

## Ep #80: Leadership Fraud



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 80.

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.

Can you believe that we have been recording podcasts for 80 episodes? Holy cow, what is going on? How are you guys doing? Happy summer. I love summer. Do you love summer? Do you know what I love best about summer? I love waking up to the sunshine, on the days at the beach when the sun is actually out in the morning, which is rare.

But today was one of those days. I woke up. It was like 5:45 in the morning and it was fully light out. It was so amazing. I got up, I worked out, and I'm killing it today. So, I hope you guys are in your happy place this summer and I really hope that you are taking in all of the joys of your summer and that you're saying a lot of yeses to yourself.

I was just texting back and forth with one of my followers on the podcast and she follows me on social media and I was asking her, what is she doing for fun this summer? So she has got it going on. She's going to Hawaii. She is not taking her technology with her, which I think is fabulous. So I love that you're saying yes to yourself.

When I think back to my summers, like, back when I was a school leader and Alex was little, it felt so indulgent to spend the day at the pool with him. And all of his friends would come over. We actually didn't have a pool but my neighbor across the street did. Her name was Jenny. Shout-out to Jenny. She had a great pool.

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She let me bring the kids, spend the day. We just spent the whole summers over at her pool. It was so much fun. The kids would be in the pool splashing around and I would have the music blasting and I would sit back and read tons of books and magazines and just relish in that day watching my kiddo play in the water with his friends. It was so much fun.

And actually, now that I'm without child – he's at college, he's working over the summer down at his campus – and I'm not in school anymore, I'm coaching school leaders, summer feels really different to me now that I'm in a different kind of rhythm. So it feels a little bit off and I miss that school year summer energy in some ways, because you could let it all hang out, not think about work for a while and summer just felt so amazing. And now, it's like, I'm working through my summer. But I love what I do so it's all good, right?

Anyway, I love what I do now, I loved what I did then, and it's interesting because I've had to create this more consistent approach to my work year so I don't have that all or none mentality like I did back when I was a principal. But one thing I want to mention, and I'm intentionally doing so to trigger you a little bit, is that you are already halfway through your summer break. And soon enough, sooner than you'd like, you will be back at work and you will be in full on go-mode in just a few weeks.

If the thought of work puts knots in your stomach and make your head cringe just a little bit, then we've got some thought work to do, my friend. If you want to enjoy the school year as much as you enjoy your summer, or even enjoy close to as much as you do the summer, just a little bit more, then you have to come and check out Principal Empowerment, which is my personalized coaching program where we take concepts from the book and the podcast and we directly apply them to your specific situation.

We take all of this to a deeper level. I know, the last thing your brain wants to do right now is think about work and dredge up all of those feelings of

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worry and doubt and overwhelm and stress and fatigue, but I'm telling you, having a coach who has your back during the rough times and who can help you work through the intense emotions while you're in them can completely change the way you feel about the job. So if you're ready to feel better about your role as a school leader, come and check out Principal Empowerment.

Okay, speaking of enjoying our job, we're going to talk about one reason why we don't enjoy our job so much. And that thing is what I call leadership fraud. When I refer to leadership fraud, I'm not talking about being unethical as a leader, as in fraudulent leadership. What I mean by leadership fraud is when we have the belief that we aren't really qualified to be a leader; that we're not good enough, we don't know how, or that in some way we're just kind of faking it until we make it. How many times have you heard that, fake it until you make it?

You're told to do that as a strategy as a leader. I'm going to tell you, I am here to rebuttal that. Let's talk about it. You know that thought that pops into our heads at work that says, oh my gosh, I do not know what I'm doing here. Somebody comes up to you and asks you a question and you're like, I have no idea.

But we also don't want people to find out that we don't know. You know that feeling. You know what I'm talking about. I have been there and I'm sure you have too. We have experienced this feeling in our lives to some capacity and it can hinder us from being confident and poised as a leader if we let it get into our heads for too long.

So, let's talk about this fraud complex, what it is, and why we have it. If you think about times you have felt like a fraud, it is most commonly when we are new to something. Think back to your first year as a teacher. Were there times when a parent or a colleague asked you a question that you didn't know the answer to? Or when you weren't sure how to teach a

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concept to your students, you most likely experienced the fraud feeling when you were new to teaching. And now that you are new to being a leader, you are experiencing it again.

It's totally normal when we get hired for a job that we've never done before to experience bouts of feeling like a fraud. Any time we try something new that we believe we should know how to do even though we could not possibly know how to do it if we haven't actually done it yet, our brains tell us that we should know how to do it or that we should know the answers. It triggers emotions of feeling like a fake.

I have found that fraud feelings are especially strong when we are in the position of leading other people. This is because we know that other people are watching and they are taking note of our actions, and that we're not just responsible for ourselves, we're having to be responsible for other people. So we worry about what they will think of us, which paralyzes us in fear about their judgments on us.

And this is even more true for those who deeply care about others and what they think of us. There are principals who've been in the job for years and who still believe that they don't know what they are doing. So having the experience, just the numbers of years on your timeframe or on your clock, doesn't necessarily exempt you from feeling leadership fraud.

The reason for this is because our brain is telling you a story that you don't know enough, that you're not good enough, and that you don't really know what you're doing and that you should know what you are doing. That's the rub. That story that you're not enough but you should be triggers emotions of insecurity, doubt, indecisiveness, embarrassment, hesitancy, uncertainty, all the feels.

And when you feel this way, you want to hide your lack of skill and knowledge and pretend that you do know and have all the answers. That's

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like our protective mechanism that kicks in. We want to portray this perfectionism person out there because we believe that being right and knowing what we're doing and doing exactly everything correctly and precisely is how leaders should be and that people will like us when we know that we're doing the job and that we're doing the job well, we're doing the job right.

Really, what our brain is looking for is the accolades that people like us and they like what we're doing, they like our work. The problem with this, guys, is that people can see through it. You can see through it when somebody else is doing it. They can see through it when we are doing it.

They know what you know and don't know by the way you approach the job, by the way you approach the decisions, how you make decisions, and by the results you have as a leader. You know how people say that dogs can smell fear in a person, well, I believe people can do it too. You might be able to fake it for a while and people will think, oh she's really got it pulled together. But in the end, people are humans, humans are animals, and animals can tell over time when you're trying to be a leader that isn't truly you.

Trying to mask your fears by pretending you know what you're doing and not admitting when you don't know something just leads people not to trust you because they won't be sure when you really do know what you're doing and when you're faking it. So they're going to be a little bit leery of you.

Let me share a story with you. I've worked with a school leader who strongly values being viewed by others as being smart. In her first leadership role, she was really excited and she had all kinds of ideas of how she was going to make these changes and be this amazing leader. She approached the position with the mindset that she needed to have all of the answers to any question that she was presented with.

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She felt like being a good leader meant knowing what to do in every situation, and so she presented herself as being very knowledgeable and capable, even though she was new to the job. She never let them see her sweat. Do you know what I'm saying?

So once the job got rolling and she got in the thick of it and you-know-what started hitting the fan, she tried to keep up this persona of having all the answers, which of course, she didn't, nobody does. And what happened for her is she completely exhausted herself trying to keep up with her image. She was also emotionally and mentally spent because, at a deeper level, she was completely out of integrity and alignment.

She was pretending to be capable and she was faking her way through the job and it didn't feel good at all. And as time went on, she continued to choose to believe, she held on really tightly to her belief. She wanted to be right. Can you see it?

She wanted to be right. She wanted to believe that her thoughts about leadership were right, so she clung onto the belief that having all the answers and being right was the correct way to lead her school. And her subordinates could see the discrepancies and that their faith in her leadership failed.

It started to fade. It dropped off. They started to ask less questions, pay less attention to her answers. Their trust in her waned and her ability to create influence and impact as a leader was pretty much nonexistent. She was not willing to question whether her belief as to what a good leader is was correct – at least correct in this situation, correct for her.

So, here's the deal; when you are new, no one expects you to have all of the answers. No one believes that you should know how to do everything. They don't want you to be perfect and I know it feels like they do when they come at you and bombard you with questions and wanting you to solve all

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of their problems. I get it. But what they really want from you deep down, they want you to be honest.

They do. They want you to be supportive. They want you to hear them. They want you to empower them to solve their own problems. And I don't mean listen to them and then at the end of it all say, "Go figure it out, I'm busy, I don't have time for this." That's really frustrating, right?

What I'm suggesting is that when somebody comes to you with an issue and you have no idea how to solve it, whether you're new or now doesn't matter. And, by the way, if you're an expert leader or you're a veteran leader, there will still be things that come across your plate that you won't know. There always is.

I can't even tell you, six years in as a leader I was still like, whoa, never heard this one before, got to figure out how to solve this one. So there will be things that come across your plate you just don't know.

Instead of pretending like you do or faking it, you can say something like this, "Wow, that's a new one for me, I haven't thought about that before. I can see why that's a problem. I'm going to have to look into that and get back to you. I need to research this a little bit more."

Or even if you don't quite see why their problem is a problem, like what is the deal here, you just ask them, "Tell me more about this. How is this impacting you? Where specifically is the problem? What is the specific issue and what, in your eyes, would help to make it better? Let's work through this together."

And you aren't saying this because you're going to solve the problem for them. That's not why you're asking these questions. What you are doing is you're digging deeper so that you can see what they are thinking. You're



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looking for the sentences in their brain because, remember this, it's only a problem to them because of the way they are thinking. So your job as their leader is to understand why they think that something is a problem.

You know, two teachers can have the exact same situation, one thinks it's a problem and the other doesn't. That's how you know problems stem from thoughts. And once you know what they're thinking, then you can ask questions and coach them on their thoughts versus trying to solve the problem, the exterior situation for them.

They don't get this yet, but you do. And here's why you do this; if you try to help a teacher solve a problem without understanding why he or she thinks that it's a problem, you could spend all day giving them suggestions for solutions, and if it doesn't match and solve the problem in their mind, if your solution doesn't match their problem, they're going to reject every suggestion you give them.

Haven't you been through this before? You know, you're listening to a friend or a colleague complain about a problem, they're coming to you telling you the whole story, and our instinct, especially as a leader or as a mother, you know, or as a friend even, you want to start throwing out solutions, like did you try this or that? And for every solution you give, they're like, no, that won't work, nope, tried that once, didn't really make a difference, yeah I don't think that's really what's going on here.

It's super frustrating for you and for them. And that's because you don't know exactly why they think it's a problem. So the suggestions you're providing are, like, you know, shooting in the dark. You have no idea. So you have to get really good at asking really good questions.

You guys, this is so good. I'm totally going on a tangent right now, but being a leader is just like being a coach. The focus of my work as a coach is not to assume that I know what a client's problem is. They'll tell me at

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that surface, but I don't assume I know everything about the problem because they've told me two or three things. My job is to dig deeper and deeper and deeper by asking a ton of questions so that they can think about the problem and find the thoughts that are making it a problem.

You want to do this too. You want to not assume that you know their problem or that you even know the solution based on the first thing or two that they said. All of us will say something is a problem, but on the surface, our brain always calls out the problem and blames it on something outside of us.

People say, "It's the bell schedule. It's the grade level. It's the traffic. It's the yard duty." Our brains are never first going to come up with the thought, it's my thinking that's the problem or I'm believing that the bell schedule is the reason why I'm not getting all of my math lessons done in time, but actually it's my thinking about it and I can control what I think and how I get my math lessons done, by choosing to think I have plenty of time.

No, people don't do this. That's not how our brains are wired to think. You have to be intentional about it. You have to be aware that you're, one, complaining, two, that you think you have a problem, three, what are the thoughts that are causing this problem?

Our brains just go into blame as the default. So when you as a school leader, when people come to you with a problem, you have to help them see that the problem is a result of their thinking and that you do this by asking great questions until they are able to articulate the problem in explicit detail.

Now listen, teachers who are not familiar with personal development tools are not going to come to the realization that their thoughts are why they feel the way they do. You know this because you're listening to this podcast and you're studying it. And you telling them, with them having no

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background knowledge, is going to come across as you being the crazy one.

They're going to be like, what are you talking about? What about my thoughts? No, there's a problem out here, quit talking about my thoughts. They have no concept of this. That is our job as empowered leaders. It's to create awareness of thought work. It's to ask them the questions that allow them to explore their thoughts about the problem until they start to see that they have ideas about how they might go about solving it.

Oh my god, you guys, this is such a good topic. I think I'm going to do a training for school leaders on how to help teachers solve their own problems. This is brilliant stuff. Sorry, I have totally taken this on a tangent, but it's really powerful. The takeaway here is this; it's okay to be new. It's okay not to know all the answers. It's okay to take on problems you've never faced before or that you don't know how to solve.

There is a difference between faking that you know the answer when you actually don't and you're pretending to be perfect and that you know everything, versus being willing to take on a big issue that you have no idea how to face but you're going to choose to do it the best that you can step by step.

Sure, you're going to make mistakes along the way, right, that's how you learn. When I first started this podcast, and my producer Pavel can attest to this, I was a nervous wreck. It took me hours and days to write one little podcast and then it took me forever to record it, and then even the best of the best was a C-plus, like, it wasn't that great. And you can hear it. Go to the beginning of my podcast. You can hear my comfort level from podcast one to podcast 80.

You have to make mistakes. You have to be willing to put yourself out there and just do it the best of your ability at the time, let it go, keep going, keep

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trying. You're not going to know how to do something until you do it. Then you will know what worked and what didn't only after you have tried it.

So, saying I don't know how I will solve this but we're going to give it our best is the way to approach any time you're feeling like a fraud. Just be honest. Say you don't know. We're going to approach this issue with the resolve of trying to improve it. I'm going to do the best that I know how. It won't be perfect, but I'm going to try. We're going to try something. We're going to see if it works and we're just going to keep at it until we've figured it out. That's what empowered leadership looks like.

Now, one more thing I want to talk about in terms of leadership fraud – and I would be remiss if I did not point this out as well. When you feel like a fraud – and I highlight the word feel, and where do our feelings come from? Thoughts – it's because you believe you are being a fraud or you are acting like a fraud.

So if you feel awkward in your role as a leader, I want you to check yourself and see, is it because you're new and you're a little afraid because you don't know what to do and sometimes you feel like, I've got to just figure it out, I don't know, or is it because you've been busy faking it until you make it?

There are times when we believe we should be faking it when we don't know something. And when we decide to approach our job in this way, our energy is going to be working on hiding the fact that we don't know something. That's a lot of work.

And isn't that the very definition of being a fraud? It's pretending to be somebody or someone or something that you're not. So there are times when the reason we feel like a fraud is because we are being one. And being willing to see the truth in this is everything.

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Think about this, guys, are there times when you ask your staff to do something that you aren't willing to do yourself? Do you ask them to take on responsibilities that are extra at the site level but then you don't offer yourself for extra responsibilities at the district level? Do you ask them to have a mentor and solicit feedback from them and to get feedback and to work on their thinking but you don't have a mentor or a coach or solicit feedback for yourself?

Come on now, be honest. Do you have them keeping pace with the lesson pacing guide but you are behind in your own work? See what I'm talking about? When we feel like a fraud, we're out of alignment. And that is why I am a coach. And it's why I have a coach, because it's really, really hard to hold ourselves accountable, and at the same time, not beat ourselves up when we're out of integrity.

I mean, humans are out of integrity all the time because we're human and we flip back and forth from feeling aligned to not feeling aligned. So that's why having somebody outside of you to hold yourself accountable in a loving way and to kind of protect you from yourself when you beat yourself up, I said I knew this and I didn't and I'm such a bad leader, and we just do that to ourselves. And then we feel bad about feeling bad about feeling bad. It's just a bad cycle.

So, having a coach helps you hold that space for yourself, but also hold you accountable. It's my job to love my clients so, so much that I keep asking them the questions gently, or maybe not so gently, nudging them from time to time in order for them to answer the question for themselves so that they see they have the power to solve their own pain points.

I don't solve pain points for people. They learn to solve it for themselves. So when they're not yet ready to do that, I just hold that space for them and I believe in them, for them, until they're able to believe in themselves for themselves. My coach does this for me as well. She pushes me to see how

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my thinking is the creator of my results and my suffering and she asks me questions to deeply understand my belief systems.

And, to be honest, when I'm not quite ready to give something up and I'm holding onto a belief, she will just lovingly hold that space for me and allow me to stay in suffering, basically, until I'm finally ready to let that go and release that thought and bring in some new thoughts. And sometimes it takes us a while. It's okay.

Being out of alignment and integrity feels awful, yet we do it to ourselves all of the time, no matter what your profession or your job title, whether you're a teacher, you're a district leader, you're the superintendent, you're the site leader, we all have this. We all do it.

You have two stories going on in your head that are in direct conflict, which is creating the stress and the pain. One of the stories is the story that you are the victim of your situation and that story is collecting evidence all day long to prove that in fact you are the victim to outside circumstances. Your brain's going to, like, collect evidence, like see, I don't know how to do my job because that parent was angry and talked about me on social media.

The other story going on in your head is that you are not a victim. You're trying to disprove the first story. So, you want to create a story that says I'm simply new to the job and I'm learning, I don't have to know everything, perfection is not the goal. And this story, which usually is like the weaker muscle – if you're lifting weights, you've got a dominant hand and a less dominant hand and both muscles are trying to get stronger, the goal is you want the weaker muscle to gain over the stronger muscle.

So, you want that story to collect evidence that you're building up your capacity, your empowerment, and your impact as a leader. You want to grab onto sentences like this; I was scared to meet with that parent but I did it, even though they were angry, I did my best to listen to them and manage

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my emotions during the meeting. I made it through. It wasn't perfect, but I did it. Those types of proofs of evidence will help you build up your capacity, your courage, your confidence, and ultimately just who you are as a leader.

You have to consciously decide to collect the evidence that best serves you. So does it serve you to keep thinking you're a victim of your job? Or does it serve you to take risks and prove to your brain that you are not a fraud, that you are a human who is learning how to lead a school and that you are learning to take imperfect action every single day and that you're open to feeling the emotions that come with imperfection, vulnerability, and at times, failure?

I know you hate to hear that but it's true. I want you to keep this in mind. I just got interviewed today for Rebelpreneur Radio and I said this at the end and I just thought it was so brilliant I want to add it here at the end of this podcast. The capacity to which you can lead your school and your team and have a significant impact is directly correlated to the capacity to which you are willing to explore your thoughts, call yourself out when you're faking it, and feel the emotions that come with growth, change, and transformation.

So I really went off today, you guys. I'm sorry, but this is good stuff. My brain is on fire today. Let's summarize what we've talked about. Number one, leadership fraud. It happens to everyone. We're all new at something at some point. You have to bring the skills you've learned along the way and apply them to your new position. You have to be honest with yourself, you have to lean into the discomfort of saying you don't know.

People will be forgiving and will trust you even more than if you're trying to fake it all the time, so just stop it. Tell themselves, allow yourself to be new. You're only going to feel like a fraud when you're trying to hide the fact that



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you don't know what you're doing, and your energy is going to the hiding versus the learning.

So let them see that you don't know. Show them what it looks like not to know and to figure it out. Empower them through your example. Let them know you're willing to try and fail, share your fails openly, and let them know that your intent is not perfection. It's progress and evolution as a school leader.

Number two, ask yourself great questions. What if you did know the answer? What would you say? How would you solve it? What would a veteran leader do? How do they go about their day? Who do they ask for advice and support? What thoughts are they thinking that are creating feelings of being an empowered leader?

Now, ask yourself this too. Do I want to continue believing thoughts that cause me pain? Yes or no. What's another thought I can think that serves me better? Also, ask these same questions of your team. You have to train them on the thinking process. I'm totally going to create professional development for you guys on this. I'm so excited right now I can't even believe it. So excited.

Finally, plan who you want to be as a leader ahead of time. You build your confidence by taking action as the leader you want to become. So plan a daily risk. Do it. Reflect on it. Run STEAR cycles with self-confidence in the E line, the emotion line, and see what you would have to think and how you would have to act if your emotion was self-confidence. Try that one on for size, guys.

So there you have it. Fabulous content. I didn't even know that was going to pour out of my brain today and I want to hear from you. I want to know, is this podcast working for you? Are you getting the concepts? Are you applying them? Where are you stuck? What do you need help with? Let me

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know. Reach out to me on social media or stop by the website and drop me a line. I look forward to hearing from you guys.

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