

## Ep #49: The Power of Intentional Awareness



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 49.

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, happy Tuesday. And welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*, my friends. I cannot believe that we are about to celebrate one full year since the launch of this podcast. I am beyond excited and proud that I fully committed to this project. I showed up without fail week after week after week and did my very best to deliver inspiring content with the goal of providing school leaders the support and strategies and some relief that is so desperately needed in our position.

The job of school leadership can completely consume a person and there are very few leaders that I know of who have not experienced this at least to some degree at one point in their tenure as a principal. I want you to be sure to tune into episode 52 for our one-year celebration. I have something very, very special planned.

So speaking of celebrations, I want to celebrate each and every listener out there because at the time this podcast episode airs, we are about to hit over 10,000 downloads of the podcast. And this is beyond amazing because it means we are starting, as a profession, to think deeply about our careers in education, how we approach education, and the work that we do in education. And my hope is that we are beginning to contemplate how to apply this thought work into our daily practice in all that we do, with our staffs, with our parents, with our students.

It brings me such joy to see my clients getting the results they so desperately wanted. Those who see the biggest gains are the ones who

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decide to invest in themselves with their time and their money, who fully commit to learning and trying new ways of thinking and being, and who are willing to experience the discomfort – yes, that is a part of it, ladies and gentlemen. There is discomfort involved – that comes with questioning our beliefs.

I want to highlight one client in particular. Her name is Lisa. She's a first-year AP and she found me through the podcast and through my book on Amazon that's titled *The Empowered Principal*. Same name as the podcast.

She signed up back with me as a private client in September. She was feeling so stressed that she was actually having physical symptoms from the level of stress in her job. In the beginning, it was challenging for her to see that situations outside of us do not cause our stress. But the way we think about that situation is what's causing the stress.

It was really hard for her to see, and this is totally normal. So for example, most of us believe that another person's behavior makes us feel stressed out. That's totally a normal thought because we've been taught to think this is true. So I expect that when my clients first start working with me, that they will struggle to see how their emotions are a product of their thoughts.

Lisa was challenged by this theory too and she stuck with it. She kept running STEAR Cycles and processing her thoughts and feelings multiple times a day. She worked so hard. She allowed herself to feel her emotions and question if her thoughts were serving her.

She reached out for help when she needed it. She did all of her homework and, in return, she's made tremendous leaps in her ability to manage the workload, manage her relationships at work, but most importantly, decrease and manage her stress levels.

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She has so bravely stepped into her role as a school leader and is actively practicing how to be a courageous and empowered leader. Lisa, my hat goes off to you. I'm so, so proud of you. I cannot wait to see how you continue to grow as the leader that you were born to be. You are intentionally and consciously choosing the path of empowered leadership, so kudos to you.

And I share Lisa's story not only to celebrate her amazing work, but to lead into today's topic, which is intentional awareness. We're going to talk about what intentional awareness is and why it's important, and why we find it a challenge to participate in.

So as the saying goes, we are creatures of habit. We create routines in our lives so that we don't have to spend energy focusing on every move our body makes and every task we do on a daily basis. This is one way the brain helps us to be more efficient in our lives and this serves us well in many cases.

It's supposed to function this way. However, there are other habits and routines that we form without much thought and they tend not to be as efficient and productive as we'd like them to be. So take a moment and think about your current daily practice. How do you typically spend a workday from the time you wake up until the time you go to bed?

What my clients will first say when I first pose this question, they'll immediately go something like this; you know how it goes. There's always something new. Even if I created a schedule, I can't stick to it because the number of things that come up during any given day, it's impossible to predict. How can I stick to a schedule?

And it feels like this is true. However, if you take a deeper look at what you actually do during the week, you will see that you do have daily and weekly

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patterns in general. You tend to partake in the same activities, often at the same time day in and day out.

So when I was a new principal, a typical day might look like this; I would wake up first thing. The first thing I would do, grab my phone and check any messages and emails that were urgent or an emergency. Basically, that meant did I have enough subs for the day? Was somebody ill? Was there an emergency that happened overnight? Always checked my phone, then I'd go on my morning walk.

I'd shower up for work. I'd make calls while I drove into work, usually checking in with people. I'd get to work. My secretary was always there early. We would have a short little debrief and then I'd review my calendar for the day. And then one of three things usually happened; I either was attending a morning meeting, usually an IEP or SST, I'd respond to some emails, or I would go out and purposely say hello to the kids and meet everybody and greet them as they were arriving. I loved that.

One of those three things were happening; I was in a meeting, I was responding to emails, or I was greeting the children. So those were my patterns. Once the kids got in and settled for the day, my morning usually consisted of classroom observations and meetings. Lunch was either on the yard or in the cafeteria if I wasn't off-campus.

And the afternoons were reserved for planning meetings. I usually met with my instructional coaches or my SST team lead or my site counsel lead. I would try to get some weekly tasks done such as planning the agendas, the newsletters, resolving behavior issues. And then after school, I was usually in a meeting of some kind.

And my evenings, if I wasn't at a work meeting or event that night, it involved a little bit of dinner, some family time, and guess what, more

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emails. Notice how the meeting thing comes up? There were a lot of meetings as a school principal. Can you relate? I'm sure that you can.

So even though an individual day for me presented some unexpected issues to handle – and that did occur more times than not – I tended to follow the same general patterns of routines without a lot of thought or question. I was just on autopilot.

And as school leaders, we are so busy putting out fires and responding to the immediate needs of the day. We tend to move through our life fairly subconsciously. Our brain, in an attempt to maximize efficiency, it creates systematic routines throughout the week. And without realizing on a very conscious level, we'll fall into these routines without questioning them or acknowledging that they actually don't feel good or produce the results we want.

Can you see that? Do you have that experience? I for sure did. This is why online grocery shopping works so well for so many people. Do you notice that when you shop, you tend to buy the same things over and over? So when you have an account online, the store, the computer program basically, picks up your habits and creates a recommended shopping list with surprising accuracy.

And this is because our brain creates eating habits and shopping routines that maximize efficiency. And we do this over and over again. The same holds true at work. So while these subconscious routines can be beneficial, they can also become ruts unless we activate our consciousness into gear, we wonder why we feel stuck or why we do things we don't really want to be doing, but we find ourselves doing it anyway.

This is where intentional awareness can help us become more mindful of our thoughts, emotions, actions, and results. Intentional awareness is the

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practice of using our emotions as a guide in evaluating our approach to our life's circumstances.

The goal is to shift from doing things on autopilot to consciously and actively choosing how we work and live. Now, the way you create intentional awareness is to start paying attention to your emotions and your results. Your emotions are your body's way of communicating with you.

Positive emotions tell you to keep going and do what you're doing. Your expectations and your outcomes are aligned and that feels good, so keep doing more of that. That's awesome. However, negative emotions are a signal that something doesn't feel right. It's not aligned. These emotions are intended on purpose to get your attention and draw awareness to what is happening, what's going on, and why is it happening.

Let's say you continue to feel overwhelmed at work. You're constantly thinking you're overwhelmed, you're feeling overwhelmed, your schedule's overwhelmed, and so you are approaching the overwhelm itself with the idea that you should work longer hours. It makes sense, right? If I have too much to do, if I work longer and get more done, I will feel less overwhelmed. It seems rational and reasonable.

So you choose to work the longer hours because you believe that you will get more done and feel less overwhelmed. However, when you work longer hours and you still feel overwhelmed, what do you do? We tend to work even more hours. We think that we have the answer, we've already solved the problem in our mind, so we keep doing more of the same.

When working even more hours continues to result in overwhelm, then we get frustrated on top of overwhelmed. We tend to do more of whatever it is we believe will solve that problem, but over time, your negative emotions do not subside. They actually are compounded with feelings such as resentment, irritation, and anguish.

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And because this happens so slowly over time, we tend to concede that it's just the way life is as a principal versus using those emotions as a signal, as a red flag, to question those beliefs. You guys, that is passive living. That is passive working. You do not want to fall into this trap.

When you feel an emotion you do not like on a regular basis, that emotion is communicating to you that you are choosing to believe a thought that's not best serving you. That emotion is your cue to take a look at the thought patterns that you are creating and that are triggering these negative emotions.

So those negative emotions are there on purpose and they're not there to hurt you; they're there to guide you. So let's break this down; you believe that working longer should reduce your overwhelm. You approach the day by working longer hours, expecting that result to be less overwhelm. When that approach does not generate less overwhelm, you double down and work even longer hours.

We're on this autopilot cycle when we do not change our approach because we're allowing the subconscious belief that longer hours equals less overwhelm to continue running in the back of our brains. The problem with living on autopilot is that you don't provide yourself the opportunity to stop and try a new approach that's going to create a different result.

You know the old saying, doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result is the definition of insanity? That's what I'm talking about here. You must tune into those emotional cues and instead of reacting the same way over and over, you stop and investigate the thoughts that are driving your action.

The only way to know when to stop and do this practice is through intentional awareness. Fortunately, in this case, the how to practice



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intentional awareness is the easy part. The challenging part is to become aware that you need to practice awareness, right?

But once those emotions have your attention, you simply need to ask yourself, why do you feel overwhelmed? And the answer to this question will be a list of thoughts that your brain is choosing to believe. Using your emotions to uncover the thoughts behind them will help you gain that awareness.

Do not underestimate the power of simply being aware of your thoughts and emotions. You don't have to fix everything and you don't have to change your thought. The first step is so important, and that simply is enough for most of us.

Just knowing that we have a thought that's triggering an emotion can help diminish that intensity of the emotion. It's like saying, I'm thinking that I need to work longer hours, and that makes me feel a lot of overwhelm. Just that awareness and that acknowledgment can actually reduce the overwhelm. It's pretty cool.

If you want to go further in that work, what you can do is take the opportunity to decide how you want to feel. So you can ask yourself, what would be different about my job if I weren't feeling so much overwhelm? If I were feeling less overwhelm, how would I approach my day? And then seeing how that overwhelm impacts your current approach can actually help you to consciously choose a different way to act and reduce the overwhelm.

Just know that you won't be able to change your approach or your actions or the results that you get until you allow the emotions to be that red flag, indicating that intentional awareness is needed.

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So, if we know that emotions are the indicators to practice intentional awareness, why don't we do it more often? The question of the day. Why we avoid doing this work is because questioning our own beliefs is really uncomfortable. It's like picking an argument with yourself.

You are basically telling yourself, that's not a true thought, and our brain is where our ego is based, and it wants to be right, so it fights back with you. You guys, it doesn't feel good, but when you stick with it, you will see the magic behind this.

So the art of intentional awareness is simply letting the emotions be the red flag and then asking yourself, why do I feel this way? The answer to the why is the unveiling of the thought that's creating the feeling. Just practice that one little piece of awareness. You don't need to go further unless you choose to. But for now, just practice that; letting your emotions be the signal, be the guide. That is how you become intentional about your career and your life.

Enjoy this practice. Let me know how it goes. I look forward to talking with you next week.

Hey, I've got amazing plans for the podcast in 2019. Beginning in January, I will record the podcast for each month based on a theme. The podcast during that month will relate to the topic of the month.

My aim is for each theme to correlate to what is happening during that time of the school year for you as closely as I can. As a bonus for my clients who work with me directly, they will receive an e-booklet that corresponds to the monthly theme in addition to private coaching with me.

This allows them to use the podcast as a guide to dive even deeper into each episode and do the work on a personal level.

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The only way to receive the booklets is to personally coach with me. If you have been curious about coaching, now is the time to sign up for a free consult call with me.

You guys, it's so fun to connect with my listeners over the phone. And for most of us, we're a perfect match to work together and I love helping you at that individual level.

And hey, one more fun announcement for the holidays. In December, for every person between now, today, and December 17<sup>th</sup>, anyone who writes a five-star review of the podcast is going to be entered into a drawing for a free six-week coaching package with me.

This means, if you win the coaching package with me, you will also receive the e-booklets that go with the podcast. How cool is that?

But wait, there's more. You can also enter your name multiple times into the drawing by doing the following; so if you write a five-star review on the podcast in iTunes, you can also add entries by doing the following. You can also write a review on my Facebook business page.

And hey, all you've got to do is copy and paste from the podcast to the Facebook. That's so easy, right? There is a second entry. You can also sign up for my Empowered Newsletter. You can do that on my website. That takes two seconds. You just enter your name and email and you're on for the week.

Every person who signs up, that's another entry. You can also download a free copy of my new book, *The Empowered Principal*, on my website, no problemo. Just let me know and it's yours for free – another entry into the drawing.

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But you've got to act now. I'm going to post this on social media December 1<sup>st</sup>, but you listeners get a heads up on everybody else. So go right now. Write the reviews. If you've already written a review, just write another one. I'll enter you because I love you. That's how we roll around here, you guys.

So, happy holidays. I'm so glad your Thanksgiving was fabulous. I'm looking forward to December. I want to celebrate you. Thank you so much for listening and take care.

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](http://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.