

Ep #72: Courage Before Confidence



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Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 72.

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, hello there, happy Tuesday. I hope you are doing well. As I record this podcast, I will be heading to Maryland next week to visit one of my very best friends in the whole wide world. Her name is Emily. Emily has been an elementary and middle school teacher for years and she just recently moved to the East Coast with her love Justin.

I have known Emily for over 15 years and it broke my heart to have her move so far away, but I am so happy for her. She's teaching over there in Maryland and is loving it. She just bought a new home and we're going to go see it. My girlfriend Jessica and I are flying from San Jose all the way over to Baltimore. We're going to spend the week together and hang out in DC. So it's going to be a blast, I cannot wait.

And fortunately, you know, I travel quite often to the DC area for my book projects, my book promotions, a shout-out to The Author Incubator, because she's over there on the East Coast. So you know, Emily lives less than an hour and a half away or something from where I go on my business trips, and so I get to see her every now and then.

So, I'm doing my best to get the podcast ready for you prior to the trip so I can relax and enjoy my time with them. We're hoping to get to see the cherry blossom and tour all of DC. I just can't wait.

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Okay, so in preparation for my trip, my brain has been having all kinds of drama about work, my work, what I'm doing for you right now. And as a school leader, I have to tell you, I did the same thing. My brain would say things like, I can't wait for break, I'm not going to do any work, I'm just going to relax and enjoy the whole week.

And that would last for about a day or two before my thoughts would drift back into work. And before I knew it, you guys, I was answering emails every single day and my excuse was, just to keep up. And I have to tell you this; be aware, if you're going on break or your break is coming up or you just had break, our brains are really good at trying to justify the need to work.

And when I wasn't working, there was this little tiny voice in my head that was chattering in the background about work. So even if I wasn't actively sitting down and working on my vacation, work was playing in the background of my brain. And it was this nagging little whisper that said, you really should work on project X while you have the time. It's so quiet, you're not going to be interrupted, you'll get so much done, you'll feel ahead.

And what I've noticed is that the way you think and feel and act as a school leader is the way that you think and feel and act in other areas of your life. We are creatures of habit. The way we do anything is the way we do everything.

I used to think that I would not feel as stressed about work if I was off doing something else. I thought that changing my situation, my work situation, would result in new thoughts. And what I want to share with you, because I have experienced this personally, is that it did not change.

Changing my situation from being a school leader to being a coach for school leaders did not reduce my stress. It shifted my stress. When I was a school leader, I never worried about generating a steady income. I didn't

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think about marketing and sales and keeping track of my travel receipts. I didn't have to pay a podcast producer – shout out to Pavel – or have to have my podcast done on time.

What I did by changing my situation, my career situation, was just shift my stressful thoughts from all the things school leadership, angry parents, unprofessional teachers, student's wellbeing, construction noise, test scores, school boards, bosses, over to book promotions, Facebook ads, client calls, client consult calls, social media algorithms, successful client stories, making sure I'm available, getting the right content out to you guys.

Like, I just want you to hear this loud and clear; your role as a school leader is not what makes you feel stress. It doesn't make you feel overwhelm; it doesn't make you feel fatigued. If you're dreaming about changing your job, you must first practice changing your thoughts, otherwise you will bring the same thoughts along with you to any job, and that's not easy.

I get your job is not easy, you guys, but I am trained to help others manage their thinking and I personally struggle with managing my own thoughts. So don't feel bad if you're not able to get a handle on this. You never have to feel bad about your thinking. That doesn't help you and it just adds more layers of bad feelings.

Learning to manage your thoughts and just be aware of your thoughts first of all, let alone managing them, it's a daily practice and every single day is a brand-new day. You'll have good days. You'll have bad days. And you can choose to practice checking in on the thoughts that are causing you stress one day at a time.

Okay, let's get on with it. Last week, we talked about what fear is and the role that it plays when it comes to exercising courage as a principal. Today, we're going to talk about how we process that fear and move from inaction to action, by allowing ourselves to engage in courage on a regular basis.

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Something I learned from my master coach, Brooke, was that of the four Cs. Brooke shared this as a concept she learned from her coach Dan Sullivan. It was a huge game-changer for me because I hadn't thought about courage in this manner. So I've used his four Cs and her teaching about it to develop my own theories on courage and how we implement it to achieve any goal we want. And I've actually changed it to the 5 Cs. I've added a C.

So I've used this concept to develop my own theories on courage and how we implement it to achieve any goal we want. But first, let me start with the foundation here. Everything we currently have in our lives is the result of our thinking. Our current thoughts created our current results.

When we want to think something different, that desire stemmed from a thought. If you think that thought over and over, you can make that thought become a goal. In order to achieve that goal, you must think new thoughts that get you to the goal. First and foremost, you must believe that the goal is possible. You have a goal, but you do not believe that it's at least possible to achieve, you're not even going to try.

For example, like, I could have a goal of going to the Olympics, but if I don't really believe that it's possible – and PS, I don't – then I'm not going to take any concerted efforts or actions towards achieving that goal. I might daydream about landing the perfect 10 in the floor exercise. I secretly wanted to be a gymnast when I was a little girl. I was all about Mary Lou Retton, for those of you who grew up in the 80s, you know what I'm talking about, right?

So I could daydream about being Mary Lou Retton and going on this floor and getting the perfect 10 all day long, but I honestly, in my heart of hearts, at the age of 48, I don't really think that is within my reach now, so I just don't commit to that. I don't change my thinking from I'm not an Olympian in gymnastics to I'm training to make my way to the Olympics. I don't want to

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do that because I don't really believe it's possible. So therefore, there's actually no way to achieve that goal.

And here's what I've learned; any goal is possible if you believe it hard enough. Let me say that again; any goal really is possible if you believe it hard enough. You've seen 48-year olds do amazing things with their bodies. They might not land the perfect 10, but they might get into the Olympics, or they might qualify to try out for the Olympics.

So let's say you dream of quitting your job in school leadership so that you can design schools for underprivileged students in underserved countries, but you have no idea how to get from where you're at now to living this new life. All you have to do to start is start believing that it's possible. And now I'm going to teach you how the four Cs come into play here. You have to know that whatever you desire in your life, you can achieve it and the only reason you desire it is because it's possible. So you have to believe that it's possible.

So if right now you're believing that you want to become a superintendent and you just started out as an assistant principal, you have to believe that it's possible; not that you're going to do it, not that you know how, not that it's going to happen tomorrow, but that it is a possibility.

Now, here's number one C. In order to achieve this pie in the sky goal, you have to be fully committed. Commitment is C number one. And the reason commitment is the first step in goal achievement is that when you are doing something for the first time, especially something so big your brain is going to freak out because it doesn't know how to do it.

It wants to tell you that it doesn't know how, it's impossible, it's scary, you can't go through with it and that horrible things are going to happen to you if you do. That's that fear kicking in that we talked about in last week's podcast. But if you think about anything new that you've tried in your life

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before, you didn't know how to do it before you tried it. Your brain just tells you that story in order to protect you and keep you safe.

So the key is that when you're excited about acquiring a new position or a new skill or a goal, that excitement and anticipation of achievement or acquisition propels you into action, even when the action seems or feels scary. This is why you need C, commitment, to come first. Commitment feels good. It's exciting. It's motivating.

You get a surge of energy when you first commit to something you want to do. It's like standing in line for the rollercoaster. You jump in the line and you feel the rush and tingle of exhilaration, which really is just an anticipation of what you believe you're going to feel when you're actually on the ride.

And as your turn approaches, you might start to feel a little bit more nervous, and that's when your commitment, that waiting in line for an hour supports you through the wave of emotions that you feel, which is a little bit of fear. So again, your body is responding to your thoughts about the ride.

Fear, remember from last week, it's always past or future-based. So your brain is thinking about the future of getting onto that ride and it's creating vibrations in the present based on what you believe you're going to experience in the future.

Now, if you're really afraid of rollercoasters because you've had a negative experience, then your brain is going to be vibrating about fears from the past and it will maybe prevent you from getting on another rollercoaster. So keep in mind, fear is always past or future-focused.

The second C stands for courage. Now, this is what people say they want. They say they want courage. In order to have courage, you have to commit

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to the belief that your goal is possible. Practicing the experience of courage over and over again is how we evolve as humans. It's how we went from being a college student to a teacher and from a teacher to a principal.

And what's interesting to me, and I've thought about this quite a bit because so many of my clients say they want to feel courageous, when I've thought about it, I actually don't see courage as a feeling necessarily. When we say we want to feel courage, what we're really saying is that we want to take action in spite of feeling fear.

Courage is really an action that we take in spite of fear that's driven by our commitment to our goal. Courage is uncomfortable. When people say they want to feel courageous, acting out in courage is scary. It doesn't feel good. And I know I've shared this example on social media, but I want to highlight something here. I watched a documentary called Free Solo, which is about the first person ever to climb El Capitan in Yosemite National Park without any supports or safety gear.

This documentary is amazing. I highlight the preparation that went into his climb, both mentally, emotionally, physically. It was phenomenal to hear the kinds of thoughts that he had about fear and taking risks. One of his thoughts was this; we could all die at any time doing anything, so I might as well be doing what I love. I was like, wow.

Think about that. We say that all the time, but when we're talking about fear, we're talking about like some emotional fear, a little bit of discomfort, a little bit of worry about what other people are going to think. This man's talking about his actual life.

Everything we do in life has a risk, either emotionally, mentally, or physically. And whether we believe it or not, all of us engage in activities every single day that could potentially kill us, or at the very least increase

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our chance of death. We drive cars, we eat fast food, we might drink alcohol. We might smoke. We might ride our bikes in traffic.

There is a risk in everything we do. So when I thought of it in this way, I thought to myself, why not do what you love even if there is a risk involved? And think about this; would you rather die doing what you loved or die without having tried and spending your time that you do get to live avoiding the unavoidable, which is you're going to die? It's kind of crazy when you think about it, right?

So we are going to feel fear no matter what. It's just a part of the human experience. But if you are committed to something, then you take acts of courage to move towards your goal, even when you're feeling the emotion of fear and scared.

I'm going to use myself as an example. I have known for years that I was compelled to combine my passion and knowledge of personal development with school leadership and education. However, I resisted taking the action for years. And here's why; the thoughts going through my mind were things like, I don't think educators are interested in learning about personal development, even though I have witnessed so much pain and suffering in education. I don't know how I would go about sharing this information with them. I don't have the time to work fulltime and be a life coach for school leaders. I actually need my district paycheck so I can't really quit and start a new business, I just can't do both.

No matter how much I tried to shove down the desire to leave my job as a principal and start this business, and really I was shoving it down only because I wanted to stay in my comfort zone and stay in what I knew how to do. I continued to feel compelled beyond my comprehension that I needed to step out of education in order to help fellow educators.

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Once I finally shifted my thoughts to there has to be a way, I'll figure this out, the universe started creating situations that either allowed me to guide me through the course of completing the job I was set out to do in education, resign from the job that I so dearly love, and jump into my new endeavor.

Resigning from my position after 22 years was not because I was feeling confident. It wasn't because I was feeling competent in being a coach. It was because I was so committed to my dream that I acted out of courage in spite of the intensity of fears I had about leaving and leaving a paycheck, leaving the people I loved, leaving my school district of 22 years. Courage is not comfortable, you guys. So when you say you want courage, what you mean is that you want to act in courage in spite of fear.

Number three, the third C is capability. The minute you take action and follow through with what you said you would do, you immediately start to gain the sense that you are capable. When you act out of courage, you give your brain evidence that you have the capacity to do hard or scary things.

Our brain will usually lock down in fear until we take the action. But as soon as you take the action, like immediately afterward, your brain is going to say, oh that wasn't so bad. Or maybe it just said, we survived that, right?

I think about the time my sister and I took our kids to a water park. They wanted me to go down this really steep and really fast waterslide. I absolutely did not want to go. I'm super afraid of heights by the way, guys. I'll tell you my zip-lining story another day.

But anyway, I'm on this waterslide and the kids just were chiding me until I resigned and I said okay, fine, I'll do it. And as I'm walking up the stairs, the entire time, my body is clenching. My heart's racing, my muscles are clenched. I could hardly breathe.

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I got up to the top. I got to the edge of the slide and I froze in fear. There were two slides side by side so that you could take a friend and kind of race down together. So my sister was next to me, she sat down. She just threw herself down the slide right away, didn't stop to think, didn't let fear get in the way. She just went.

I sat there letting my brain paralyze me in fear. And after what felt like 10 minutes to me, and it probably was more like 10 seconds, the lifeguard just gave me a gentle nudge and down I went. I was down that slide in probably three to five seconds. And as soon as I stood up, I thought, I did it, I survived, that wasn't so bad.

It really wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. And then once I did it, I wasn't nearly as afraid to go again. Now, was I a competent and confident waterslider? No, I've done it one time. But I did shift my thought from believing that it was impossible for me to go up those stairs and go down the slide because I really thought – like, my body thought I was going to die, my brain thought I was going to die.

I shifted into feeling capable of doing something even though it was unpleasant for me. I knew I was capable of doing it because I did it once. And that, you guys, is a major, major step towards achieving any goal that you want.

We must be willing to experience unpleasant emotion, the fear, the vibration that feels so intense, in order to achieve the highly pleasant accomplishments, such as success, pride, like, just meeting a goal, like that super exhilaration of achievement. In order to have that high, you've got to experience the fear.

So the fourth C, and this is the C that I have added in the process because I believe there's a difference between being capable of something and

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being competent in something. So I added competency as number four of the five Cs.

To me, knowing you're capable means that you believe you can do it or you've proven to yourself that you've done it once before, and that although you might not be competent at it yet, you know that you have the ability to take the action and do the task at hand. That's being capable. That's believing, like, okay I know that I can do it. I'm not really sure but I know I can. I don't feel super competent quite yet but I've done it before.

When you shift into competency, that's when you realize, wait a minute, I've done this more than once, I know how to do it. I'm still adjusting, I'm still learning my ways, but I'm starting to believe. It's like being 80% or 90% at the goal versus being at 10% or 20%. So competency, I feel like, is a steppingstone into number five, the fifth C, which ultimately is confidence.

Once you've done a task many, many times, you've reflected on your practice of it and you've adjusted as necessary, you're going to feel a sense of confidence whenever that task is required of you. It's the difference between hosting your third principal's coffee ever versus your 15th, or starting up your second year as a principal versus starting up your fifth year as a principal.

Your second year, you know you can start up the year, you have the capacity to start up the year because you're like I've done this once before, I know I have the capacity to do it again. Not feeling super confident quite yet, not sure I have all the capabilities, but I know I can.

When you're into your fifth, sixth, seventh, 10th year, you're feeling confident. You know what to do. You know how to run the school. You know what to do when parents come at you, when they want to change the teacher or they're brand new to the school. You know the drill. So that's when you shift into confidence.

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Confidence comes when you take the actions over and over again to the point that they are engrained in your brain and your body. It's like driving a car after 20 years. You don't have to get in the car and think about every single little baby step every time, you just get in and drive.

But I also want to note one more thing; there are people who are competent at what they do, they do know how to do the job, they've done it many times, but they don't feel confidence. And why is this? It's because they don't believe they are competent. Do you see that little shift? You can be competent but not feel confident.

This is because the feeling of confidence comes from what? It comes from our thoughts, not our level of experience. So you can be a 20-year veteran and still feel like you're not competent. In order to move into confidence, the certainty that comes with confidence – here, certainty, there's another C – you must believe you're competent. Do you see the connection? It all stems back to your thinking.

So many of my clients want to jump into feeling confident and they want to skip all the emotions and all the work that comes beforehand. Here's the deal, guys, confidence cannot be the emotion you feel when you're doing something for the first or even second time. Confidence only comes from experience. It is earned and it comes from the belief that you are capable and competent.

People might say they're confident before they ever do something, and I've thought about this and I had to think about this when I was writing the podcast, but really I kind of question if it's true confidence or they're just so super committed and resolved to their goal that even though they don't really know how to do something or they have a little bit of fear, they're not sure how to do it with ease and automaticity, they're willing to do whatever it takes to figure it out and practice it enough times to truly build confidence. Can you see the difference in that?

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That's my take on it. I'd love to know what you think about it. Okay, let's summarize. You must be willing to experience commitment and courage before you begin to feel a sense of capability, competency, and confidence. The commitment to your goal and the courage that it takes to take action prior to knowing your capability is how you're going to build competency and feel confident.

To my aspiring leaders out there, if you want to become a principal, you have to commit to the thought that you are a school principal, that it's possible to become a school principal. Envision yourself in the position, allow yourself to feel how being in that position will resonate in your body and use that vibration to propel you into taking the action of applying, interviewing, getting rejected, and finally accepting your first tenureship.

New school leaders, if you're at the end of your first or second or even your third year, first of all, congratulations, you did it, I am so proud of you, you should be proud of you. Please, please do this step. Take some time at the end of the year to reflect. Reflect on the year. What worked? What didn't? And what do you want to do for next year so that you can build up your capacity and your competency which will promote your confidence?

I am confident that you've got this, my empowered leaders. Go get it. I love you guys. I'll talk with 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.