

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss



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Angela Kelly

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Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 91.

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, my dear friends. Happy Tuesday. I am so happy to be here with you. Welcome to the end of September. I cannot believe how fast time is flying. I am very excited to share this episode with you. As the last of the theme for the month of September – we have been talking about how to build teams, how we think about teams, how to build the foundation of teams, how to navigate team conflict, what to do when we have thoughts about the teams on our campus.

And finally, we're going to wrap up with an interesting way of looking at teams. We're going to talk about how to team with your boss. Instead of believing that they control you, this conversation came up when I was presenting at the National Association of Elementary School Principals. It was fascinating.

I called people up onstage and asked them to be coached on a situation that they were dealing with. And one of the women who raised her hand and came up to the stage was a woman who felt like she did not have a good relationship with her boss, she didn't feel like they were on the same team. And she felt that her overriding thought was that her boss has control over her.

So I looked out to the audience and I asked, how many people feel like their boss has control over them. And people were like, duh, hello, of course they do. So I really want to address this.

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

I actually created a video and sent it out to the people who attended the presentation because I wanted to follow through on this. We started coaching on it, but it was the end of the session and we had to wrap up. So I wanted to elaborate on this.

I want to talk about how you can frame the way you look at this and think about your boss and decide, from yourself, whether you want to team up with your boss or how you want to engage with your boss. And you can do so and you can build a relationship with your boss without them changing at all.

And I know most people don't believe that, but there is a way to have a relationship with somebody completely based on the way that you choose to interact and you choose to engage and they don't have to change at all and you can have a beautiful relationship with them.

So, let's talk about how to build a team with your boss instead of choosing to believe that they have control over you and that they impose their power upon you.

So, I'm going to start with an analogy that I want you to think about laws. There are laws in our country. In the United States, we have laws and the laws are just a situation. They are neutral in and of themselves. And you get to think whatever you want about a law.

You can love it. You can hate it. You can care less about it either way. You can just be completely neutral about it. How you think about that law is completely up to you. The law doesn't change or go away just because you don't like it and it doesn't have more power over anyone if you love it. The law is just there.

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

And based upon what you think of said law, you will feel either positively, negatively, or neutral whenever you think about that law. And your feelings about the law are completely based on what you think about the law.

So, based on whether or agree with the law or not, and how passionate you are about that law in your opinion and your position regarding that law, you may choose to act in accordance with that law or in opposition of that law. So we're going to take an example.

The example is speeding laws. Scenario one is there is a law against speeding, that's the situation. And in this scenario, you might completely agree that we should have speed limits. You might believe that they help keep people safe. You feel good that speed limits are in place, especially if you're like me and you have a teenage driver in your house.

You might really agree with speed limits. And whenever you think of your teen driving around town, you are so glad that there are speed limits and you are sure to also follow the speed limit yourself because you want to honor the limits, you want to be an example to other drivers, you want to see your teen following the limit.

So based on what you believe about the speed limit laws, you are going to feel and act in a certain way. And the way you think about speed limits is impacted by your personal experiences. In the case of that teen driver, you have a new awareness of the value of those speed limits and the reason and the rationale behind the limits. And because you love your teen, most days – no you love them all the days, come on – you choose to honor that law.

And as a result of your choices, you do not receive speeding tickets and you may or may not be ever involved in a traffic accident because you choose to honor the speed limit. So, that's scenario one. That's the case of where you approve of the law, you believe in the law, you like the law.

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

Scenario two is there's a law against speeding. It's just neutral. And you disagree with that law. You believe that we should not have the speed limits. You believe that the law is unnecessary, it's over-controlling and it crushes your sense of fun and adventure and you despise that speed limit. And you feel that they're too low and the government spends millions of dollars on all the signs and the postings and the traffic officers and every time you think about that law, your skin just crawls.

You may choose, based on these thoughts and emotions, to act in advocacy of removing speed limits. Or maybe you choose to go whatever speed you want and regardless of the posted limits, you're just going to go how fast you want to go.

Now, as a result of your choices, you might crash, you might injure yourself or others, you might get a speeding ticket, you might lose your license, you might get arrested. Or maybe not. Maybe none of those things happen. Maybe you speed all the time and you never get caught. We don't know the result of those choices until they're made, until the result happens.

So there's a third scenario here. There's a law against speeding. That's neutral. And you might agree that limits are important and work for some types of roads or maybe certain locations, but you disagree on the posted limit in a certain area. Or maybe you believe that you have a different idea of how police officers should go about implementing the speed limits. Maybe they shouldn't be so harsh with their measurements. Maybe they should allow second chances or lower the cost of speeding tickets or whatever.

But as much as you disagree at times with the speed limits or how the officers approach the speed limit, you're going to choose to follow the law, not because you love the law or you agree completely with the law, or maybe you don't even agree with the consequences all the time, but you're

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

going to choose to follow the law in order to not create results in your life that you do not want.

So you choose not to speed, not because the law is just there, but because you do not want to risk getting the potential outcomes or the results that come from speeding. So in this approach, you're intentionally choosing not to be open to certain results. Therefore, your decisions and your actions not to speed come from you.

The decision not to speed is not coming from the law or the officer. They're coming from a place of your personal empowerment. You choose that action based on your not wanting to create a result that you do not want. So instead of blaming the officers and blaming the law and blaming the consequences, you take over your empowerment and you're going to take action based on you not wanting to be the victim of some given situation, which is laws and speeding tickets and all the things.

Here's where I believe our brains get confused. I believe that we confuse positional authority and people controlling us. And so in the case of speed limits, the law grants the authority to police officers in their position to take action if you choose to break the law.

The law itself does not control us, our behaviors, whether or not we choose to speed. It can't force you not to speed. And how do we know the law cannot force us not to speed? Because people speed, right? Regardless of the speed limit, people are out there speeding. So the law in and of itself does not control whether or not people speed.

The law gives people in certain positions, meaning police officers in this case, the authorization to take a certain set of actions when they observe individuals speeding. The decision of how fast you are going to drive is completely up to you. Your decision to speed or not speed comes from

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

your thoughts and feelings about speeding and speed limits and about your thoughts and feelings about the potential results of those actions.

The law provides positional authority to police officers and allows them to take action towards your action of speeding. The police don't have control over you or your brain. They don't have a little remote control deciding how you're going to think and feel and act. They do, however, have the authority to engage with you based on your actions because of their positional authority.

Their actions towards you create another situation. And the way that you feel and respond to the police stopping you while you're speeding is based on what you're thinking; things like they shouldn't stop me, they're being unreasonable, they're just trying to meet their quota, whatever you're thinking. Their action of stopping you is nothing about you.

It's about their thoughts, their beliefs, their emotions regarding the speed limit law, and their thoughts about their job. They're acting in accordance to what they believe they should be doing or what they feel is their job to do.

Okay, so what does all this speeding have to do with your boss? Let's bring it back to your boss. Many of you principals believe that your superintendent has control over you and how you run your school. The fact that they are in the position of superintendent and that you are in the position of principal gives them positional authority to take action regarding your position as a speeding driver, and your boss's position allows him or her the authority to take action over your position as a principal.

And the key is to understand that they have authority over the position, not the person. So, how our brain interprets this positional authority is that it believes your thoughts and actions are controlled by the actual person who has the authority. But if this were true, then you would not be able to do something different than what they want you to do. They would be able to

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

literally control your actions. You would not have the ability to choose other choices or other actions.

It's like if the law were in control or the police were in control of your actions and they were controlling you, then you'd be like a little puppet. You'd be doing whatever it is that they wanted. You'd be following the limit against your will basically.

So you have to understand that it doesn't quite work this way. So choosing to believe that they have control over you versus their positional authority has control over the position you are in causes you a lot of pain and frustration as leaders.

And here's the nuance; when you choose to follow your superintendents initiative and mandates and requests from the belief that you have to and it's because they have control over you, the emotions that trigger from these thoughts are frustration and resentment, anger, disempowerment, undervalued, incapacitated to take action, and so on. There's going to be all kinds of thoughts that you're having, and emotions.

But, if you choose to follow your superintendent's initiatives from the thought that I choose to follow the mandates, either because you actually do believe in the mandates yourself and you're in alignment with them. And even when they're not easy to implement, you're going to try. Or because you choose not to open yourself up to the potential results that you don't want, you are taking back your power of choice.

It feels very different to believe the thought, "I'm intentionally choosing to follow the mandates," over, "I have to follow the mandates," or, "I have no choice but to follow the mandates." Those thoughts, like he's controlling me, she's controlling me, those feel terrible. They don't serve you as a leader, nor do they put you in an empowered state of mind and energy.

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

And we know, because we are leaders of people, that leaders cannot force or control other people's behavior. If we could, life as a school leader would be so much easier. So when you're believing that your boss has control over you, then you're actually believing that you have control over your subordinates, and that can't be true, right?

But what is true is that you and they have positional authority to take actions regarding the other position. So you have positional authority to take action over teaching positions, and your superintendent has the positional authority to take action on your position as a school leader.

So you may choose to act in accordance with what your boss asks of you because you choose not to be criticized, critiques, reprimanded, demoted, fired, whatever. You do not want these potential outcomes to become your result, therefore you are choosing to act in accordance with what she or he asks of you.

Basically, what you're doing is you're choosing to align your actions based on their request. And their request isn't law, per se, although sometimes we treat it as such. But because of their positional authority, they can take a set of actions regarding your position that you may not want or like.

The thoughts around those negative results impact your decision and how you approach your job. Or it could be that you choose not to follow your superintendent's recommendations and requests. You might decide that your commitment to your beliefs and values is more important to you than the potential results of a negative review, a reprimand, or being even let go from your job.

So some people value keeping the job. Other people value holding true to what they believe is most important for their school. So either way, your boss can never control your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions, ever, ever, ever. Only you get to decide how you're going to approach leading

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

your school based on your own thoughts, feelings, and actions. And where we feel trapped is when we believe that we are under their control.

And here's why; we want to control the outcome of the results. Think of the speeding law. We don't like the law. We don't like that it tells us how to drive, but we choose whether or not we're going to follow it based on any potential outcomes.

So their positional authority over your position as a school leader allows them to take actions in response to your actions. Your actions are neutral. Her or his actions are neutral.

Each of you has a STEAR Cycle running on each of your reactions to one another's actions. And the same is true for your boss. Your boss is going to make decisions and take actions based on their thinking and their emotions. So you can hate the law all you want and you can spend tons of time and energy focusing on how much you hate it and how much you want it to change, but ultimately, the truth is this; your boss has positional authority over your position.

They have the ability to take action regarding the position you hold, but they don't have control over you or your brain. And there is a difference.

As I mentioned, think of this from the perspective of your teachers. You, as the principal, have positional authority over their teaching positions. If a teacher continually chooses not to follow your directives, you can decide not to reelect that teacher for hire, if they're not tenured yet, and you have been given the authority based on your position to make this decision.

You have control over who is in the position but not control over the person who is in that position in terms of how they think, feel, and act. Your decision to let the person go is simply a situation. Your brain can make it

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

mean whatever you want it to mean and your teacher's brain gets to make it mean whatever they want it to mean.

So you don't have control over what they're making your decision mean to let them go. Perhaps their brain might mean that you ruined her career and that her life is over. Or she could make it mean that it's completely fine and that she wanted a change of pace and she's fine with leaving. You don't know. You don't get to decide how they think and feel.

This is why I know that you get to decide how you think and feel about how you relate to your boss. So, how do you want to relate to your boss? What kind of team do you want to build with your boss? You get to decide to build a team with your boss however you want. They never have to change. You can make peace with your boss for who they are and what they think and how they feel and act regardless of them changing or you changing.

You can create this all on your own. So you can choose to fully agree and comply and just be happy that you've chosen that choice because you want to stay in the position and you choose not to have the consequences of potentially losing the position. Or you can choose to disagree openly, share your ideas, have the courageous conversation and discussion, don't attach to the outcomes.

Maybe your boss will agree with you. Give them the opportunity to hear you out. Give them the opportunity to make their own choices. Maybe they agree with you. Maybe they don't. Regardless of the outcome of what they decide to do, like even if they let you go, the result for you is not like, oh poor me I'm a victim, they had control over me. No, the result is that you had the confidence to speak up about what you believe in and to align to your values and you were courageous enough to speak to your boss.

And if they don't accept your ideas or they don't want you in the position anymore, you can give yourself credit for having tried and know that this is

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

happening for you and that maybe you go to a position that aligns better with who you are and how you lead. But believing that you're a victim of their decisions and their choice completely disempowers you.

Another option is to completely disagree with them and just be disgruntled and overwhelmed and angry and frustrated and tell a story to yourself that they're controlling you, they're giving you too much to do, they have over-the-top expectations, they don't understand your situation and you end up approaching your job with a lot of resentment, you don't speak up, and you stay in the position, but you feel very disempowered and miserable.

So you have to decide what outcome you want and how you want to relate to your boss. And what kind of relationship do you want with your boss? Do you want to work towards understanding them and getting to know them, or do you want to believe that they are the bad guy, they're doing things to you, and they're the victim?

You're creating the victimness in this situation in your own mind. Their positional authority does not mean that they are the bad guy and you are the victim. So, decide what kind of relationship you want with them. and you get to show up as a positive member of this team of two, regardless of what your boss says or does.

You get to decide, even if they don't like you, even if they say mean things to you, you don't have to buy in. You can ask yourself, hey, is what that person said to me true? Is my boss telling me the truth? Do they absolutely know everything about me?

And first of all, ask yourself, did they really say they didn't like you? There's a difference between I don't like you as a person and I don't like what you're doing.

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

So what have they directly said to you? And even if they have directly said to you, what are you making that mean? How are you interpreting their words and their actions to mean that they don't like you or that you are in jeopardy of losing your job, because whatever story your brain is telling you about your boss, it's just that. It's just a story.

You get to write it all down, take a look at it, neutralize it, and then choose to believe it or not. You can say, like, it really feels like he or she doesn't like me, but I don't know that for sure, so I'm going to believe that their actions are more about them and where they are and not about me. And when they show up grumpy or when they snap at me, that's really just a reflection of what they're thinking and it has little to do with me. I'm going to let them own their emotions and I'm going to stay in my lane, I'm going to own mine.

So many times, we default without question to believing that somebody doesn't like us because of the way they interact with us. Our brain wants to believe they don't like us because it gives us an excuse not to own our own empowerment, not to speak up and not to take the actions we want to take because they're scary sometimes.

It's easier to believe that our boss doesn't like us, and that's why we don't accomplish our goals and that's why we don't speak up, versus owning, like, whether or not they like me, I'm going to have a conversation, I'm going to speak up. Or I'm going to choose to try and navigate this relationship from a place of accepting them for who they are. I'm going to do all I can to accomplish my goals, which align with their goals, and we're going to move on.

So, if you really ask the question, is it absolutely true that my boss doesn't like me, can I know this for 100% certainty? You might find that you really don't know the answer to that and that your brain's defensive mechanism is just kicking in to keep you emotionally safe.

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

And when you choose to believe that he or she doesn't like you, how do you show up, by the way? Are you empowered or are you meek? And let's just go there and say, okay, your boss doesn't like you, now what? So what, they don't like you, do you have to believe it? Do you have to act upon that?

Maybe they've said they don't like you. You get to decide, I don't believe that. Isn't that crazy? It's absolutely true. You get to think whatever you want regardless of what others think about you.

This is a little side story. There was a district admin who I was positively sure did not like me. I could have let this bother me until the end of time, but what I did was every time I went to district office, I showed up in the most loving and enthusiastic and positive energy I could, greeted this person, bought them treats, just little thank you gifts. I was always quick to send them a thank you email and you're so helpful and you know so much and I appreciate your support.

Like, even if they hated on me, I didn't care. I just decided that they loved me and I just made a decision that I was going to show up out of love regardless of how they felt. So you can do this with your boss. You can love the heck out of them, even when they're being crazy.

So, you get to respond any way you want. You can be pleasant, you can be cordial, you get to work at your site the way that you want to and show up however you want to. So, my friends, I ask of you, be empowered. How do you want to team with your boss? How do you want to feel about them, think about them, show up? How do you want to show up in your job? How do you want your thoughts and this story around your boss to go?

You get to write the story, completely empowered, okay. Try it on. I invite you to share your successes with me. Send me an email. Reach out to me

Ep #91: Building a Team with Your Boss

on social media. Let me know how awesome it is to build a team with your boss.

Have an amazing empowered week, my friends, I'll talk to you next week. Take care, bye-bye.

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