

## Ep #55: Why We Experience Conflict



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With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 55.

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.

Well hello there. Happy Tuesday. As this episode is being aired, I will be visiting my family in Iowa after having attended a Life Coach School event in Dallas, Texas. I'm so excited to go, you guys, and I will tell you all about it after I return.

I'm going to be attending the Self-Coaching Modelthon, which is where we focus for two full days on self-coaching to break through mental blocks that are holding us back from achieving our current set of goals. My focus this year in 2019 is to find ways to increase the awareness and the need and the support for school leaders and provide leaders with the tools to enhance their emotional and mental wellbeing so they can lead and live happy lives.

I'm here for you, people. It really pains me, you guys, to hear stories from fellow leaders about all the struggles they are facing on a daily basis. And if you read any school leader association magazine, you're going to find it is chock-full of articles on how to overcome the infinite challenges that school leaders battle.

It seems to me that the institution of education forgets that teachers and principals are human beings and not robots. I fully believe that we need to nourish all aspects of our lives; not simply hone our leadership skills. This is why I've spent the last nine years studying the human component of school leadership.

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I just knew there had to be more than simply figuring out how to do the job. In fact, the more I learned how to do the job, the more I felt I should be doing. Do you guys feel that way? I totally did.

Each year, I was being asked to do more and more because the more competent I was, the more able I was, the more efficient I was, the more the district thought, “Oh, she can go ahead and do more.” I ended up mentoring other principals, all kinds of things, serving on the committees, being on negotiations.

And I loved all of that because I learned, but it burned me out. It was so much work. And I felt like each year, I was being asked to do more, be more, serve more, and give more.

I worked more hours as the years went on, not less. The way the current system is set up is designed to demand more and more to the point of breaking people down. You guys, there has to be another way to do this job.

And one way I’ve discovered is to get into alignment with who we are as individuals and bravely honor that alignment through emotional and mental fitness. Many of you are meant to be school leaders and you need the tools to keep your life balanced and in harmony.

Others of you are in a position that does not serve you or your family and you’re seeking a way to align what you are most passionate about. And whatever path is yours, thought management is how you’re going to be able to live a much more authentic life.

So let’s get on with it. Today, we are going to discuss the reason why we experience conflict in our relationships with others and how we can end

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that conflict once and for all. First of all, I want to talk about the word relationship.

Relationship means to relate or to connect. As humans, relating with others is a deep primal need. We are hardwired to want to connect with other people. Being able to relate to others feels so amazing and it amplifies the human experience.

This is why we fall in love, why we spend lots of time with our friends. And think about it, this is why we attend sporting events or concerts in mass groupings. It is way more fun to see your favorite person sing when you're surrounded by other people who love him or her just as much than to go – well, maybe it would be kind of cool to do a one on one, but you know what I mean.

Sporting events, it's amplified, the excitement, the agony of defeat, the excitement of the win, all of those things are amplified through human connection. Our emotions are elevated when we connect with others.

Now, you may argue that you enjoy your alone time or that you're introverted or that you prefer to be alone. And these are true. They can be true for people, however, some level of connection with other human beings is a part of being human. And as educators, we are drawn to others. We love to serve and help and be around other people.

We would never have chosen this profession otherwise, and even though we joke about the stresses of teaching and leading, hence all the hilarious memes you see on social media – I can get distracted for hours watching those things, they're so funny. But I'm betting that all of us, on some level, thrive when we are authentically able to relate with fellow human beings.

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Knowing that relating to others is how we are wired, the question becomes, why do all relationships strain from time to time and how can we minimize that strain and conflict? The short answer is this; whenever we have conflict with another person, it is because we believe they should be behaving differently than they are.

We think they should think differently, speak differently, decide differently, or act differently. Think of someone at work that you don't easily relate to. What is it about them that you don't connect with? Why are they difficult for you to have a positive relationship with? Think about that.

Let me tell you, I had a staff member who seemed to complain about everything. No matter what the topic, this person would find something negative to highlight. It drove me crazy. I was sitting there labeling myself as a positive person who wanted to focus on solutions and what was going well and all of the things that were going right in the world, while at the same time, I was being negative about her negativity.

Can you see how funny that is? I was not relating well to her, and this is why; I believed she shouldn't be complaining. I didn't like her complaining and I wanted her to not complain. I wanted her to behave differently than she was choosing to behave.

She was choosing to complain, but I wanted her to choose to be positive. And my wanting her to behave differently than she was, was causing me to be negative and was the source of my unhappiness. And not only that, my frustration as a leader was compounded because I also had the belief that I, as the school principal, should be able to change her approach; that I was her boss and that I should change her.

I thought, you know, I should stop her from complaining and guide her into being a more positive person. You guys, this is the second reason why we experience conflict with relationships. We not only think that the person

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should not be behaving in the manner that they are, we also want to control and change the way that they behave.

And this combination of believing they shouldn't do what they're doing and that they should be able to get them to change is why we spin in complete frustration. Basically, the line of thought goes like this; I don't like what this person is believing, saying, or doing. I want them to change what they believe, say, or do.

I think I know what's best for them. I want them to think this way or speak this way or act this way. I need, or should convince them, to think and act differently. And when they act in alignment with my thoughts and with me, then I'll be happy.

Now, when you hear it presented in this way, it sounds completely out of line, doesn't it? It almost sounds to the point of absurdity. And it sounds absurd to us because we would never want someone to try and control our own beliefs and actions.

I know I, for one, do not like people trying to tell me what to do. And I guess, if you're a school leader, you have your own thoughts and ideas and you want to be able to express them. Furthermore, we know that we can never really control another person.

We have influence on some people more than others; people like kids, our children, our students, and perhaps new teachers, they don't know what they're doing, they're afraid, they don't have tenure. We might have a little more influence or impact on them, but we can never truly get inside of their brains and delete the thoughts we don't like and enter new thoughts in. they're not a computer; they're not your laptop.

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With children and subordinates, there is a difference between setting clear expectations, boundaries, and consequences versus attempting to control or manipulate their behavior. So we can't physically force somebody to speak differently or act differently or even energetically show up in a different manner. Even if they don't say or do anything, people's energy, you can read what they're feeling or how they are thinking.

We know this to be true. We know we can't control people, but yet we buy into the thought that we can over and over again. Any time we attempt to manipulate another person's beliefs or actions, we have created a mental manual for them.

A mental manual is an instructional handbook that outlines what we think another person should believe, say, or do. For example, with our own children, we may have thoughts such as, they should make their bed, they should pick up their toys, they should not slam the door, they should not be late coming home, they should give me a call, they should be polite, and on and on.

We have this whole manual for our children and we think they should follow it to a tee. And, you guys, we all have mental manuals for the people in our lives and they have manuals for us. Unfortunately, there are just a few problems with trying to adhere to them.

Number one, the manual is mental. This means it is only in your head. Your brain created this manual and it is the only place that it's stored. So even if somebody wanted to follow your rulebook for them, they don't have a copy and they can't know your expectations of them unless you were to tell them or write them all down.

And as you can imagine, if you did write them all down, it may come across just a smidge bossy. Can you imagine somebody handing you a manual of how you need to act in order for them to be happy. I don't think so, guys.

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Number two, mental manuals are constantly changing. A person can do something that one time makes you happy and another time makes you unhappy depending on the situation.

If you are married, you will most likely relate to this story. One day, your husband does something for you and you're so happy. And another day, he does the same thing but it drives you crazy. The same holds true for the people we work with. Something they do or say may trigger a different emotion in you depending on how your day is going and what headspace you're in.

So even if you could hand over a hard copy of that mental manual for them, it's forever changing. So the person can never be sure of what it is you expect of them.

Number three, giving control of your emotions to someone else leaves you disempowered and leaves them feeling burdened. You hand over your power and responsibility of managing your own emotions when you blame others for your negative feelings. And then you wind up feeling completely frustrated when you attempt to control other people.

In addition, not only does that other person feel burdened to try and make you happy, they are going to build up resentment that you are putting them into the work of your emotional management.

Finally, as you hopefully know by now, other people do not create our emotions. The way we think about a person, their words, and their actions is what generates our emotions, not the person themselves.

When someone says something to us, it isn't the words they say that make us angry; it is what we make those words mean. For example, if a parent says that they want to know the punishment you are going to give to the



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student who pushed their child in line, you might make their words mean that you don't trust that you are going to follow through.

When they say the words, your brain generates the thought, "They don't trust that I'm going to follow through." And this is where that emotional response kicks in.

You can know that this is true because their brain may make their words mean something different. Perhaps their request made you think that they're looking for justice, or maybe that they're being nosey, or maybe that they're just simply concerned parents. Whatever your brain makes the words or actions mean is what triggers your emotions.

Now that we understand that, at least on a cognitive level, we understand why we experience conflict with others, which is what? It's a test. It's your thinking. Your thinking creates the experience of conflict. Now that we know that, what do we do about it when conflict arises?

The answer is to take emotional responsibility for our own emotions. This means, when an emotion is triggered, we must stop and recognize that we are believing a thought that makes us feel that way. When you walk into a classroom and a teacher is sitting at his desk reading the newspaper while his students are working – and this has happened to me – you may feel pretty disturbed about that scene.

The emotion that occurs in your body stems from a thought you had, such as, "He should be teaching, not reading the paper." And I want you to use those emotions as a signal to remind yourself, "I'm feeling disturbed by a thought I'm having."

Using that phrase, I'm feeling blank because of a thought I am having, allows you to separate yourself from the emotion long enough to explore it

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as a thought about the person and situation. And it reminds you that the person is not directly causing you to feel anything.

The story created in your head about the situation is the reason you're feeling the way you are. So, practice taking ownership for how you are feeling by acknowledging that a thought is creating the feeling, and see how much more empowered you start to feel.

You're taking back the ownership and responsibility of your emotions for you. That's called stepping into emotional adulthood. It is fabulous. It feels so good. And from there, you can decide to create the emotions you want to feel on purpose.

Send of all, we need to seek to understand. And I know this phrase is probably overused and you've heard it before, but I cannot stress enough how helpful this approach has been for me personally.

When somebody is behaving in a way that you dislike, remind yourself that every behavior is being driven by a thought and emotion that that person is having. So just as you are owning and being responsible for your emotions, you can allow others to take responsibility for their emotions.

There is a reason why they are behaving the way they are, so be curious and try to observe their behavior from a neutral place. Instead of reacting to the behavior, ask yourself first what might be causing this behavior. And the fastest way to answer that question is to directly ask the person; who knew?

However, before you ask, be sure to clear up your own thinking first and then approach them from a place of genuine curiosity. If you approach them having already decided what you think their behavior means, you will not be open to hearing their thoughts.

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It could be something totally different than what you're thinking. So your goal is for them to be able to honestly share their train of thought so that you can gain clarity on why they're behaving the way they are. Being open and willing to hear what others have to say will greatly decrease the amount of conflict you experience as a school leader.

Alright, my friends, this is such amazing stuff. Working on owning your own emotions and letting go of the manuals that you have for other people will drastically change the way you feel and approach your job. It's very empowering to know that you get to feel however you want regardless of other people and that you are not responsible for other people's feelings; they are. It's so amazing.

If you found this podcast helpful, please, I ask you to share the link with your friends and colleagues. Think about it, almost every person knows somebody who is a principal. Parents out there know their school principals, their child's principals. You guys all have colleagues and friends.

It's amazing how many people know school leaders. Letting people know that there is this support for our school principals will raise the awareness that is so needed to provide for their support. Thank you so much. Have an empowered week, you guys. I will see you next Tuesday.

Hey, are you ready to take your empowerment to the next level? If so, my January coaching cohort is still open and available for you. The only thing you have to do is sign up for a free consult call and we'll take it from there.

When you become my private client, in addition to personalized weekly coaching, you will receive a monthly ebooklet with worksheets aligned to the monthly podcast theme that allows you to dive deeper into your empowerment.

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All you need to do in order to gain career clarity, boost your confidence, and take inspired action is to sign up for a consult call at [www.angelakellycoaching.com](http://www.angelakellycoaching.com).

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