

Ep #43: Sticking to Big Commitments



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Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 43.

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 Empowered Principals. How are you doing today? How is the week going? I am beyond grateful and excited for life. I have to tell you why. My son came home from college this past weekend, which makes two weekends in a row, he attends school down in Southern California in the city of Orange, which is about five miles east of Disney Land in Anaheim, California.

Actually, Alex lives in Anaheim and Orange is just right next door. It's a couple miles away to the campus. And it's about a six-hour drive from Orange up here to Santa Cruz. So it's not just this little short jaunt. It's a hefty little drive.

For him to come up two weekends in a row was super exciting. So the first weekend, he came up for his best friend's birthday party down in San Luis Obispo, and then surprised us with a visit on Sunday. So we ended up taking him to the 49ers home opening game and we had a blast.

However, the following weekend, he came back home for a very different reason. And I'm going to tell you a story about him and how it relates to my clients who are aspiring to become school leaders.

A dear friend of ours, who I will name John to protect his privacy, has been cutting Alex's hair since Alex was a very young boy. It was his very first haircut. Actually, John is the only person to ever have cut Alex's hair. And

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what I love about this is that Alex is the only child client that John has ever taken on.

John and his wife own a salon in the Bay Area where I've been going to get my hair done since I moved out here in 1996. Alex and John are very close and John has been a mentor for Alex through all of his childhood transitions, especially with the divorce between his father and me.

John has a deep love for Alex, as does Alex for him. John also happens to be an ordained minister and was the officiant for my wedding this past summer. He's just one of the best people I know. He is so personable, funny, loving, energetic, and positive.

Unfortunately, about six weeks after our wedding ceremony, and on his 64th birthday, John was diagnosed with glioblastoma, which is a rare and aggressive form of brain cancer. Part of his treatment included removing as much of the tumor as possible, which, as you can imagine, meant shaving his head.

Now, the reason I highlight this aspect is that John had always teased Alex about shaving Alex's head. Alex has this beautiful thick blonde hair and he's quite particular about its style. He always teased John back saying, "Hey, if you shave yours, I'll shave mine."

So fast forward to last week and Alex said not me, "Mom, John is having brain surgery. They will be shaving his head. You know what that means? It means that I need to shave mine too. I have to. I would not be in integrity if I didn't do it."

First of all, I wanted to cry at this child's love and compassion. I realized that Alex was absolutely in alignment with himself. He loves John, he made a promise, and he acknowledged that he needed to follow through on his

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word. Even if it was just teasing and bantering in the barber shop, he did in fact go through with his commitment and shaved off all of his hair.

The reason I share this story with you is to use it to teach you what happens inside your brain when, one, you make a huge commitment to yourself or others. Two, the moment you have to decide whether you will follow through on that commitment no matter what. And three, after you've followed through on your commitment, what goes on in your brain?

So, let's talk about making the commitment. The moment you make a commitment to something that makes you uncomfortable, you tend to have a burst of enthusiasm and excitement. Your brain likes the exhilaration behind the thoughts of doing something that scares you a little bit.

This is especially true when time separates you from the actions you will need to take, or if you don't truly believe you'll actually have to follow through. So in Alex's case, he felt very little anxiety about shaving his head, way back when, when he made the commitment, because he did not anticipate the day where John would actually shave his head.

It was easy to commit to at the time because it was kind of fun to talk about and think about what it would be like not to have the hair when he didn't really have to do it. Alex even contemplated what it would be like not to have his hair, but he really only played with the aspects he thought would be enjoyable and fun.

This holds true for some of my clients who are interested in becoming principals. They commit to becoming a school leader one day. They're excited at the thought of becoming a principal, they take all the coursework and the exams needed to acquire that administrative credential. And they'll talk and daydream about how they're going to lead a school and bring about some exciting changes.

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At this stage, our thoughts are focused on all the positive aspects of the commitment. We think about how good it will feel to be in that moment. This is a very important part of making big commitments because, in order to commit, your brain must have a compelling reason to make a commitment in the first place.

And a compelling reason we have is how we think the commitment will make us feel when we follow through. We are driven to achieve based on how we believe it will make us feel. This is how we do hard things. We believe ahead of time that doing hard things will result in feeling good. This is why we set goals in the first place.

Now, the moment of decision – we ride on the anticipation of positive emotion until the moment we actually have to decide to follow through on the commitment. This is the moment. This is the moment when fear can override our desire to be in integrity with our commitments and achieve our goals.

So in Alex's case, the moment he learned that John was having surgery and needed to shave his head, he remembered back to their conversations and his commitment to John. That spiked Alex's emotions about the commitment, both positively and negatively. He initially was excited that he had the chance to show his love and loyalty, but he also was nervous about following through and not having his beloved hair.

I mean, you guys, really, Alex really loves his hair. So if you follow me on social media, my personal social media pages, you can see my son's beautiful hair. And he's always running his fingers through it. It's just a habit. Even – let me just go a little further here – when he was a baby and he had hair, the way he put himself to sleep was to take his finger and kind of spin his hair around his finger. He still does that to this day. Well, he did do that when he had hair.

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So I want you to know, the kid loved his hair. And the moment that commitment became an option and he had to decide to follow through was when his fear set in. Before John needed to shave his head, there was no need for Alex to have to choose between shaving his head or not; it just wasn't a choice.

So the same holds true for my clients who are at, what I call, the moment of decision. When they say they want to become a school leader next year and it's only October, they're not super stressed because they have time between now and the moment that they have to apply for that leadership position.

When spring approaches and those new positions start being posted, their fears will kick in something fierce and they suddenly start to wonder if school leadership is for them. These moments are the tipping point of sticking to your commitments. This is what people call the moment of truth because it is when you decide whether you will be true to yourself in spite of that fear that will always show up when you actually have to take action towards the goal or commitment.

Your brain shifts from thinking about all the wonderful things you will do as a school leader to all of the painful or scary aspects of the job. Do you see how that flip happens? Now it's starting to create evidence against your commitment with the goal of keeping you in your safety zone.

This is so important to know because you will actually have to be acutely aware of this shift in your brain. You have to acknowledge that it will happen, call it out, and remind yourself that you aren't in danger and that the fears your brain is coming up with is nothing that you cannot handle.

So for Alex, his thoughts went to what are other people going to think about him? What if they think I have cancer? What if they think I represent a certain political view? What will my friends say? What will the girls think?

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On and on, he was so worried about other people's opinion of him, which had him extremely anxious about following through with his commitment. But he did it and I'm super proud of him. And let me tell you this; you would think like once you decide and you go through with it and now it's your reality, that it's over, that pain is over.

No, my friends, there's the aftermath. So you already know that Alex did end up shaving his hair and he followed through, but afterwards, he had some new thoughts kind of bubble up to the surface. And we had to end up talking about it and coaching through it. And I want to share with you what his brain did because it's so fascinating to me.

And I notice that we do this to ourselves all the time after we've taken a massive action. So, two opposing feelings can emerge after you have followed through on a commitment; relief and regret. On one hand, you feel relieved that the agony of the anticipation of the moment is over and you didn't die. You recognize how you were able to follow through, and it wasn't that bad.

So that feeling of relief is positive. It feels good to know, like, you anticipated the moment, you got through it, you didn't die, nobody got hurt, and it wasn't as bad as your brain was making it mean. But on the other hand, you might get this surge and sense of regret. Like, oh my gosh, what have I done? What now? What is happening right now? And a whole new set of worries will wash over you.

So for Alex, he was really proud of himself for following through and he felt great that John felt supported by him in this way. But he also had that sinking feeling of, "I can't take it back. Now I have to deal with the consequences of my decision." And all of the fears of what others might think or say came right up to the surface.

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The same holds true for my aspiring school leaders out there. They hit that moment of decision, they feel the fear and take action in spite of being afraid. They secure that new job and then they feel both really excited and really scared about what's coming next.

But this is where we get to the fun part of coaching. This is the moment we learn that no matter what we decide, we will feel negative emotion. We will feel the agony of regret, and we will feel the fear of the unknown in either decision. If you decide not to follow through, you'll feel the regret of not committing and the fear of wondering what could have been.

If you decide to follow through, you'll feel the regret of what have I done, and the fear of what now. So here is the ten-million-dollar question, my friends; if you're going to feel the same emotions either way, why not choose the decision that propels you forward? The decision that honors your commitment, that gives you that new experience, and that expands your horizons?

A quote from one of our favorite movies says this, "I also know the only thing in life that you regret are the risks that you don't take." So, my up and coming school leaders, I ask you this; if you are going to feel negative emotions regardless of your career situation, why not choose the ones that give you a wealth of new experiences? And hey, and pays you way, way more by the way?

You're going to feel negative emotion about 50% of the time, you guys. It's happening. So I invite you to consider choosing the commitments that propel your life to empowerment. I want you to ponder that commitment, my friends. Have a glorious week.

If you have questions, please reach out to me. You can email me at angelakellycoaching@gmail.com – I will respond ASAP.

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I love you guys. Have a wonderful week. I'll talk to you next week. Take care; bye-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.