

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 96.

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, my empowered leaders. How are you doing? I just realized that when this podcast episode airs, it's going to be two days before Halloween. So that means that Halloween is on a Thursday this year, which is good for you because you'll only have the sugar hangover children for one day before they go home and get the rest that they need.

So, happy Halloween, for those of you who celebrate the Halloween holiday. And I wish you a very calm and peaceful Halloween celebration at your school. If you don't celebrate Halloween at your school, good for you because it can be pretty chaotic with the costuming and the candy and the buzz and the excitement that the kids go through. It is really fun, but it can also be pretty stressful and kids can get wound up and over-stimulated. So I'm just wishing you all the best. I hope you enjoy the week and the celebrating, if your school does celebrate the season.

So, with that, we're going to talk about why fun and pleasure and celebrations matter as a school leader and how scheduling them in actually help you lead and help you grow and evolve as a leader. So, what I've noticed about adults is that we, for some reason, love to separate work and pleasure or work and having fun.

So we'll say things like, let's get to work and then we'll take a break and have some fun. We do this in the classrooms with the kids. We say hey,

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

let's get busy and work really hard, and then we'll stop for some fun or we'll stop and take a break and go to recess and have fun.

We do this as adults, we do this with the kids, so we work hard all day long and we're very serious and we feel like we can't have fun or have pleasure or have celebration in the middle of the workday and we have to wait until some other time. There's always a later. We have to wait until the evening or we have to wait until the weekend or until the holiday break or the summer to have some fun and to celebrate our successes and our accomplishments.

And what happens is we just push off. We delay the fun, we delay the celebrations. And I believe that, as school leaders, fun has to be a choice and it is actually our responsibility to schedule it in. Fun doesn't just happen. Celebrations don't just happen. And we could go through all of life working and working and accomplishing and achieving and checking the boxes without any fun pleasure or celebration and completely miss the point of living.

Humans are wired and designed for fun and pleasure. We need to acknowledge and celebrate all of the work that we're doing. And let me tell you something; so many people will say – like I have clients who will say – but my work's not fun. My job isn't fun, it's a pain, it's hard, I don't like it all the time. Well, here's the eye-opener. This is kind of the tough love.

It's not your job's job to be fun for you. It's your job and responsibility to create the fun for yourself. You can make anything you want fun and it's not our job's job to be fun. It's our job to make our work fun. We bring the fun to the work. The work doesn't bring the fun to us.

And you can make anything fun. It doesn't sound like it's true, but really, it is. If you think of your job and you think of how you can make it fun, it's kind

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

of like a puzzle to solve. And you can ask yourself, like, how do I make this fun? Think about this; how can I make taxes fun?

I don't know, but I'm going to figure it out. It's a puzzle. It's a mystery. Bookkeeping and tracking all of my business expenses, trying to learn how to make it fun, but it's kind of fun to figure out a process for making it fun. So let me give you an example; I did this with driving. I, for some reason, used to absolutely hate being in the car.

I hated driving, I hated commuting, and really why I hated it, the feeling I was feeling was generated from the thought that being in the car was just a waste of time. I didn't want to waste time driving here and there, having to run errands, run to school, run back, always in the car. And I just was constantly frustrated every time I had to be in the car because it was – in the Bay Area, we have tons of traffic and I feel like I was in the car all the time. I really, really couldn't stand it.

So one day, I was on the phone with my sister. A lot of times, I'd talk with her while I'm commuting. And I was complaining about the traffic. And she said to me, "There's always traffic in Silicon Valley and you're in the car a lot, so you might as well just accept it and find a way to enjoy it." I was a little embarrassed because, you know, here I am, the coach.

My sister is also a certified life coach, so we both went through the program together at The Life Coach School, but she coaches musicians. And anyway, she was just calling out my complaining and I was embarrassed because I knew that it was not the first time I had complained to her about the traffic. And I know that I would get home and the first thing I would say would be something about how awful traffic was. It was just ridiculous actually.

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

I was making myself so miserable and my family was just tired of hearing about the traffic. So I thought about what my sister said and I thought, oh my gosh, she's absolutely right.

So from that day that she made that comment, I started to ask myself, okay, how can I enjoy my commute and running my errands and that errand time, how can I enjoy it more? How can I be in the car and make it more fun? What could I do?

So kind of the first stage of this was I just started always blasting my favorite music. I love music. I go through phases of who I'm into, what band I'm into or what album I'm into. I love to listen to musical soundtracks. I go through these phases.

So whatever was on my flavor of the month or flavor of the day, I would play that and I would just sing and fill the car with music and it was so fun. And that really, really helped. The other thing I did was I would make sure I had something I loved to drink in the car. So I always had bottled water stuffed away in the car, but I like sparkling water, so I'd make sure I had a can or a bottle of something yummy and sparkly and delicious.

Sometimes I would have a Diet Coke or a soda. I love Diet Coke. I'm trying to cut back on it. But I would definitely take something with me to enjoy in the car along with my singing.

And then, when Bluetooth came out and Apple CarPlay came out and all of this stuff, I started listening to podcasts, or when Mitch and I travel long distances, we love Audible so we listen to books on tape on Audible, and other things like I love to call my family and chat in the car or friends I haven't talked to in a while.

So I have so much love for being in the car right now. I actually, when I have to commute and now that I live in Santa Cruz and I have to drive over

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

the hill to the Bay Area, I have, depending on traffic, a 45-minute drive. But I love that time. I can't wait to jump onto the latest podcast or call my mom and say hello or catch up on a book I've been wanting to read. It's so much fun.

I never complain about being in the car and I don't mind long road trips. Mitch and I drive to Tahoe or we'll go down to LA and see Alex. And if there's traffic and we're chilling out to a great book, we don't even really notice the traffic. It's amazing to me because I will tell you, like, a few years ago – this is probably five years ago now that my sister said this to me, or even longer, I can't even remember, but I couldn't have imagined loving being in the car.

So my point is this; you can look at the tasks you have to do at your work, at school, and ask yourself, how can I make this fun? What's something I can do to stop being so serious and so professional and so – I almost feel like – actually any industry, but I know education – so in education, I feel like if we're not being super busy and super stressed and running around and feeling worried or feeling overwhelmed or looking like we're crazy people, if we're not in that agitated state then we're not taking our job seriously enough.

Guys, come on, like, I will venture to say I think the opposite should- be true. How can we make it less serious? How can we make it more creative, more fun, more jovial, more lighthearted? Doing things in a fun way can actually bring up solutions we wouldn't have thought about before because we can get silly with our ideas, we can get more bold and broad and we can think about how do we make everything at school fun? And that's where we engage our brain and our heart and our soul and our body fully into doing hard things.

So I want to talk about the difference between fun and immediate gratification. This is a cautionary tale. So there is a difference between fun and immediate gratification. When you want to add fun into your workday,

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

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

your brain is going to say, yay let's add fun into our workday by not doing the things that aren't fun.

So, for example, you're going to say things like, I don't like to have hard conversations so let's avoid those because that's not fun. And what's really happening here is that your brain is trying to convince you that voiding hard things or avoiding challenges or avoiding things that make you struggle a little bit is how you get to feel like you're having fun.

But when you're avoiding doing a part of your job that's necessary to achieve those macro wins that we're talking about versus the micro fails, so when you're avoiding doing parts of the job that are necessary to get the result you ultimately want, you're avoiding hard work in exchange for immediate pleasure.

So what I mean by that is pleasure is a necessary part of self-care in life and we'll address it more. I'm going to do a whole podcast theme on self-balance, work-life balance, self-care, adding pleasure to your life, really tuning into what you truly need and what's true pleasure versus immediately gratifying yourself in the moment.

But when we exchange hard work for immediate pleasure, what that really is, is what we call in the coaching industry as buffering. Buffering is when you have something hard, you need to get it done, and you actually want to get it done, but you avoid it, you procrastinate it because you don't like the feeling of having to do it, so you do something else in lieu of that.

So this happens a lot with people who overeat. Whenever they get stressed, they eat. Or they play Candy Crush on their phone or they scroll through Facebook and all of a sudden you're 30 minutes in and you haven't done anything because you are avoiding and giving yourself that immediate hit of dopamine and pleasure by playing the game versus the gratification,

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

that distant gratification or the not-immediate gratification of accomplishing that goal and making it as fun as possible.

So, when you choose immediate pleasure over doing the parts of the job that you don't love, you're not really choosing fun. Choosing to make your job fun means finding a way to see the fun in the hard challenges, the difficulties, the struggles. Making your job feel fun doesn't mean you get to enjoy and love every single thing you do and that everything feels really simple and easy and flows.

The process of doing hard things and figuring them out can be fun in and of itself. Learning to find fun in the process of leading your school, even the hard stuff, can help you drop the story that you're so overworked and you're so burnt out.

So even when you're doing something that feels highly uncomfortable at the time, such as having a difficult conversation, you can make it more interesting by treating it like a puzzle to solve. How can I prepare beforehand and nail this conversation? What can I learn to make this more interesting? How can I reward myself after the conversation for having had the courage to have it?

And if the conversation goes well, celebrate it. Acknowledge it. And by the way, a little side note, beforehand when you're preparing for it, part of the success of a difficult conversation is visualizing the conversation going as well as possible, like what would your dream come true for this conversation be? Visualize it and watch it like you're watching a movie in your mind and seeing the conversation go really, really well and you walk out of that conversation feeling on top of the world, feeling amazing. That's how you prep for that.

Then after it actually happens, regardless of how well it went – if it went great, go celebrate big time. Even if it went terribly and you feel awful

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

afterwards, you can still celebrate your courage for having had the conversation. You can tell yourself, look, I learned a lot today, I had the courage to have this conversation. I'm going to take some notes. I'm going to assess what went well and what I'm going to do differently next time and this will get easier. I'm going to find some humor in how awful this went so I can learn from it and I can laugh it off. It's not so serious. It doesn't have to be so serious.

Because I can guarantee you, when a conversation goes really south, it goes really awry, just terrible, I guarantee you that something in that conversation that was said was pretty off or pretty crazy or pretty funny. So even if you can't laugh about it in the moment, you will be able to laugh about it at some point. So you can tell yourself that one day I'm going to find this funny, even though I don't feel that way right now.

Okay, so I want you to include in your scheduling, you know, we talked about how to time-manage effectively and to get more productive and organized. And in part of that process, I want you to add scheduling celebrations into your day.

Scheduling and taking time to celebrate small wins in your day as well as celebrating the bigger goal achievements is a critical piece in creating more successes in your professional and personal life. So being a person who's really driven and thrives on being highly productive, I have found personally that when I was a principal, I look back and I think, gosh, I rarely took the time to celebrate, let alone even acknowledge when I had accomplished something. I was just onto the next thing. It was like, accomplishment, check the box, accomplishment, check the box.

I didn't stop and purposely acknowledge that accomplishment or achievement. I didn't celebrate it. And even with really big wins, like, my school was selected as a national distinguished school award, we received that award. It's a big deal in the state of California. And we definitely had

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

these official celebrations and such, but I didn't personally stop to acknowledge the hard work that I did in creating that result.

I gave complete credit to my predecessor and I love her dearly. She's one of my best friends. But I didn't really give myself the acknowledgment of the work that I did because I had been at that school for two years, so I definitely did play a role in helping our school achieve that result of getting that award. And it dawned on me that I had to almost force myself to stop and take a minute to acknowledge that achievement and what it took to accomplish that goal.

And to be honest with you, when I really think back to that moment, I now can see that the reason I didn't think to acknowledge it or celebrate it is because I didn't feel comfortable. I didn't feel comfortable with celebrating. I didn't feel like I deserved to celebrate or that it was a worthy enough accomplishment or that I wanted attention that I thought celebration would mean.

I felt like officially celebrating would be ostentatious and selfish and flashy, or whatever. But probably at a deeper level, I didn't feel like I deserved it. I didn't feel like I deserved to stop and celebrate because there's more to do, I'm not getting enough done. The tape that plays in our heads that's constantly driving us to work harder, do more, be more, we're not enough. That whole self-deprecating message and story that we play in our heads is why we hold ourselves back from celebrating.

And this mindset carried over into my career as a coach. Building a business from the ground is no easy task, my friend. So for those of you thinking, "I'm going to quit being principal and just go start a new business on my own," just hold the phone. Work with me on this.

It requires a ton of self-coaching and mindset work, just like running a school. Running a business can run your life if you let it. There's always

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

something to do and you, if you're a solopreneur, you're the only person who's writing the paychecks, who's creating income, who's balancing the books, who's setting up consults, who's coaching the clients, who's writing the emails, who's writing the marketing copy, all that stuff.

And I saw myself working myself to the bone, just like I did as a school leader, and I wasn't stopping to celebrate my accomplishments, especially the small ones. I finally was like, wait a minute, what am I doing here? What's the point in all of this?

I need to practice what I teach. I need to celebrate the things in my life because if I don't stop and acknowledge my work and my accomplishments and actually celebrate them, what is the point of it all? Why am I doing this? What's in my business for me?

I mean, I love serving clients, I love creating content, but I also need to honor and celebrate the work that I'm putting into the world. You do as well, school leader. You are working your booty off for your kids and your staff and the school community and your district. You need to be the one who acknowledges you.

It's not anybody else's job to acknowledge you. So many of my clients tell me, my boss doesn't acknowledge me, the teachers don't care, nobody tells me I'm doing a good job, I just want a pat on the back, I want somebody to acknowledge my work, I want approval from my boss or other people.

You can give yourself the approval, the celebrations, the thanks, the acknowledgment, the approval for your work. You create that. You have to create that for yourself because when you don't, what happens is that your brain starts to be very resistant. It starts to dig its heels in and you feel yourself resisting and getting frustrated and you just don't even care about getting the work done, because what's happening inside your brain is like,

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

wait a minute, why am I putting all this effort to learn new things and think in new ways and take new approaches when the results happen, I actually achieve my results and I just don't care. It just gets blown over.

When you don't acknowledge you, nobody else will acknowledge you. This is so, so important. You must acknowledge yourself in order for other people to acknowledge you. And you know that you're not acknowledging yourself if you feel a very strong resistance to learning new things and getting down and getting busy and getting to work or if you're complaining that no one is acknowledging your work or efforts. So you are responsible for your own acknowledgment, you are responsible for your own fun and pleasure.

Susan Hyatt, who's one of my favorite coaches that I've ever had, she's just amazing, she's got so much energy. She's one of my favorite people on the earth. She is a coach who helps women lose weight through celebration, seeking pleasure, and openly loving their bodies just as their body is. So if you're a person that needs more support with loving your body, your physical body, the way that you look, the way that you feel, the weight that you are, check out Susan Hyatt.

But what she teaches is that celebration and pleasure are the answers to achieving any weight loss goal, or any goal for that matter. She says that we often postpone celebration and pleasure until we meet some nebulous deadline. Have you ever done that? Like, I will take a vacation once I get this project done or once I get the money or when I find the time or when I get to the end of the school year? We move the bar basically is what happens so we never get the pleasure we're looking for or we're so desperately craving. And when we deny ourselves daily pleasure, fun, and celebrations, we stay stuck in this pattern of dissatisfaction and stress because we're always chasing that magical day called later and that day never seems to arrive.

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

So I've had potential clients who reach out to me and they want so badly to coach with me, but they're like, I'll have to wait until I have more time or money. They don't give themselves the pleasure of empowering themselves as a mom, as a wife, as a school leader, as a woman because they're waiting for some magical day to happen. And the whole point is you have to take that action that scares you before you're going to get the result that you want.

I know the brain is tricky and it feels backwards, but you have to practice the daily and the weekly and the monthly and the quarterly and the yearly pleasures now, this moment, what are you waiting for?

So here's what I do. At the end of my workday, I take a minute, just before I do my – I call it the closing ceremony. You remember the podcast with Shira Gill who talked about that five minutes of tidying up and putting things away for our workday to honor our tomorrow self? Before I do that little five-minute closing ceremony for work, I take one minute, I look at my calendar, I notice all of the work that I did for that day and I add in anything – like if something came up in addition to what I had scheduled, I add that in if necessary so I can see all the work I've done, all the clients I've coached, all of the podcasts I've created, all of the emails and all of the things.

And I just put my hand on my heart and I tell myself, thank you, Angela, for the hard work you've done today. Look at everything we've accomplished. I am so proud of your work and I know that you're doing this to serve people in education to create more satisfaction and pleasure and empowerment in their lives, thank you so much for doing that, I appreciate you.

You can write yourself a letter if you prefer to write. You can say it out loud, if that feels cheesy to you, you can just say it in your mind, but I strongly believe that this practice sends a message to your brain that your work is valuable and important, that you are valuable and important, that you are enough and that your efforts have not gone unnoticed.

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

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

It's so small but it's so huge at the same time. I also have a list in my journal of small, medium, and large rewards that I treat myself to in celebration of my accomplishments. So, small rewards are something I give myself for the little wins at the end of the week, such as getting my podcast uploaded in time or writing an awesome email or social media post or something.

So I'll treat myself to something small like a walk or I might get an awesome candle. I love candles so much. I might treat myself to some little luxury lotion or some face cream or just something I've had my eye on that's not super expensive, it's small, but I really love it and I really want it.

Medium rewards are for bigger celebrations. Those, I typically do at the end of each quarter, and you could do it at the end of each trimester or semester. And those are bigger wins and bigger celebrations. So I might, like, get a new pair of shoes that I've had my eye on or I might take a day off and go down to the beach.

It doesn't have to be like you're indulging in expensive things or, you know, taking off weeks at a time, but giving yourself something that you really look forward to, either in time or money, or just a day off. Sleep in for a day. Take a half-day and sleep in. Whatever feels like luxury and pleasure to you is what matters. It just has to be something that you really love and that you really want so it actually does feel like a reward.

And you can also choose something like I'm going to have a glass of champagne tonight or I'm going to go out for dinner, but Susan Hyatt, who is the weight loss coach, she says to be just cautious of doing things that are food and drink related, only because it's too easy to believe that food can be a sole source of pleasure and you can fall into overeating or using food as a pleasure all the time or too often.

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

Now, my larger goals are my yearly wins, and these are rewards that I get for achieving a big goal, a massive goal. And I celebrate huge. These are big celebrations such as taking a vacation, buying something very indulgent that I might not have considered doing otherwise for myself.

And look, guys, there are going to be days at work when just getting through the day is a success. I highly recommend that you add in some daily win rewards. Take a 20-minute walk in the middle of your day. Yes, you have permission and you can do it. I did take walks as a principal.

I would walk off the campus, I know, but it is allowed. It's okay. You have to take care of you. Take a 20-minute walk in the middle of your workday, or just take five minutes to watch a funny video, to give yourself a brain break, do something. Or you know what, have flowers sent to yourself at the office. If you're having a rough day, take five minutes, get online, order yourself a beautiful bouquet and have it delivered to school tomorrow.

Yes, do it. Do what feels good to you. What's fun is different for everybody. So what you find pleasurable, somebody else might not, but you have to play with it and figure out what it is that really makes you feel so good, like fills your bucket, so to speak, right?

You know, we are wired as humans for fun and pleasure and celebration. So fun is different for everyone, and the way that we celebrate at the way that we like to celebrate is different for everybody. But what is the same for us is that pleasure and celebrations are not optional. We are wired for fun and pleasure and celebrating.

So please, do not approach your school leadership job with so much seriousness and so much professionalism that you squeeze all of the fun out of your life. Come on, let's have some fun here. What's the point if we never stop to celebrate?

Ep #96: Celebrate Your Wins

I realize this concept sounds very counterintuitive and counterproductive, but I'm going to venture to say that pleasure is the key to your full empowerment, so I want you to get out there, schedule some celebrations, put in that one minute of honoring and acknowledging your work for the day, and celebrate yourself. Have an amazing, amazing week. I'll talk with you next week. Take care; bye.

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