

Ep #61: Coaching Teachers



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Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 61.

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 friends. How are you doing? Here we are. It's the end of February. I cannot believe how quickly the weeks start to go after the New Year. I remember being a teacher and then a principal, and I always felt like February was a super-fast month. You guys have Valentine's day, there's Presidents' Day, there's Chinese New Year, I think it's Black History Month and there's all kinds of fun things going on in the month of February; such a fun month.

And for my district, it was also – usually it was around the end of that second trimester, so we had all that additional assessments and report cards, all of the fun things going on at the end of the trimester in addition to having Ski Week off. So, February is just lightning speed.

And I hope you have had an amazing month. I hope this month's podcast theme has been beneficial to you and for you and I appreciate all the people reaching out, asking questions. If you need any help with anything, I am here for you.

So, today is the last week of the month, which means this is our last podcast on coaching. We're going to wrap up this month discussing how you can take the self-coaching tools and use them to coach your teachers. I'm going to talk about the difference between leading and coaching, why you include coaching as a leader, and some tips for coaching others, specifically your teachers.

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Next month, we'll move into our discussion into how we can use emotional fitness tools to guide us through human resource issues, such as hiring people, letting people go, working with others, and when your staff members engage in conflict. It's going to be really, really good stuff. I tried to time that so that it falls in the month of March, which for my district, was when we were doing the decisions around hiring, the decisions around letting people go.

It can be a really stressful month for school leaders because I know that you feel very deeply about your staff and you care and want to have the best experience possible for them. So this can be a really stressful time.

So, this month, in February, you have been practicing all the self-coaching strategies. And for those of you who are private clients, you've completed the additional work of using the workbook tools and exercises, which, if you did, my guess is that you've seen even more impactful results.

I have this topic, this coaching topic, at the beginning of the new year, right after relationships, because the skill of coaching yourself is the way to make any changes in your life possible. Creating change in our lives always stems from the way we are thinking and feeling. Every action that we, as humans, have ever taken, always, always is based on the way we believe it makes us feel.

And knowing this, you guys, is the most powerful piece of knowledge I can imagine. It is such a shame that we don't learn the power of emotions when we're young. This is something that I believe we should be teaching in school right off the bat. Just think of how different life at school would be for students, teachers, parents, and all of the leaders if we learned how to take responsibility and ownership of our emotions from the very start.

Everyone would still be experiencing negative emotion, but it would come from this place of allowing and accepting that negative emotions are part of

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the experience as a little human, and that emotional vibrations aren't going to hurt us, nor are they ever caused by someone else or by something outside of us.

Wouldn't that be the most amazing gift? If you could hand a gift over to a child, wouldn't that be it? I know, I've got to get off my soapbox, but I believe in this stuff so much so because I've experienced it in my life. I'm so passionate about this work, you guys, and I want everyone to experience the gift of emotional fitness. It's just such good stuff, I'm telling you.

Okay, back to self-coaching. The reason we self-coach is because in order to feel differently, we must think differently. We can't change our thinking if we're not aware of our thoughts. And once we're aware of our thoughts, we can see how they start to impact the results that we have in our lives. And it is from that place that we can then decide how we want to feel or what we want to achieve for ourselves. It's a process.

And once we see how the STEAR Cycle is in motion all of the time and our brains start to get some evidence that it's always at play, we tend to get really excited and we want to share that discovery with everyone. I know I personally – well, obviously, I chose to do this for the rest of my life as my profession and my passion, and I want to share it with as many people as possible.

But what happened for me initially is, once you start to see it work and you're starting to get some different results and you're feeling differently and you get really excited, you want everyone around you to see how it can work for them. And we want everyone to get coaching, especially by us. I know, for me, I was so blown away once I really explored how the cycle worked and how I was able to shift my emotions by shifting my thoughts. and I wanted everyone around me to do the same.

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So, as you start to experience these same shifts, you may want to share your successes with the world and show your team how to take back ownership of their own emotions. So I'm going to share with you what I learned along the way so that, in your own excitement, you don't make some of the same mistakes that I did when I was in school leadership and coaching.

First and foremost, it's important to distinguish the difference between leading and coaching. As the leader of your school, part of your job is to guide and inspire your team into taking action that aligns with your school's mission and vision. In doing so, you may be required to set standards, expectations, boundaries, and hold people accountable for taking actions that result in an aligned vision.

There will be times when you have to ask people to take action that they don't want to take, such as taking on a yard duty or something, or change an action, like you want them to get their attendance turned in on time every day. But you do so as the leader because it is in the best interest of students and it aligns with the school's vision of student safety.

So you lead when you set expectations and you hold people accountable to those expectations. Coaching is different than leading, primarily in that leading involves letting the people choose the way they problem-solve. It involves helping them see how their thoughts are creating their results and empowering them to come to their own conclusions and allow them to approach the problem in any way they want.

Any single person has the internal capability to problem-solve. And, as leaders, we have that idea for how we want our school to operate and approach the problems, and we guide our staff to follow the process we believe is best for our students and what we think is best in order to get the results we want for our school and our kids, right?

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As coaches, we allow the teacher to explore their own ideas for solutions and let them choose and approach that works best for them. We don't judge their approach or correct their approach or bend them into using our approach. We help them see their own blocks and we support them through that problem-solving process.

Having been a principal who learned how to coach while I was still leading a school, I highly recommend learning the skill of self-coaching and coaching others so that you can integrate it into how you lead. Choosing to include coaching as an approach to school leadership is helpful for many reasons. When you coach, you're acknowledging that your teachers have viable solutions.

Asking questions of them and embracing their ability to come up with solutions builds strong, trusting relationships. It shows them that you value their input and their ideas. You're not just telling them how you want them to teach or how to problem-solve and you're not imposing upon them your way or the highway, right? You're probing them to come up with the answers for themselves, and isn't that what you want for them?

Coaching builds up your team's capacity for problem-solving on their own. And the more that they have permission and the ability to make decisions for themselves, they will begin to problem-solve on their own, which then takes the burden of being the resident expert problem-solver off of your shoulders because you can then be spending time solving your own problems versus having to go and solve other people's problems.

So, one critical thing to keep in mind before we shift in how to coach – being the supervisor of your staff, you also have positional power. You evaluate their work, you determine what grade level they teach, and your decisions can have an impact on their career. This means that people tend to do what you tell them to because you are the boss and they choose not

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to disagree with their boss because of the potential impact that disagreeing might have on them personally. Can you see that?

Because of this, you have to be really, really careful not to use your positional power to manipulate other people's behavior. Using these coaching tools to force someone into change or do it your way is an abuse of that positional power. It's imperative that you know the difference between leading and coaching so that you don't believe that you are coaching when subconsciously you are leading.

Coaching someone to the conclusion you want them to is manipulation. And if you approach coaching with this intent, you are not going to get the results you want and you most likely are going to lose the trust of your team. They won't let you coach them. So, be very mindful of that.

Now, let's get into the how, how to coach the teachers. Coaching is such a wonderful way to approach leadership when it is understood and welcomed. It allows you to start a conversation with a teacher with compassion and a belief that they are capable. It builds trust and empowerment when done in full transparency.

People who don't understand what coaching is and what it involves are going to feel like you're interrogating them and they won't trust the process because coaching involved a lot of questioning and internal reflection. So, before ever attempting to include coaching as a leadership strategy, be sure to explain and model what coaching is and what it feels like for that teacher. Let them know that coaching is a way for you to help them examine problems and explore solutions.

They need to see that coaching is about empowering them and not manipulating their behaviors. They need to trust that they are safe in the process and that sharing their honest thoughts and opinions will not negatively impact them or their job. Teachers are very afraid of us school

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leaders. We have to be very authentic in our approach with them and letting them know the process is helping them see the things that they cannot see on their own and that it is your intention just to be supportive in nature.

So, once you've set the stage for them, the first step in offering coaching involves getting very clear within yourself. You need to identify your intention and be clear in your desired outcome, the purpose of that outcome, and how you want to approach obtaining that outcome.

Let's say you have a teacher who sends kids to sit outside of her classroom door. And, day after day, you see these kids in the hallway outside, day after day after day, and her approach does not seem to be working in your eyes because it's the same students sitting out in the hallway day after day.

Now, before you approach that teacher, you have to clean up your thinking about her situation, or this situation. It means it's time for some self-coaching, my friend. And you're going to start with a brain drain. So, basically, you're just going to write everything down about that situation, what are your thoughts about it?

Her behavior management system needs work. What she's doing is not working. She's not addressing the needs of the students. The students aren't learning what they need to be learning when they're sitting outside. Get it all down, and then ask yourself, what is it that I want? Because clearly, that situation is not what you want. So, if you don't want that, what do you want and why do you want it?

So, you're going to write down thoughts like, well I want students in classrooms, not in hallways. I want this because I believe students should be learning, and learning occurs in the classroom. I want her to improve her behavior management systems. And I want this so that her students are more engaged in learning and not wasting time sitting out in the hallway.

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So, ask yourself, what are you thinking about the current situation, what is it that you want to have happen, basically, what do you want to change, and why you want to change it? And another very impactful question to ask yourself is how the current situation impacts you. What does the situation mean or say about you? Like, what is your brain making it mean?

So, your brain might say something like this; when kids are sitting in hallways, they're not learning. This impacts me because I'm responsible for the instructional leadership at this school. It looks bad on me as the school leader when my teachers don't implement the tools they need to keep kids engaged and inside of classrooms. It's my job to help her acquire effective management strategies, because every situation, you guys, always comes back to us.

Whenever a situation captures our attention, it's because of what our brain makes it mean about ourselves. Good teaching makes us feel like we're doing a great job as a school leader. When we see ineffective teaching, we make it mean that we're not doing a good job as a leader. This is why we have to get clear on how the situation is impacting us personally and self-coach before we consider coaching others. So, step one is all about understanding your thoughts about that situation, the results you want, and why you want them.

Step two is deciding how you're going to approach them, either with the hat of a leader or the hat of a coach. So, as the school leader, you make decisions all day long. Some of those decisions, they don't require a whole lot of energy or thought, such as when to hold kids in for rainy day recess. You look outside, it's raining. You call the rainy-day recess. Teachers look outside, they see it's raining, and they keep the kids indoors. There's not too much stress or debate in your mind about it, and there's little pushback from the teachers because they get it. They get why you made the decision, right, so it just comes and goes.

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Other decisions, on the other hand, feel much more intense. They may have a larger impact on you or your staff or your students or your school community. And it might involve more people, more stakeholders, as we say, and you therefore spend a greater deal of time processing all of the potential outcomes before finally landing on a final decision. That's just a normal part of leadership and the decision-making process.

So, when you are deciding how to approach a teacher, either through the lens as a leader or through the lens of coaching, you want to take the following into consideration; does it matter how the desired result is achieved? Does it matter when the desired result is achieved? And what happens if the result is not achieved, or the desired result that you have in your own mind?

So, let us use the example of the teacher who is sending students out into the hallway again. If your desired result is that students are in the classroom learning, does it matter to you exactly how the teacher gets that result? Do you want her to use a specific management system? Maybe you guys have a school-wide management system. Or, can she choose the one that works best for her and her students? Does it matter how long it takes her to effectively use this system? Are you giving her a deadline or can she keep practicing for as long as it takes her to get this under wraps? Questions like, do you expect her to never send students out into the hallway, or do certain behaviors warrant a little seat in the hall, a little timeout?

And what happens if she attempts a new management system and it doesn't work? What are her consequences from you? Are you going to fire her? Are you going to coach her? Are you going to get the help she needs? What's happening here? What if she doesn't attempt to change at all? What about that? What's going to happen then?

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So you need to get very clear on what it is you want, why you want it, and then how you're going to approach that teacher ahead of time so that you can identify, is this a coaching moment or is this a leading moment? Laying out that approach ahead of time is going to help you decide if you want to choose a more direct approach by leading her directly to the outcome that you specifically want, or, if you want to choose a more indirect approach through coaching and letting her figure out how she's going to solve this problem of misbehaviors during class on her own.

And, guys, there's no right or wrong ways to approach her. There's only knowing what outcome you want and how you want to get her there. When you've decided that coaching is best, step three is to ask permission to coach. This sounds optional, but let me warn you, it is not. People who understand coaching but have not been asked for permission will feel manipulated.

They realize. They see it, that you're trying to get them to act differently, but it feels like, on their part, it feels like you're making them change their ideas or their approach, by imposing your own. Think of a time someone has tried to get you to change your mind or take different action without your permission. Our brains go into shutdown mode, right?

We resist anything that other person is saying, even if we agree with it, because we feel we're being manipulated. So, as a school leader, be transparent. Ask permission. Allow them to say yes or no. If they say yes, then you can put on your coaching hat. If they say no, then you can choose to hold a conversation with your leader hat on and be a little more direct in how you want them to handle something and how you will hold them accountable for that result.

Step four, if you're coaching and you've gotten the permission, step four is to share with them what you're noticing and ask for their thoughts on it. Your goal is to be really listening how she is thinking. You want to

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understand her thought process because her behaviors are being driven by her thoughts.

She's basically going to do a verbal brain drain on the solution as she's telling you about the problem. So it might sound something like this, "Hey, Suzanne, I notice that Billy and Michael sat out in the hallway a few times last week. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?" "Sure, Billy and Michael had been talking during instruction and when they aren't talking, they're passing notes and just being plain silly. I've asked them to stop, but they can't seem to stop on their own. I don't really know if they can help it or not or if they're just being disruptive on purpose, so I'm sending them out so that they're not interrupting the rest of the group." Something like that, right?

Then, step five is to keep asking questions and hold space for her. Now, this is hard for us school leaders because we are problem solvers. We want to dive in. We think we know what the problem is and we want to tell them the solution.

When you're coaching, it's different. You have to be genuinely curious and concerned. So, as she's talking, you want to dig deeper and deeper and hear more of her thoughts. You want to ask a lot of questions, things like, why do you think this is happening? What else could be going on? What do you want to happen? What might get you that result, will lead you to a deeper understanding of where she's at and the result of the students sitting outside are coming from.

The questions help you understand her, but you're not problem-solving for her. You're letting her process by asking her questions that she is not asking of herself. So, while you're in this part of the process, you are going to need to hold space for the teacher. And what this means is that you are patiently waiting for her to answer questions, process her thoughts and

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emotions, and maybe get some ah-has, like whoa, I never thought of it that way before.

But you're never ever judging her or her or her responses. You're simply being a neutral observer, helping her see her own processes and how they're not working for her by continually asking her questions to help guide and allow her to see through her own ideas and come up with her own solutions.

You're also – and this is interesting – you're also helping her see how she is contributing to her own problem. This is why coaching others is challenging for them and for you. When people start to uncover the cause of a situation, the real cause, not just the symptoms of the problem but the cause of the problem, what they're going to see is that they do have a role in part of the problem, and they resist this. Nobody likes to be told or to see how they are a part of their own problem.

But they are going to want to resist. They're going to want to not take responsibility initially. And, of course, on some level they're going to blame and resist. They're going to want to blame the kids. They're going to want to blame the lesson, something like that. They're resisting that their own thoughts are creating this result for themselves.

It just kind of depends on their level of awareness, so your role is not to force them to see it, to push their awareness on to them and accept full ownership. It's to guide them by asking them questions very lovingly, very compassionately, and authentically, and allow their brain time to see how it can relate back to their own actions. So, holding space for them means holding space for their emotional response and allowing them to process in their own time.

The goal is for them to see how their current actions are getting the result and you want to stay neutral and listen and love them for as long as it takes

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for them to come up with new thoughts and ideas for new actions. That is the bulk of your coaching job.

And then step six, you want to allow them to determine the solution and the approach. You are not deciding for them. You're not passing judgment of their choice. You're allowing them to see the problem in a new way and letting them choose how they would like to attempt to solve the problem.

This lets them try and fail and try again until they come up with a solution and a process and a routine that works best for them. Coaching can take more time than giving someone a directive for sure. So you have to wear both hats. There are times for leading, times for coaching.

You're going to see maybe more immediate changes through a directive, but I want to have you consider the opportunities that coaching provides. I see it as a benefit because you're promoting a more lifelong lasting change with that teacher when you guide them through the process of reflection and awareness. And if this sounds familiar, it's because that's what works best when teaching kids. Coaching is teaching.

You want to show them through the process of questioning and coaching. You guide them through. They make their own discoveries. They come up with their own solutions. They solve the problem on their own. That's integrated into who they are. If you solve the problem, it's a quicker response, but it might not be long lasting and really integrated into who they are as a teacher.

So, you want to let them see the need for the change, and then they're going to be inspired into action because they'll see that by taking the action, they're not only benefiting the students, they're benefiting themselves. So, this teacher, she wants those kids in that classroom. She wants them learning. She just has to figure out how that's going to happen for her personally as a teacher.

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And at the end of the day, we're all ultimately driven to make those changes to feel better for ourselves. So if you can get the teacher to see how working on this problem helps her, not just her students, that will really be self-driven and motivated and she will be able to start to problem solve future problems because you've shown her how to coach.

So, there are the basics into coaching other people, specifically your teachers. I know this is a lot of information, and there's so much more to cover, so please let me know what you're thinking about this process. Please share any questions that you have with me at angelakellycoaching@gmail.com. I so look forward to hearing from you guys and helping you through the process of coaching your teachers. Have an empowered week and we'll talk to you next week. 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 where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.