

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 41.

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 your week going? I am so amazing. I have to tell you that when I was writing this podcast, I was on a plane back to California. I had been visiting my family in Iowa and I love working on the airplane. I'm so productive and so efficient and so creative when I'm on the plane.

So I wrote this podcast while on the plane, but I'm updating you because this is what was going to happen that has now already happened. So, my husband was bound to pick me up at the San Jose airport and we were heading straight away to a wine tasting fundraiser for a dear friend of ours who is a 12 year survivor of pancreatic cancer. Isn't that amazing?

She is amazing. She is a true testament that anything is possible, that miracles happen, that mindset matters, and that faith carries us through difficult stages of life. She's one of the most kind, sweet, generous, and loving humans that I know. I am so honored and thrilled to have her in my life.

She lives down here in Santa Cruz, is a neighbor, and she's also really connected. She knows a lot of people. So she decided to host a wine tasting event in honor of her 12 years of survival, and she's also a very active member of a fund-raising organization for pan-can, what they call it, which is pancreatic cancer.

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You

And this was the cool part; she hosted this in her San Jose home and the wine that we were tasting was being hosted by the sommelier of the French Laundry. How cool is that? And for those of you who don't know what the French Laundry is, the French Laundry is a world-famous restaurant. I believe it was opened by Thomas Keller, the chef, and he still cooks there. And it is definitely on my list of life experiences.

So on Saturday night when I got back from Iowa, we went to this wine tasting event and I have to tell you, I was so excited to go. And number two, it exceeded all of my expectations; not just the wine, mind you. But the sommelier, his name was Andrew. He was fantastic. He works at the French Laundry. His fiancé was there. She actually is a sponsor of the organization for pancreatic cancer.

But I met the most fantastic wonderful people. We made so many new friends. I love to mingle at parties. It was just so fabulous. We were the last people to leave. We just couldn't stop ourselves; we had so much fun. And it was so nice to meet new people, especially that we live down here in Santa Cruz and we're fairly new to the area, and we're living apart from our close dear friends that we've known over in Mountain View and Sunnyvale for years and years.

So it was just really nice to have human connections and physically by at a party and share space with people. It was wonderful. So that's the space I was in when I was writing this podcast, which is going to seem like the polar opposite of what the topic is today, which is this.

Today, I want to talk about the intense feelings that arise when someone is really irritating you, and how you can manage those feelings and avoid reacting based on those irritable emotions. So I know, all of my clients at one point have had someone in their professional, or personal, life that rubs them the wrong way.

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You

It may be a staff member, a boss, or a parent. The client can comprehend that it's their thoughts causing the feelings, yet in that moment, they find themselves struggling not to act on their negative emotions. Have you been there? Yes, I have been there too.

What we typically do is we snapback or we say something we wish we hadn't, or somehow otherwise approach that person or situation in a way that is not as empowered as we would like to be. The good news about this is that it's completely normal and it happens to all of us.

I know it happens to me and I certainly know it happens to one of my master coaches. I can see it during our planning meetings, she will just go off. So I share that with you just to let you know that no one is exempt from reacting to their emotions.

Many times, when I react in a way that I prefer I hadn't, especially when I do so to people who know I'm a life coach, they want to know, hey, why didn't you self-coach in that moment. That happens to me with my family. Oh my gosh, and I say, "That's a great question." My answer back to them is that, "Hey, I'm a life coach second, but I'm a human first and I'm just trying to strive to better understand myself and my mind just like everybody else is."

So we have days where our highest self stands out brightly in her power, and then we have other days where we just flub up and we're human. But the important thing to keep in mind is that the mistakes we make can be our best moments in the sense that we can analyze the situation and find out what triggered us in that moment.

This is the work we need to do in order to learn and broaden our ability to manage irritation in the present moment. So let's break down what happens when someone does or says something that really bothers us. And I mean not just the occasional irritation, I mean the person who gets

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You

under your skin all the time. Let's go there and talk about that situation. Let's talk about them.

Let's use the example of a staff member who is a Debbie-downer at work. Every staff meeting, she raises her hand and she points out something negative about the idea or plan you're presenting. She complains about her kid, she complains about her work conditions, she talks about you to her colleagues, she whines about yard duty, parent meetings, and curriculums. She avoids meeting with her grade level. She thinks she knows it all. You get the picture; classic Debbie-downer situation.

She's negating everything and whining and complaining in lots of negative emotional space. So every time you have an interaction with this person, you can feel yourself. You feel your blood pressure rise, you're clenching your teeth, you're trying to take that deep breath, but you feel your eyes rolling to the back of your head as if they have a mind of their own, right? You try not to make that facial expression.

Trust me, I had some really close friends on my staff who could read me like a book and they were like, "Girl, you have no poker-face." I could not control my facial expression. So even though you're trying to stay empowered, stay professional, you snap.

So she makes a comment, you find yourself suggesting that if she considered a more positive outlook, she might notice all of the things going right with her class this year instead of complaining about them all the time. And as soon as you say something like that, you feel your stomach knot-up. For me, sometimes my skin would flush, my cheeks, because I know that the comment did not help matters and, most likely, would fuel her fire and fuel her complaints.

I'm giving her evidence that what she thinks about me is true and what she thinks about the negativity is true. So, what really bothers me is you

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You

continue to think about her after the hour, after the situation, because you want to figure out how to work with her and you want to understand why you were irritated and you can't figure it out. "She just bugs me..." right?

So if you go ahead and run a STEAR Cycle on those thoughts, you're going to notice that your brain has tons of thoughts and evidence to prove to you that she is irritating. And so the cycle continues.

What most of my clients try to do is run an intentional thought on a STEAR Cycle when they want to replace a thought that produces negative emotions with a thought that they want to believe, and they think that if they do that, automatically they're going to shift the way that they feel and they try to convince themselves that the person's not annoying and they want to have an engaged and happy relationship.

Well, the problem with simply trying to thought-switch is that you don't truly believe that new thought. Now, see the difference, guys? Your brain has tens of thousands of thoughts a day. You don't believe all of the thoughts you have. They simply appear. But you attach a meaning to some of them, many of them – those are your stories. Those are your opinions. Those are your beliefs.

And when you don't like something that you believe, you don't want to believe that but you do, simply trying to just think a new thought or believe a new thought, you can think up the new thought, but you don't, to your core, believe it. So even though you want to believe it, you don't. And the way you know you're doing this is that if you really did believe that thought, you wouldn't feel irritated. You would feel engaged and happy, right?

So your brain is not easily tricked. It knows what thoughts you buy into and which ones you don't. If thought-switching were that easy, we'd all be able to do it. So what do you do? So first of all, I want you to accept that you will have moments of emotional reaction. No one is immune to reacting to

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You

indulging in what we call childhood emotions. We feel bad, we pout, we get angry, we resist, we push back, we make snide comments or whatever.

Nothing's gone terribly wrong; you're just being human, good for you. And just know that. But take that moment to look at it as an opportunity to fine-tune your awareness about yourself and determine what specifically is triggering you, and see if you can unveil the thoughts causing your irritation.

Now, you want to notice where the behavior that is irritating you shows up in your own life. And here's the catch people; the things that we find annoying in other people is actually a reflection of something that we find unattractive in ourselves. I know that's a zinger.

We would not give that behavior any attention or be triggered by it if we weren't attaching some type of meaning to it. And the reason that we attach meaning to somebody's irritating behavior is because, deep down inside, there is a part of us that's connecting to that irritating behavior.

So let's think of an example here. Let's say a fellow colleague has to always have the last word in at the district meetings, and that bugs the bajeezies out of you. Why? Ask yourself, what bothers me so much about this? Ask yourself that question.

By the way, I just want to reiterate that a question does not go in the T-line. If you're trying to put a question in the T-line of the STEAR Cycle, ask yourself the question, and the answer goes in the T-line. So why does this bother you? That's not a thought, but the answer to why this bothers you is the thought.

Let's say, this guy always has to have the last word. Why does it bother you so much? It bothers you because he always has to be right or he's got

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You

to get the last word in because he wants to have the last say – I don't know, whatever it is you think.

If you believe that he needs to be right and have the last word because he's insisting that his opinion is the right opinion, that's the thought. Now, from that place, you can work on he needs to be right – how do you feel? What are your emotions? You feel irritated. How do you act when you're irritated?

When we're irritated, we're not our best selves, admit it. Of course we're not. But ask yourself this question; are there times when you ever feel the need to have the last word and be right? Why does it matter if this person has the last word? There is something in you that is triggered when you believe that he needs to have the last thought, probably because you're wanting to have the last thought and you're annoyed and irritated that he's taking the last thought. Can you see it?

This is hard for us. This is why people avoid doing thought work, because the finger points back to us. See where you can find that internal connection with the behavior that you find irritating and just notice it. Be aware of it, because what happens is, it diminishes your irritation immediately because it brings you into humbleness, quite honestly.

It's like, "Oh, I can see where I act like that sometimes; wow." Maybe he's just being human too, and it reduces the irritation. But that's the whole point. Getting irritated, finding out why you're irritated, seeing how you are a reflection of that irritation, bringing it back down to sum-zero is perfect. That's what you want.

So, keep in mind that irritating behaviors are not about the behavior, but about the meaning you are attaching to that behavior. What are you making that irritating behavior mean for you? Why do you think that? How is it impacting you? Where is that behavior showing up in your own life?

Ep #41: When Things Irritate You

And as I said, this question can be a jagged pill to swallow, but it will set you free from the irritation. It can be humbling to see how the very things we focus on as irritations are simply an external focus on the things we do ourselves.

My question to myself and my parting words to you is this; this is what I ask myself – would I rather be right or be happy? Most of the time, I choose happy. Right doesn't always win. So stay curious about your irritations and allow yourself to see the irony in them. It can actually be really entertaining when you see it happening as a reflection of a part of you.

I laugh at myself all the time when I catch myself doing the very thing that I say that I hate. Oh gosh, guys, life is so glorious when you're open to examining your own thoughts and finding the humor and the beauty that is being human and the irony that comes with it. So notice your irritations, examine them, explore them, have fun with them, and last but not least, stay empowered, my dear friends.

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