

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 39.

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, my friends. How is the year going so far? I'm thinking about you guys. It is so strange for me not to be on a school year schedule. When I was working at a school, which was for over 25 years – and before that I was a student, so I was still on a student schedule. I've basically been on a school schedule my entire life except for the past year – I was always really aware of the day of the week, the month of the year, and every time a holiday was approaching.

Now, in this new career, a week will go by and I don't even realize it's Friday or that it's a holiday weekend. They practically sneak up on me. To be honest with you, even seasons sneak up on me. Like, I cannot believe that it is the end of September. I feel like we are somewhere still in the middle of summer; I don't know what happened. It's driving me crazy.

Oh well, I'm sure your brain is fully aware that September is ending because I know that first trimester of the year is the heavy lifting. You have been going strong since the beginning of August. You now are at the end of September. You're starting to fatigue a little. You're wondering when things are going to click and go smoothly. I know that feeling.

You guys are definitely into the season of fall festivals and pumpkin lattes and you still have a solid month or two to go before you get a break. I hear you. I feel for you. I understand where you're at. I actually really miss the flow of the school year, but I really enjoy having the capacity to manage my

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency

own schedule a little more than I did, or felt like I did, when I was a school leader.

So today, we're going to talk about the essence of my coaching practice, and that is developing resiliency. At the very core of helping school leaders manage the demands of the job is the ability to expand our resiliency. And think about this; in education, we use this word all the time when we refer to students.

We want to build their resiliency for sitting, their resiliency for learning, their resiliency for writing, their resiliency for listening to us lecture on and on. We want to build their resiliency so we practice with them, we try to expand the amount of time that they can focus and learn and listen.

We also do this with teachers, especially new teachers. We want to build their capacity to be resilient in the job. And if you can remember all the way back to your first years of teaching, how many times you cried, how many times you felt like you failed, how many times you felt like giving up, how many times you thought, "I have no idea what I'm doing." Remember those days?

Yes, the experience of all of that negative emotion is what built your resistance, resistance? Your resiliency, and some resistance, to teaching. So it really baffles me that we spend a great deal of time supporting our students, supporting our teachers, with emotional resiliency and emotional support, but once we transition into the school leadership role, we somehow shift into thinking and believing that we should know it all, we should be all pulled together, we should execute the job with this super humanness that doesn't involve emotion.

We think that we become ninjas, or that we should become ninjas, and know everything and handle everything with grace and style and savviness, but we're still humans. What I have found to be true is that every time we

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency

choose to try something new or learn something new or experience something new, we have to build up a level of resiliency as it relates to that new thing.

Resiliency doesn't just transfer over from one new thing to another. We have to build up our resiliency in that capacity. So what is resiliency? The dictionary definition of resiliency is the power or the ability to return to the original form or recover readily from a negative experience.

Now, I personally believe that resiliency is not only about being able to simply recover or bounce back from a negative experience, but in addition to that, we want to grow and expand our capacity to experience negative situations. We don't want to just return back to the same state or that original form. We want to exercise and build up our endurance.

The willingness and ability to experience intense negative emotion, recover from that rawness and to grow and learn from that experience is the difference between empowered leaders and disempowered leaders. The worst thing that can ever happen to you as a human is an emotion. And what an emotion is, remember, it's just an intense vibration in the body.

I know it's uncomfortable, I know thoughts create very painful physical and emotional and mental strains, but remind yourself that an emotion cannot hurt you. Think about this; let's do a scenario here. Let's say you are called into your superintendent's office over some student issue that ended up going all the way to the top.

Things went wrong, you tried to get it under control and get it in check, it just didn't happen. Parents went off the deep end, ran to the superintendent and now he's heated over this situation because his belief is that you should have handled it at the site level. So, when you meet with him, he lays into you and he threatens to reassign you if you can't manage your side on your own.

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency

And in that moment, you feel the sting of his criticism, the guilt of mishandling it, the regret of wanting to choose a different approach or handling it in a different way, the embarrassment of it coming to his attention in the first place, and actual fear and maybe a little distress and anger at the thought of being moved from your site.

All of these emotions create intense physical vibrations in your body. It does not feel good. Your heart races, your palms sweat, your brain goes blank. In the moment, your stomach ties into knots. All of this happens. This emotional set of responses feels so uncomfortable that really, many of us will do just about anything to avoid them because it's totally awful.

I dislike it too. I still dislike it. I spent many years trying to avoid any type of negative vibration. But I have learned, through the experience of putting myself into situations that may result in negative emotion, that if you lean into those feelings when they arise, it's the fastest way to get actually through them.

So here's the thing; emotions, no matter how intense or uncomfortable, they cannot kill you. Your brain thinks it's being attacked because the brain can't tell the difference between physical harm and emotional harm. That threat that your body and your brain perceives as dangerous, the brain just kicks into action. It does not know the difference. That's part of why we are animals, right? Homo sapiens, that part of our brain is fight or flight, protect, defend, or run and get the heck out of Dodge.

But when we realize that we have evolved and our thinking can go beyond fight or flight, the key is to know that that emotion cannot do anything more than feel terrible. I know it sounds awful, but the key to resiliency is to practice feeling bad. The ability to feel terrible, process the terrible moment and learn from that terrible situation is what makes a leader more empowered.

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency

Empowered leaders know that they have the ability to live through an intensely negative situation and still move forward. So how do I embrace feeling terrible, Angela? That's the question I get next. Do I have to love feeling bad?

No, that's not what I'm saying here. What I am suggesting is that you allow yourself to feel bad. Resisting or attempting to avoid that feeling terrible increases how terrible you experience negative events. That resistance creates more negative vibration.

So the way to build up resiliency is to allow yourself to feel and just surrender to those feelings. They are a part of being human. Accept that you feel bad. Let yourself feel the vibration. Kind of notice where they are occurring in your body. See if you can observe those feelings from an outside perspective.

Now, your brain may not be able to do that in the present moment. It might be on lockdown out of fight or flight, but you can certainly view the situation externally after that moment's over. So in the case with the superintendent, you might be on lockdown just trying to survive and breathe through that moment when you're getting that sting of criticism or the threats or whatever that person's saying to you.

But afterwards, instead of replaying that scenario over and over again and beating yourself up, what you can do is watch it from an outside perspective, kind of like the eagle's eye view, and look down and notice, "Oh yeah, that's where I started to feel this. I noticed my body vibrating really badly here."

And when you're able to do this, either before or after the situation, it actually diffuses those vibrations. I have certainly found myself able to do it and it does help decrease the amount of time you spend perseverating on that negative moment.

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency

But here's how we typically approach negative experiences. If we know something is coming ahead of time, and we don't always know that, but if we do, what do we do? We worry, we agonize, we fret, we lose sleep, we stress over the anticipation of future negative emotion.

This has us experiencing that negative emotion for minutes or hours or days or weeks or months even before the event takes place. And the more we rehearse a negative scenario in our mind, the more sure our mind is to experience that actual moment as negative. You're basically training your brain to know that it's coming and then you seek evidence; here it is, it's coming, it felt as bad as I thought it was going to feel.

So you feel bad before and you feel bad in it, and then after that, if that isn't enough, we replay that emotional response over and over again. We put ourselves through that same negative vibration multiple times. And guys, how does that pattern serve us? It doesn't.

It takes away energy and time and focus. That is not what you want as a school leader. You don't have time for that. So what you have to do is this; we have to train our brain to think and view negative moments in a different way.

You need to run STEAR Cycles on the thoughts that are coming up for you and you will start to see that the thoughts that you have are what's creating and causing you to panic. So take a look at those thoughts and see, number one – is there any truth to them?

Why are they vibrating so negatively in your body? If they are true for you, what can you learn from them? How do you want to think and feel about what happened? How do you want to change your approach for the next time something similar comes up?

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency

Also, consider what is the worst-case scenario; what's the worst thing that could happen out of this situation and why is that the worst-case scenario? Really dig deep into this. Figure out, why am I feeling so badly? What am I thinking? Why am I thinking this way? What am I afraid of? What is the worst-case scenario?

And then, what's your plan if the worst-case scenario happens? Once you have a plan, your brain can start to relax a little bit knowing that even when the body experiences negative emotion and what it considers to be the worst-case scenario, you really will be okay.

There are a few leaders who are able not only to survive feeling awful in a given moment or period of time, but who actually thrive on these moments because they believe it makes them more resilient. I find these people fascinating and I aim to be one of these people.

They are more able to experience discomfort again in the future because they know they've been through it before. And even though they know they have to go through it again, their brain has evidence that shows them they will get through the discomfort.

This is what I want for you. I want you to go from resisting discomfort to accepting discomfort and eventually to choosing discomfort. It is not easy, but it is certainly character-building, as they say. Allowing discomfort and choosing to experience it is the key to a most empowered and vibrant life.

So get out there, start building your resiliency muscles today. And look, I know this is not easy. Many people do not do this alone. If it were easy and we knew how to do it, we would be doing it, right?

So if you want support in this, if you want to dive deeper into learning exactly how to build your resiliency, let's connect. Sign up for a call, shoot

Ep #39: How to Build Resiliency

me an email, let's connect, talk about what's going on for you and we'll get you into shape in no time at all. It's really fun once you know and believe that you are capable of being resilient.

Alright, ladies and gentlemen, have an amazing week. Go out there, build those resiliency muscles and if you need support, I am here for you. I love you guys. Have a great week. Take care, bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit www.angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.