

Ep #29: Question Everything



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 29.

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 guys doing? I'm so happy to be here with you this week. I am back from the Author's Castle and I'm home in Santa Cruz just before the wedding as I record this, it's next week, so super excited. If you are returning, thank you so much for listening, and if you are new to our podcast, hey, welcome to the tribe.

We are glad you are joining us and helping us to build a movement of empowered school leaders; welcome, welcome. Hey, I want to shout out to our latest members, Awesome Montana and Principal Smith, a big, big shout out and thank you guys for taking time to let me know what you love about the podcast. You guys are both entered into the next drawing for our \$100 gift card to Amazon.

And as of the date I'm recording this podcast, I haven't heard from our first winner yet, so please, please be sure to message me. You can email me at angelakellycoaching@gmail.com to let me know your address so I can send you the gift card. We want to get this in your hands. I know how much money you spend on your school and I want to honor your work, so please be sure to shout out.

And continue sharing, guys. Let me know how we can gather like-minded leaders and start having conversations. I would love to hear what you have to say, hear what you're thinking and how I can be of service to you.

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So today, we are going to talk about increasing our awareness through questioning. And as I've mentioned on previous podcasts, we have thousands of thoughts that run through our heads every single day and many of them, we're not even consciously aware; they don't even register in our heads that they're happening. They're just there. It's too much, right.

Our brain naturally filters out thoughts that are occurring that have a lot of meaning versus thoughts that just are passing by, right. And the summer is a great time to begin a practice of questioning on a regular basis. Your brain is in a slower, more relaxed state of being and I think that it's better able to question our thoughts with less judgment and less defensiveness in our mind.

When we are revved up and we are worked up and our emotions are really high, our ability to rationalize and look at our thoughts from a more neutral state is lower. And when we're on summer vacation and we are in a different state of mind, we're not at work, we're not being bombarded with situations left and right, we're able to slow down our process and look and observe our thoughts and question them from a more observant standpoint, so more separate from yourself. It's really fun to do.

Now, I want you to understand that emotions are the way that your brain communicates with you and it is through your emotions that we steer our life in the direction we want it to go. So I think of your emotions as being a flag or a signal. You can call it your north star, your rudder, whatever it is that you call it, but it is the guide to what's going on in your heart and in your head.

And I think this is important to know and understand because I believe that emotions are created from your thinking. Your brain takes in a situation outside of you and creates meaning out of that situation by producing a thought, or usually a series of thoughts, about that situation. So the brain attaches meaning and connection to that situation. I mean, that's how the brain learns, so it makes sense that it does that.

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But left unattended, you will just blindly believe every thought that pops into your head to be true until you have conflicting thoughts, and then the brain goes into wildness, right, and goes into shutdown mode. It's like, what is happening here?

And when you are unaware of those thoughts that your brain is producing, you take them as truth. And that belief, that attachment to that thought, triggers an emotional response. And that emotional response depends on whether or not that thought aligns with what you want in your heart or in your head.

So there are times when you think you want something, but your heart and soul craves something else and you try to, like, force it into wanting and thinking that you want something but your soul says something different. Do you see that? Have you felt that experience?

So I know there are times when this whole concept, this theory that thought creates emotions, emotions determine your approach, your approach impacts your results, that whole thought to emotion doesn't feel true when you're experiencing it in the moment because those emotional vibrations are taking over. And it looks like that situation is the direct correlation to the emotion because we can't see our thoughts.

We don't know what anybody else is thinking so when you watch somebody, let's say, at the park and a Frisbee whacks them, it looks like the reason that they get angry is because the Frisbee hit them. And they wouldn't have been angry if the Frisbee didn't hit them, so therefore it's the fault of the Frisbee or the fault of that person throwing the Frisbee and hitting them that caused that reaction.

But it very well could be that somebody could get hit by a Frisbee and laugh it off or throw it back or do any number of things with the Frisbee. So

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it holds true to me, and I invite you to consider this, that there really is a thought that occurs at the time your brain becomes aware of a situation.

So your brain wants to connect the event directly to the emotion and when we observe others going through a challenging time, like I just described, we either do one of two things. We can see how the way that they're thinking about that situation affects their emotions or we do what coaches call jumping in the pool with them. And that basically means that you are believing that same thought pattern that they are thinking.

So for example, you're talking to a friend. She's telling you all of the gossip that happened at work and you're like, yeah totally, oh my god I feel the same way. That means you're attaching the same type of thoughts, you're attaching meaning to them and you're believing them and you're jumping in and you're starting to feel the same way with her.

And there's nothing wrong with that, but I want you to be aware that you're jumping in the pool with that person and you're basically believing their story. You may have heard that expression, it's called drinking the Kool-Aid. Don't drink the Kool-Aid or they're drinking the Kool-Aid, right. And that saying just means that you are totally buying into that story; you're jumping in the pool with them. You're believing their story to be true.

Let me share an example with you. This actually has just been happening in my recent coaching practice. So I have a client. She has been struggling emotionally because she was trying to decide between two different career opportunities. One involved an educational startup company and the other was more of a traditional school position.

She had a baby last summer and she took this past year off to be with him to start his new life together and decided it was time for her to go back to work this coming fall. And she was really excited, she was having fun with her baby but also looking forward to getting back into her career; very

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career-driven, very passionate about the field of education, looking to get her administrative credential and really a go-getter.

So she felt excited to go back. She felt a little bit of mom guilt, but overall, she was debating these two positions because she felt like the traditional position, which was a teaching position in a classroom, was taking a step backwards in her career because this person had stepped out of the classroom, she had taken on some teacher leadership roles, she was an instructional coach. She was aiming for her administrative work and felt like going backwards into the classroom would not serve her advancement in her career.

And this thought was really creating a lot of pain for her. She wanted to be on the cutting edge of the education industry and she felt like choosing the consultant job was going to be more exciting, she would have something fresh to put on her resume and she was really talking herself into both jobs. It was kind of funny.

So as I listened to her, I could feel her pain in the sense that I could see where it was coming from. I could understand why she felt the way she did, but I personally felt no discomfort in either of her choices. I simply observed the choices, I listened to her brain, I was watching her brain from afar. I was watching it rationalize the pros and cons of each option.

So her brain was making it mean something. My brain was making it mean something different, or nothing really at all, therefore I experienced no emotional response and my client, on the other hand, was in full angst and indecision. And I know what you're thinking right now; my guess is that you're thinking, of course you didn't feel anything, Angela. The decision was not yours to have to make. It's not your life that's going to be impacted.

Like, what she decides doesn't matter to me and I respond with an absolute yes; those are all true. I was not making the decision. I was not having to

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live with that decision. I was not going to be impacted and whichever she decided really didn't impact or affect me one way or the other. So those are all true, but I share this story with you because these thoughts that we're thinking, it's not your issue to deal with so it doesn't matter, that's exactly my point.

It illustrates the example that thoughts create emotions beautifully because here's the way I see it. If the situation itself of deciding which job to choose was the cause of her pain, then both of us would have the same feeling of anxiousness about which one to choose because the situation – my awareness of her situation – would have caused me angst.

And if I had jumped in the pool and believed the same thoughts as her, that might have held true. It would have affected us both the same. But the difference in what I'm suggesting to you is that her thoughts were sentences such as, "I have to make the right decision. I need to choose the job that advances my career. The consultant startup position is much more cutting-edge than teaching. That's more cool; it's more advanced. That's what I want to do."

But then she also had feelings like, "I know the teaching job well. I'm a new mom going back into a fulltime career. The school is right across the street from my home. It will be so lovely to work with a new team and be close to my child." So there were some conflicting thoughts there which was causing her the pain.

Whereas my thoughts, on the other hand, were I knew she would be offered multiple jobs because she is so talented. These both sound like amazing opportunities. She cannot go wrong with either of these choices. I was really excited for her.

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It's funny because in our last coaching call, she was worried that she wouldn't get any positions offered to her and here we were one week later with two very appealing choices and I just was thrilled for her.

Can you see that? Can you see how the way that we individually view a situation determines how we feel about it? Her thoughts generated emotions of stress, confusion and anxiety while my thoughts generated thoughts of gratitude, confidence in her, excitement for her. I was attaching a different meaning to that situation than she was, but it's because she believed that her decision was going to have such a profound impact on her and that there was a right or wrong decision and that left her stewing in pros and cons and the good and the bad and what if this and what if that.

So how we coached through that was we decided to end up trying on some thoughts that sound like this; there is no wrong decision. The decision you make is the right decision for now. You can handle either decision. Perhaps the teaching job is not a setback and perhaps the startup job is not the advancement in your career that you're looking for. You have years to create the career of your dreams. You will experience either job in the way you choose to think and approach it. Decide ahead of time that either job is the right job for you and you can always change your situation if it no longer serves you.

That, my friends, is what empowered thinking looks like. It takes the emotion out of it, it takes the right or wrong out of it. It helps you believe in yourself and make a decision – and decide means to cut off the other option, decide, move forward knowing there's no wrong decision. You have the ability to change it, that you will choose to experience it in the most positive way possible and that it is the right decision for you in this moment and that you can always change it.

So the reason I share this story with you is I want to demonstrate why it is helpful to view your emotions as an indicator of your thoughts. when you view them as simply your body's way of getting your attention, it's just a

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signal, you can start to question those thoughts from a much more neutral stance.

When your emotion strikes, use it as an attention signal and take a moment to question what you might be thinking that's chasing that particular response. This can work on either side of the emotional scale; however, I know what our human brain does and it tends to lean towards that negative side.

When we're feeling positive emotions, we don't feel the need to avoid them, or change them. When we're feeling intense negative emotion, we are like, whoa, what is going on? I want this to stop immediately.

So the way that helps me understand and question my own thinking is I use the STEAR Cycle and I allow myself to question any component of that STEAR Cycle. So if you give a situation and you put it into a STEAR Cycle, you can choose any one of those components to question. And let me run through quickly what that will look like.

So let's take the example that a situation occurs. Your staff held a meeting without you present and let's say you walked in and you saw everybody meeting there. Immediately, your brain has a thought that triggers an emotional response. And my body's doing it too – like, I could feel the pit of my stomach turning. And the reason I'm using this example is because it happened to me personally.

So my staff held a meeting without me present. Imagine how that feels. Your body's going to have a physical visceral response to that, but what you can say is wait a minute, what are the facts? What actually happened in this situation? What are just the facts that you could uphold in a court of law and what parts of my thinking are my opinions and judgments and assumptions about the situation?

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We call this story versus fact. You need to separate the facts of the situation from the story your brain's making it mean. And you can't stop your brain from making the story, but you can identify the difference between the parts of the story that are made up in your mind and the parts of the story that you could check off and say, yes this actually happened.

Then you can question the thought, right. This is what I thought initially, my staff was talking behind my back. It's very easy when you walk into a situation, whether there's a couple of colleagues or whether it's your whole staff and you're not there, you instantly think, oh my gosh, they're talking behind my back. What did I do wrong? Why aren't they telling me this?

So in order to stop that from happening or stop the – actually, you're not going to stop the thought. What you're going to do is you're going to intervene and question if you want to believe that thought. So what am I making this mean? What thoughts am I thinking? And do I believe this thought or not?

The goal is not to not have the thought; the goal is to question and ask yourself if you want to believe it and if it feels good to believe it. You don't have to feel good to believe a thought. You might want to not feel good about a thought, but you can consciously decide whether you want to believe it or not.

Then you can move on to the emotion, right, questioning that emotion. And let's say you feel hurt, kind of stung, shocked, surprised, hurt, sad, whatever it is that you would be feeling if you walked in on your team having a meeting without you. And you're going to ask yourself, what am I feeling?

Write it down. What thought is generating this feeling? And you might not know the thought, which is why I'm showing you how you can start anywhere in the cycle and you can question it. You don't have to question

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every single component. You can start anywhere, it just depends on what you're most connecting to. Like, if you're very aware of the situation or if you're very aware of the thought or you don't know the thought but you know your emotion, so just start wherever it is easiest for you to answer these questions.

So if you're looking at the feeling, you're going to ask, what are you feeling? What thought is generating the feeling? When I feel this way, how do I act? Is this how I want to feel? And if not, how do I want to feel and what would I need to think, or what could I think, to feel this way?

And do you see how it neutralizes the pain because you're starting to feel a sense of empowerment, a sense of choice, in the way that you're feeling. And finally, you can question the approach. So you might, in this case, ask them what's going on or you might accuse them of talking about you.

Who knows what your approach is, but you can ask yourself, did that approach work? What about it worked? What about it did not work? What can I do differently? Did my approach feel good to me and is this how I want to show up in the world? And that really grounds me. That question really grounds me in terms of do I want to show up this way. Is this how I want to present myself in the world and does it feel good to me?

And if those questions are no then I know I have some personal work to do. And finally, you can question your results. So whatever results occur, you can ask yourself, is this what I want? Am I getting the results I want? Now that I have this result, how do I want to think and feel about it and what are my next steps to continue moving forward?

So the power of questioning, I cannot emphasize it enough, I feel like it is so understated and the use of questioning the components in the STEAR Cycle, it's magic. And it doesn't seem, as school leaders, that we have the time to stop and question the full cycle. It feels like it's kind of mundane and

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tedious and we don't really have the time to do this, but here's what I'd like to offer; I'd like to offer you that the time you spend assuming and wondering and creating this story in your mind about what you think is happening takes so much more time than just questioning the facts versus the opinions about the story you're creating.

You can eliminate the time you spend thinking and – you know that feeling where you're just perseverating on something and ruminating over what to do and how to do it and how you're going to respond and why did they do that, you can eliminate all of that time and energy by noticing that it's time to ask a couple of questions of yourself because eliminating the time you spend thinking about what might be the problem and how you will solve the problem by recognizing that your brain is the emotion creator, not the situation.

So please consider to use some questioning strategies to help you not only feel better about your day or about a situation that's kind of gnawing at you, but to increase your time efficiency and your overall productivity. How is that for a ninja strategy? I love it. I think it's so, so powerful.

Alright, my friends, I loved sharing this strategy with you. It's one of my favorite tools. It's so simple. It's so underrated but it's so, so awesome. So I want you to get out there, enjoy your week, question those thoughts and live an empowered life. I will talk to you all 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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Applying this podcast information is helpful and personalized coaching will expedite total transformation. It is so worth it. So sign up today and let's get to chatting.

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