because I know what's on the other side and I know that I'm capable. I know I've done hard things and I know I'm willing to let myself be wrong and I have faith that I'm going to reach that destination, my core of peace, through this book writing process.

It is such a beautiful journey, my friends. I hope that you all are willing to step in for the ride. That is what I've got. Doctor Martha Beck, thank you so much. I love you. You have changed my world. You are amazing.

Alright, my Empowered Principals. Go get it. This was a long one. Thanks for sticking with me. I'll talk to you all 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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