

Ep #106: How to Be an Emotionally Developed Leader with Jenn David-Lang and Kim Marshall



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Hello, Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 106.

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.

Angela Kelly: Today we have not one, but two special guests on our show. I'm so excited to have them both here with us today. Our first guest is the founder of The Main Idea, Jenn David-Lang. The Main Idea was developed with the thought that school leaders are so busy leading their schools, and often don't have the time to read and research all of the latest tools and strategies and books to help you all effectively lead your schools. And I know this is true because I was a huge subscriber to The Main Idea while I was a principal. I read many things from Jenn's work. I'm so appreciative that she had this resource available for us. And she herself has been in education for over 25 years, and has tons of experience teaching in a variety of different teaching and school leadership positions. And I'm so honored to have her here today. Welcome, Jenn.

Jenn David-Lang: Thank you for that nice introduction.

Angela Kelly: Oh, you're welcome. And our second guest is the founder of The Marshall Memo. I feel like I'm talking to a superstar in the field of education. Kim Marshall is here with us today. He has consistently published a weekly memo that highlights the latest research in education. What he does is he condenses hours of information by reading all of the information and then condensing it into a summary, giving school leaders a

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nice 20-minute summary of topics in education that you can read, in as simple as 20 minutes. And that's amazing. And he and Jenn have recently co-created a compilation of his work in their new book, *The Best of the Marshall Memo*. So welcome, Kim, and we're so happy to have you on today's show.

Kim Marshall: Thanks so much.

Angela Kelly: Great. So let's get started. Just tell us a little bit about each of yourselves and who you guys help and what got you into creating *The Marshall Memo* and *The Main Idea*, and why you and Jenn also decided to create *The Best of the Marshall Memo* book together.

Kim Marshall: So *The Marshall Memo* started in 2003 when I staggered out of my principalship in Boston, pretty exhausted. But then realized within a few months that I actually had time to read. So I subscribed to a lot of publications. I think I started with about 40. It's now up to 60. And got in a rhythm, of every week on Sunday, reading through what's come in that week and finding the articles that are the best for principals and teachers and superintendents. And then on Monday, writing brief summaries of them. And from the very beginning, I started with about 300 subscribers, from a couple of friends. From the very beginning, it struck people as being a good deal, that they could pay a reasonable amount and, as you said, in 20 minutes sort of read through and get some really good ideas for their schools, their classrooms, their districts. So that's how *The Memo* got started, and the book really grew out of that.

Kim Marshall: Jenn and I met, I think, close to the beginning of her *Main Idea*, which was about five years after I got started, and we immediately saw our common cause and started having dinner together in New York

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City when I was down there. I live in Boston. And Jenn, why don't you pick it up from there?

Jenn David-Lang: Sure. So I sort of do the counterpart to Kim. Kim summarizes journals and articles, and I read tons of education books and leadership books and choose the best ones principals should be reading, and summarize them as well. I save a lot of time. So instead of you having to read a 400-page book, you can read my eight-page summary. And at the end of the summary, I write professional development ideas you can use to train the teachers or leaders in your school.

Jenn David-Lang: And mine came about because I was doing consulting and working with principals who just didn't have time to read. So one leader had a pile of 30 books on his desk and said, "I need to do a two-week training program for my teachers. We're starting a new school, and I don't have time to read these books. So can you tell me, Jenn, what's in the books, and plan some PD for two weeks for these teachers?" And that's where the idea, or The Main Idea, came along.

Jenn David-Lang: So yeah, as Kim said, we've been having these dinners and talking to each other for years. And Kim had the idea, what if we chose the topics that principals care most about and are most important to school leaders, and we dive into his archive, where Kim has over 8,000 article summaries, and let's choose the best reach topic. Because when you receive your weekly Marshall Memo, it doesn't focus on one topic. They're great articles, but on a variety of topics. So in our book, we took topics like teacher coaching, or difficult conversations, or emotional intelligence and leaders, and we chose the best 10 to 12 articles from his archive. And then at the end of each of these chapters we wrote professional learning ideas. So you could take these 10 to 12 articles and you could share them with the appropriate people, or have a protocol

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discussion with your faculty, so that you really could not just read the articles but put them to use the next days and weeks, in your school.

Angela Kelly: I love that idea. There are so many resources and so much out there for us to digest, and as a school leader, you're just in the job trying to figure out how you're going to get through the fires of the day, let alone really have that deep thinking time and that time to really read and reflect, and then take it and implement it, on top of all of that. So what you guys have done to provide for principals is absolutely amazing. Really appreciate that.

Kim Marshall: Jenn was a little modest there. She is the one who does the professional development suggestions at the end of each chapter. So that was one major contribution that she made to this book. And then the second thing she did was she really helped me with the perspective of what really are the best articles. And we thought that it was going to be relatively easy to go into the archive and just pick the best ones, but it turned out to be extremely difficult. I mean, it took us months to really narrow down the search, and then there was the thing of sequencing them, and then within each chapter, their sort of logical groups, and then there had to be an introduction. And that was where Jenn added this tremendous value. I could absolutely not have done this alone. So although the summaries are the ones that I originally wrote for The Memo, the crafting of this super-curated book, and then the PD suggestions, was Jenn's part, and we made a good team.

Angela Kelly: That sounds like the perfect resource for the school principal who's trying to figure out what is the best tool, avenue, strategy to bring new learning to their staff. And I think that that's really important. I know as a principal myself, I struggled with how to relay new information and how to communicate it in a way that teachers could then digest and

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implement on their own as well. So that's really awesome teamwork, you guys. I love it.

Angela Kelly: So for The Empowered Principal listener out there, we've been focusing, this month, in the Empowered Principal Network, on the importance of self-care. And I know that your book, in The Best of the Memo Marshalls, I think it was chapter three, discusses the value of emotional intelligence and the characteristics that are important for a healthy and well-balanced school leader. Can you share with the listeners a tip, or a strategy, that will help them achieve a higher level of EQ?

Kim Marshall: Jenn, why don't you go ahead.

Jenn David-Lang: Sure. I was doing a workshop on this chapter to a group of principals in Nebraska the other day, and I shared a few quick tips that they could put into place. But if I were to pick one, I think that probably the best emotional intelligence tip for any leader is the skill of the pause. And I'm sure that's something you've addressed on your podcast before, but it's that moment, that famous Viktor Frankl quote, "Between stimulus and response there's a space. And in that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." It's really that pause, so that you are not making a bad long-term decision, based on a temporary feeling.

Jenn David-Lang: The pause allows you to have a little bit more self-awareness of how you're feeling, which Tasha Eurich talks about in the second article of this chapter. The pause allows you to communicate in a balanced way, when Jennifer Gonzalez talks about in this chapter. The pause allows you to just become aware of everything. So if you were just to think of one small tip, if school leaders could slow down and take a pause before they make a decision, I think that would be a tremendous benefit.

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Kim Marshall: Each of our chapters starts with a quote we picked out from one of the articles in the chapter, and the quote at the beginning of this chapter is from Barry Jentz and Jerome Murphy. "Organizational cultures that claim to the ideal of an all-knowing omniscient executive, will pay a high cost in time, resources and progress, and will be sending the message to managers that it is better to hide their confusion than to address it openly and constructively." And that's just from one of the articles, a very wise piece of advice there. Humility, being able to admit weakness without being weak, and balancing the assertiveness that we think is necessary in school leaders with the humility and the pause, as Jenn says, to really sort of connect with other people at a human level and to make good decisions.

Angela Kelly: Absolutely. That's exactly the type of skill set that I teach. I'm specifically a life coach for school leaders, and I help them navigate the emotional and mental demands of the job, and I help them see how that pause comes into play and how it helps them. Instead of reacting, they can take intentional action, based on how they want the outcome to happen. And so it's really good advice, the pause, and then allowing yourself to feel vulnerable, while you're also building up your skill and evolving as a leader. Like they go hand-in-hand. And I think that's a really important point, that showing weakness without feeling that you're weak or thinking that you aren't a capable leader is a dance, and it's a skill set that you grow over the course of being in the position of a school leader.

Jenn David-Lang: And because your podcast focuses on this area, if your listeners want to go deeper, two of the articles each have 10 skills listed in them. Seventh article by David Holmes and the ninth article by Jenna Pincot each has 10 emotional intelligence skills. So, given that we are just on the new year, if your listeners want to choose one skill a month for 10 months to develop, they could look to those articles.

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Angela Kelly: Oh, that's a good idea.

Kim Marshall: So would you like to hear the skills in article number seven?

Angela Kelly: Yes, sure.

Kim Marshall: So what I do with it ... This was a longer article from Independent School Magazine by David Holmes. I do shorten these articles to about a page and try to capture all. So, here are the 10 things in that article. Accept the situation as it is. Sometimes you need to vent. Don't take it personally. Keep the intensity of the job in perspective. Develop friendships with a few trusted colleagues. God, I wish I'd read that in my first year as a principal. Engage in professional reading and writing; the Marshall Memo and the main idea. Get enough sleep. Attend to the home front. Adopt a posture of fearlessness. And if necessary, get help. Call Angela.

Angela Kelly: Yeah. Yes. Well, and what I like to tell people is, as a coach, I'm not a therapist. If you're broken, come to me. It's like, I try to make good people even better, and building ... Like, Daniel Bauer and I, of The Better Leaders, Better Schools; we were chatting and talking about making a good school leader great and expanding your capacity for leading your school is all about the capacity to which you grow as a leader. So, I love those 10 tips.

Angela Kelly: And listeners out there, be sure to check out this book. It's really, really good. I've had the opportunity to read through most of it, and I've been really impressed with the information and the support that it provides to school leaders, and very practical hands on tips and strategies

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for any school principal. Beginning school principal, veteran school principal, all of the above. It's a great resource for everybody. So-

Kim Marshall: So if I can just interject here, the Marshall Memo website, there is a free chapter that you can get just by clicking the link. So marshallmemo.com. Right at the top is a picture of the book, and if you scroll to the bottom of that little paragraph there, you'll see a link to chapter two on managing time for impact, which is a whole bunch of really practical stuff on dealing with the stresses of time management and being an instructional leader. So you get the whole chapter free, and then you can decide if you want to buy the rest of the book.

Angela Kelly: Great. We'll be sure to put that in the show notes as well. Thank you for that.

Angela Kelly: So, being a brand-new author, my book was just released in October of this year.

Jenn David-Lang: Oh, congratulations.

Angela Kelly: Thank you. It was really cathartic for me to write it, because I talk about the journey and the process from teaching to school leadership to now coaching, and I know that a lot of people out there are reaching out to me saying, "Hey, like I'd love to read your book, but I don't have the time." So, in terms of finding the time to read even a chapter, and I've been telling them, "Read one chapter a day, it's pretty short." What are your tips and suggestions for school leaders out there who do want to get their hands on a book and get it read and then be able to implement some of those strategies?

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Jenn David-Lang: That's a really good question, because it's about developing the habit of reading. And like Kim said, right? It was only after the principalship that he was able to carve out that time. So I think that a lot of what school leaders do is made up of habits. So, you have to decide who you are. Do you want to have a morning habit? There's the book *The Miracle Morning*. Some leaders I know, they set their alarm a half hour early, and they get up and they read a half hour in the morning. Some principals listen to books on tape because they have a commute to work. Some principals commit to reading one or two chapters every night before they go to bed.

Jenn David-Lang: It's frankly why people do pay Kim and me a small fee to read for them. Not read the whole thing, but to minimize the amount of reading they need to do. Because we're not just condensing the books and articles we find, but we're also only choosing the good ones. So, part of it is taking all this time to read a book or go through a journal, and realizing a lot of it isn't really useful. So, but I really do think it's about developing the habit of reading and believing that it's useful.

Kim Marshall: Having a sacred time where you do that kind of reading, and some people just block out Sunday morning or some other time. I can't read before bedtime because I fall asleep.

Kim Marshall: But the other issue, of course, is curation. I mean, a lot of people are on Twitter and Facebook and other avenues, LinkedIn and so forth, getting suggestions from people. But what I found in my reading for the Marshall Memo over the last 16 years is that the good material is widely spread. I mean, I'm reading 60 publications as they come in, and I'm also getting links to other publications that are not on my list, and the stuff is so spread out. I found this wonderful article in *Rethinking Schools*; tiny magazine out in Portland, Oregon. The New York Times has occasionally terrific articles. The Harvard Business Review. And then the standard

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things like Education Week and Educational Leadership and Phi Delta Kappa. But it's widely spread, and it does take me every week a good six or seven hours to make my way through the pile and to find those eight or nine really, really good articles out of maybe 150 articles. And Jen, how many books do you reject for every book that you choose?

Jenn David-Lang: Oh, I mean, at least 10 probably.

Kim Marshall: Yeah, curation is the thing. And as long as people trust our judgment, and that's really when it comes down to. The value add here is our judgment based on all of our years of teaching and school leadership and consulting and reading and thinking and talking to audiences, having the judgment to know which article is a keeper and needs to be summarized and gotten to people and which one is just fluffy or puff piece or breaking news or other things that really is not worth people's time.

Jenn David-Lang: Their suggestion for your listeners is build in some accountability. Maybe two principals together decide to do a book study, right? So, "We're going to read the first four chapters and chat or text or email next Wednesday." Have some kind of outside accountability. Or if you're someone who's good with internal accountability, that's me; I know that to get a book summary out to my subscribers, I have to have a regular schedule of reading. Kim is always like, "How do you have this crazy schedule?" But I do; I have internal accountability. I have to read a certain amount each day.

Angela Kelly: Yeah, that's a great idea. Some people are more internally driven, and other people need that little friendly boost to hold them more accountable to getting into the literature and into the summaries that you guys provide for people, so that's great.

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Angela Kelly: I have a question for you. What's the most common problem you see when you're helping your clients or your schools, and how can listeners overcome that issue?

Kim Marshall: The thing that I see the most, and I just came back from visiting two school districts this week, one in New York City and one in New Jersey; the problem of principals getting out of their offices and into classrooms. That is a huge issue. A torrent of email, people dropping in and saying, "You got a minute?", discipline problems, parents with questions, superintendents' meetings. All these things that are just constantly pulling principals away from being in classrooms. Having a structure in a way of doing that is really one of the things that I see is the biggest ones.

Jenn David-Lang: I was just coming from visiting a school in Albany, and I think the visit illustrates one of the biggest problems that I see, which is that school leaders and schools have a knowing/doing gap. Even when principals know what should be happening, it doesn't always happen. It's harder to implement. You know you should be in classrooms, but you get stuck in your office. You know you should use faculty meetings for learning, but you end up just using it for announcements. You know you shouldn't just do the thing that's in front of you, but it's so exciting to check off that to do item that you do that instead of something that's a higher priority.

Jenn David-Lang: I think the knowing/doing gap is a big problem, and I think that the podcast and the services that you provide, Angela, and the whole focus on emotional intelligence is a way of beginning to address that. Because the first step in addressing the problem of getting stuck in your office and not observing teachers is an awareness. That skill set is very important in helping leaders identify what are the problems, what are the obstacles, and what are the first steps?

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Kim Marshall: Of course, another reason that a principal might not be getting out of the office and into classrooms is that they have a teacher evaluation system that makes it extremely burdensome, bureaucratic, and ineffective. So, our chapter on teacher evaluation tackles the macro issue of how can you change the policy so that it's possible to make more frequent, less formal visits that when meaningful face to face coaching conversations with teachers? Really shifting the emphasis from bureaucratic evaluation to meaningful one on one coaching.

Angela Kelly: Yes, totally agree. Because really, when you know something but you're not doing it, that's when you have to stop and take a look at why. What's the why behind this? And most often, what I've found with clients is that they'll say like, "But there's too much to do and not enough time." And so we work on the time mindset, and we work on getting that schedule back in control by being very intentional with our thoughts and our emotions around it. And this whole idea of we're driven by the way we think other people will think about us or feel about us, and we tend to say we have to do something, when really we're thinking somebody else wants us; that we should do it, and getting into that whole concept of should versus have versus choosing, and getting a sense of more control over our schedule and our priorities and asking ourselves the why. Like, why do we want to do this? Why is it important? And what am I willing to do on my calendar in order to make those everyday meaningful observations and visits happen in my classrooms? Yeah.

Kim Marshall: One of the best articles in the whole book is by Justin Bader. It's in the time management chapter, chapter two, about dealing with substitute teachers, which is one of his examples, is how that can just consume principals first thing in the morning. Calling subs, you're covering classes yourself, you're running around like a chicken with your head cut off before the day even gets started. I used to dread those calls, because they called me personally those days. Justin has this wonderful metaphor

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of a low wall. You have a low wall to keep people from consuming your time immediately, and you have systems. He was a principal in Seattle when this example came up. He set up a system of how substitutes were dealt with and how classrooms were covered, and it created a whole lot of time for him because he had a system that worked, and then he could really focus on the things that really mattered.

Angela Kelly: That is such a great example, because especially this time of year, where it's the winter and the flu is happening, and not only are the children getting sick but the adults are getting sick, and you find yourself in classrooms subbing more than you would like to, only because you have so much else to do. That's been a big topic of conversation in my leadership groups and with clients, about how am I supposed to get to everything else when I'm spending my day subbing and putting out fires with the sub situation? So, that is another great resource for people out there who are struggling with substitute issues.

Kim Marshall: And that's in the free chapter, by the way. That's in chapter two, so ...

Angela Kelly: Oh, you guys got to run out and get that. I'm telling you. This is everything. This is golden.

Angela Kelly: So Jenn and Kim, are there any last thoughts or tips or suggestions that you would like to share with the Empowered Principal listeners out there?

Jenn David-Lang: Just that I think that your listeners are headed in the right direction by following you and your podcast, because of a shift in the way we're thinking about leadership, and I think Barry Gents and Jerry Murphy, they capture it well in the article that Kim referenced, with the

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quotation in the beginning of the chapter. They say that, "In the 21st century, as rapid change makes confusion a defining characteristic of management, the competence of managers will be measured not only by what they know, but increasingly by how they behave."

Kim Marshall: One suggestion if people get the book or if they get the free chapter, is there are certain chapters that lend themselves to being shared with a whole staff in an actual ... Read it now and then turn and talk and discuss in groups and then pull together. The articles will jump out at people as they read. They'll see articles where you can get the whole faculty involved, or a part of it. Maybe just the English team or the fourth-grade team or the algebra team. But getting people really thinking through these issues. And again, this is the curation of the curation. Is the school leaders saying, "Okay, in this chapter, which of these articles do I want to share with whom, and how am I going to do that, and how can I get people talking?" And again, back to Jenn's point, going from the knowing; "Okay, we know this, but how are we actually going to do it and change perhaps a mediocre or an ineffective practice in our school and just make things better for kids?" Which is what it's all about.

Angela Kelly: Exactly. Oh, exactly. So if listeners want to learn more, where can they go?

Kim Marshall: So, marshallmemo.com is the website where the book is, and it's also on Amazon. But you can see this free chapter, you can see the outline, you can see the reviews. They're all out there now, 24 reviews to the book. And you can just get access to that chapter and you can decide, "Am I going to go to Barnes and Nobles or Amazon and get the actual book?" It's also an ebook; it's available on Amazon.

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Angela Kelly: Great. Awesome. Jenn and Kim, thank you so much. I really appreciate your time. I know we have been trying to connect for a few weeks, if not months. And it's such an honor to have you on the Empowered Principal podcast, and especially exciting because this is the first podcast of the 2020 school year. So, thank you both for being with us today.

Angela Kelly: And listeners out there, please do check out the best of the Marshall Memo. You can join the website at marshallmemo.com. Check out the free chapter that's available, and I highly encourage you to get their book and utilize the resources that are available to you. So, I hope you have an empowered week, and we'll catch you next week. Take care. Bye bye.

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