

Ep #27: Achieving Emotional Adulthood



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 27.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal 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? How is summer treating you? I need to know what's going on in your lives. Are you resting? Are you playing? Are you traveling? Are you reading, Netflixing or Pinteresting? What are you doing? What are you up to?

And I have another question for you; are you spending time with your family of origin? And if so, are you having fun? I bring this topic up today because one, many of us spend time over the summer visiting with our families. We go back for family reunions, we spend time maybe with our siblings or we go back and visit mom and dad, maybe they come out to visit you – and we tend to have a little more time in the summer for spending with our families.

Number two, time with family often triggers intense emotional responses; at least for me this is true. I don't know about you, but for me, family can trigger some interesting emotional states. And three, although this is not directly a school topic, what we will talk about today definitely impacts you and your school year.

So for those who regularly follow me, you know that one of the reasons why I resigned from my leadership position when I did is because my mom's health is failing and I wanted to have the time and flexibility to support her and spend as much time with her as possible. And the positive side of this decision is that I actually have been able to spend a great deal of time with her and support not only her, but my dad and my sister, who are her primary caregivers.

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The job of a caregiver can be incredibly challenging and I've been able to experience this firsthand in all that goes into this job. I'm basically the assistant and they are in charge, for sure. So I want to shout out to both my dad and my sister and actually all of the caregivers out there.

If you are caring for a loved one, a friend, family member, I want to acknowledge you; I want to thank you for providing the best service possible for your loved ones and the best care possible for them. It is such demanding work. You are so recognized for your selfless service and your dedication to your family and really, you are appreciated. And even if you don't hear the appreciation, please know that deep down, all of those involved are truly appreciative of the work you have chosen to do.

So thank you so much for that; I really do, from the bottom of my heart, feel gratitude every single day for the work that my sister and my dad are doing along with my grandma, Lola, who is also helping take care of my momma.

So when it comes to family, it seems that these relationships are the most challenging of all to navigate. And if you're a person who has a strong positive relationship with your family, I commend you and honestly, am a little bit envious. I don't know too many people who aren't driven to drink once in a while when their family comes around.

Now, don't get me wrong, I totally love my family and I also, at the same time, experience intense emotional reactions sometimes when I'm with them. Anybody can relate out there? I have been pondering these relationships and why they feel trickier to handle than, you know, the everyday relationship. It seems like they are more challenging, more difficult and just like you're walking around them a little bit.

So this week's episode is really for this who struggle either with your family of origin, which are you parents and your siblings, or perhaps your immediate family; your spouse, your partner, your kids because how these

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beliefs about the relationships that you have with them also impact your professional life. How you do anything is how you do everything and how you show up in one aspect of your life is how you show up in other aspects of your life. So the way that we live is not compartmentalized; it's all interconnected.

What comes up for me when I think about my family relationships is the belief system that family relationships should be different than other relationships. Do you notice this? If you think about the societal messages around a family, we are taught to value our family relationships most of all.

You hear it all the time; family first – family comes first. And I understand, this belief comes from the fact that we are biologically wired to take care of and protect the members of our family. We love on our babies; we care for them, we raise them. We love them in such a fierce way that there aren't even words to describe the love we feel for our little ones, right.

And we feel that way about our spouses, our partners, our parents, yet at the same time, we experience a multitude of emotions as we engage with them throughout the course of our life. This happens in most animal species in terms of taking care of the babies, loving on them, protecting them.

I get that; we are an animal being so that makes sense to me. But humans, however, we take our family obligations to a completely other level. We're taught and expected to love our family members at all times, to respect and care for our elders and to put our family needs before the needs of others. We also tend to value the opinions of our family members much more than we do strangers and we may be willing to say things to other people that we would be highly uncomfortable saying to somebody in our family.

The majority of us, when you think about it, we actually really want to be liked and loved and accepted by our families. The fear of damaging family

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relationships runs higher because we want to get along with the people we spend time with in our lives. So there's this kind of teeter-totter of what we want and then what the reality is versus how we feel, and we go back and forth.

And I'm not arguing whether these beliefs are right or wrong. I'm not placing value on them for you; not at all. I'm simply noticing them as a neutral observer. And you may find that you don't have the same beliefs about family. You may think very differently about your family. You might adore your family or you might not interact with your family at all.

Every family has a different dynamic. These are just beliefs that I have observed to be prevalent in the world and ones that I was raised to believe. You can take time to explore the thoughts that you have about your family and the belief systems that were expressed throughout your childhood. That's the purpose of today's conversation.

If you're having negative emotions about family in any way, our emotions are the signal that it's time to monitor our thoughts from an impartial standpoint – and this is what we're going to explore today. I've noticed that when I'm back with family, I tend to fall into my old ways of thinking and resort back to my old ways of coping with my emotions.

Have you experienced that? Have you found yourself going back to your childhood ways of engaging? Man, I do. I can tell you that for sure. For me, my old methods of interaction included being the authority figure. I am the firstborn. I have one sister who's four and a half years younger than me and I definitely was trying to be the boss of her.

So what I do is I try to put on my authority figure hat, I puff up, I take charge, I know what's best. I try to just wrangle control of all situations and I'm sure some of you can relate. And if you're a school leader, many of you understand this mentality.

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But when something has been done or said that provokes feelings of shame or guilt or anger, or basically fear, right, what I do is one of two things; I either go on full attack and I get bossy and controlly and clingy and in-chargey, or I completely shut down. I avoid like the plague. I completely stop talking. I completely disengage and, to be honest, I physically moved 2000 miles away. It was just the way I knew how to cope.

So it's one or the other for me. It's all or none. And basically, that's just my fight or flight response kicking in. It's normal, it's totally natural, we all have it, we all do it; it's okay. But when I do this, I am in full reaction mode. There is no intentional thinking going on because I'm allowing my emotional state to determine my approach. And when our emotions run high, our intelligence runs low.

We drop into emotional childhood and allow ourselves to respond as we did when we were young. We feel out of control and we lose our awareness. This detaches us from our ability to take intentional action. And I believe that when we tend to drop into emotional childhood most often with our family, and our family of origin specifically, because it's with these people that we learned what thoughts to believe and we witnessed how they responded to their emotions.

So we watched and observed our parents as we grew up, how they thought, how they felt, how they reacted and we learned inherently from them how to think, feel, and act. So it's no surprise to me that when we go back into that environment, we slip back into that state of mind. It almost feels like you go back in time, right.

And what I find most fascinating about this situation is that when I am experiencing it in real time, I do not seem to be aware of the thoughts and emotions going on in me. I can't catch it in real time. It's so funny to me. I'll look back at the situation, I'll replay it in my head and when I've got my

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adult emotional brain on, I cringe at the thinking back to how I responded when I was being an emotional child.

So emotional childhood, by the way, is just a phrase that my master coach uses to refer to the way that we think, feel, and act when we are reacting to our emotions. An emotional adulthood refers to the practice of observing our thoughts and emotions prior to choosing our approach and planning that approach in an intentional way. So we use these phrases to decipher the times when we take responsibility for our emotions versus the times when we default to blame and shame.

What I've learned in my years as a coach is that when we are triggered by another person – any other person – we're being challenged with a thought that is just not true. We believe that that person should be doing or saying something other than what they are actually doing or saying. We're basically arguing with reality.

We hold a set of beliefs about each member of our family as to how they should treat us, act around us and basically live their lives. We basically have a little guidebook called a manual [Emmanuel 0:12:40.1] about how each member of our family should behave and treat us every step of the way. That's my bossy coming in, right.

No, this is natural. We all think and feel this way from time to time; totally normal. But any time my emotional response is triggered, what I want to do, my goal, is to stop and acknowledge that I'm believing a thought about that person that is not matching the reality of what is happening.

So for example, if my mom tells me how to cook dinner and her comment annoys me, it's because I'm thinking that she should not be telling me how to cook. When I believe the thought – I think about this, this actually happens. So I'm back home, I'm trying to be helpful. I'm cooking and my mom is barking little orders at me all along the way. If I'm not aware of the

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thought she shouldn't be telling me what to do because I'm 47 years old and I know how to cook. If I'm not catching that little story my head is creating and I'm not aware of it, I'm most likely going to respond and react to my emotional state, which will be annoyed and I will say something to her that is probably less than adult-like and snap at her and say something that will probably result in her not feeling happy. Maybe I hurt her feelings and she's upset, and that's certainly not my desired result.

So it's important for us to notice that when that little trigger of emotion kicks in, that is our clue that we want to question a thought very quickly. So how do we stay in emotional adulthood when we spend time with family? It's the same way we do when we are at work. For some reason, I am able to detach from thoughts at work before I was able to detach from thoughts with my family. But if you think about it, people are people and relationships are relationships.

So you can apply the same tools and strategies with family as you do at work. You have to acknowledge that you have different thoughts about those people in your life versus the thoughts you have about the people at work, which is what's triggering different emotional responses. Do you see that?

We must use our emotions as our guide. We stay as aware as possible and before we react, we try to observe those thoughts as they appear and decide whether or not we're going to believe them today in this moment. This skill does take practice, but if you can practice it with those who most challenge you, then you can transfer that skill to any other relationship that you have. And as I said before, the way we do anything is the way we do everything.

I will say this over and over again. If you are experiencing strange relationships with family then I'm guessing you are also experiencing strange relationships in your professional and your personal life as well. So

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I encourage you to practice the art of thought awareness and intentional choice.

Now, you will forever be a student of this practice, but it will be rewarding work; I promise you that. So on my flight home, I was listening to Gabby Bernstein's book *Judgment Detox* on Audible. And by the way, a shameless plug, Audible is one of my all-time favorite apps. I love audiobooks. I can learn so much from listening to the book when I'm driving or flying. It's just – I retain so much more information when I'm hearing the author in her own voice saying the words.

So, I love that app. If you're an audiobook person, get Audible; it's great. Anyway, I love Gabby and I love her work. Her simplicity is so palatable. She says that any time we slip into judgment, we separate from love. Judgment is simply a separation from love and our goal as humans is not to eliminate all judgmental thoughts. We cannot control the thoughts that appear in the mind.

Our goal is to witness the judgment, forgive the thought and release it so you can intentionally choose an alternate thought. When we experience negative emotion, our brains have presented us with a judging thought. You do not have to blame yourself or make the thought mean that you are a terrible person – you can just tell yourself, hey, I'm noticing a thought occurred in my brain. I forgive my brain for having that thought and I'd like to release that thought and think of another thought that feels more like love.

And as cheesy as that sounds, if you want to feel better about the relationships with your family, this works. I have practiced it. Gabby's perspective on judgmental thoughts are so freeing to me. As I flew home, I felt like a weight had been lifted off of me. I no longer felt responsible for having to believe the thoughts.

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I don't have to believe them. I don't have to keep the thoughts. I don't have to attach more judgment on top of them. I simply have to witness and release them because I want to choose love over judgment as often as possible.

Friends, I hope this has been helpful. Being empowered as a leader is just one aspect of your life. The art and practice of being empowered in all areas of your life will revolutionize the way you experience your whole life. So may the force of awareness be with you.

I love you all so much. Have an empowered week and I'll talk with you next week. Take care, bye-bye.

Hey, Empowered Principal, if you are enjoying this podcast and want to dive even deeper, check out my website at angelakellycoaching.com to schedule a free no-obligation discovery call. It is so much fun to connect with you over the phone and chat about what's going on so that I can find out how to best serve you. I am here for you. I have your back.

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