

## Ep #111: The Illusion of Control



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to Episode 111.

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.

Hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday and happy almost Valentine's Day. I've been watching all of the cute things on social media that school leaders do to show love for their staff, and I have to say, wow, you guys are some creative people. I love it so much. I wish I'd had an ounce of your creative genius when I was leading a school.

As a kindergarten teacher, we did all kinds of things, and then when I got into school leadership, I just was so busy being busy, that I didn't think of all these cool things. You guys are just so amazing. I love to see the lengths that you go to share your gratefulness and your gratitude for all of your teacher's work, but I want to remind you, be sure to give yourself a little bit of that love and make sure that you're coming from a place of true gratitude and not out of obligation.

It's really easy to get caught up and to want to go bigger, and better, and do all these things. So, don't be staying up until the wee hours, putting together little handmade valentines, or cooking all of these things, and being exhausted because you're giving so much to your team. Show a little appreciation for yourself, and of course, show that appreciation to your staff in a way that suits you. So, I'm sending so much love to you this Valentine's week, and may it be a peaceful week at school.

Let me share with you a little love that I received from a client of mine very recently. I helped this person prepare for a parent meeting where the parent was furious about something and wanted to meet as soon as

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possible. So, the principal scheduled the meeting for that very next morning with the parent, and then emailed me asking, "Could we schedule a time to coach on it prior to the meeting?"

Of course, I said yes. I made the time to make that happen. I could have simply jumped into that phone call and told the principal step by step what to do in order to prepare for the meeting. That's what a mentor does. A mentor is somebody who has the experience and the expertise. They've done the job before, and they mentor you, they guide you, they coach you, and they tell you how to do it.

I could have done that, but as a coach, as a mindset coach, what I coach on is the client's thoughts and feelings about the parent, and about the situation, and about the student. We talk about what's going on in their mind because that's what they can control. They can't control how the parent's going to behave, or what the student has said or done. They can't control anything else other than their own thoughts and emotions, and their actions. Right?

So, what I do is I help clients clean up. I call it clean thinking. Clean up their own thoughts about any given situation they're dealing with and struggling with because it will impact the way they approach that meeting or that person. The reason we do this is that when you're caught up in all of your own thoughts and emotions about the situation, you just can't meet with them in a way that's really clear, and clean, and open to listening, and open to hearing all that's going on from a neutral space.

Think about this. Think of a parent that's really hard for you. When you think about that parent, your brain has all kinds of thoughts, and judgments, and expectations about who that person is, why they're coming at you sideways, what they're going to say, what they're doing. They're judging you, they're criticizing you, and your brain is doing it right back.

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We think like, “They shouldn't say or do that. They should say or do this. They should be more respectful. They shouldn't be so upset. They should go to the teacher first. They shouldn't come to me without going to the teacher. They shouldn't call us names.” This poor principal was being called names, and we tend to think a kind of summary of this person is that they're rude, they're bossy, they're demanding, whatever it is. We're thinking all the things.

If we aren't aware that we're thinking and feeling this way about them, I mean, we might know what on a surface level, but when we don't stop to realize that when we think and feel this way, we act very differently around them. When you have somebody that's annoying you, and that's coming at you, and that's judging you, and criticizing you, and that's angry, and demanding your time and energy, you're going to want to go on the defense. That's just human nature. You want to protect yourself.

So, your brain is going to be like, “Hey, no, we're not doing this. Don't talk to me that way, and I don't want to hear what you have to say. This person's annoying,” and you're going to kind of shut them out in an effort to protect and defend yourself. That's totally normal, but when we're not aware that that's what's happening, we don't realize that we approach them slightly different than we would when we've neutralized our thoughts, and we're able to hold space for that person, whatever it is they're doing, or thinking, or feeling.

We can sit there just thinking, “Okay, this is a parent who loves their child, who's concerned, who has some thoughts and feelings. I'm not making it mean anything about them or about me. I'm just here to listen. I'm here to openly hear.” When you can neutralize your thoughts, you can approach that meeting in a very different way, and that's what I help clients do.

I help them coach through that beforehand so that they can handle themselves in a different way than they would have had they been reacting to that parent's behavior. Right? So, this can be really hard to do on our

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own because it's really tough to see our own thoughts. We just think that they're true. We just think, "Yeah, that guy is rude. I've seen him treat everybody that way. Of course, he's rude." It feels natural, normal. It feels reasonable, justified.

So, anyway, we got the client to a place where they could see the parent in a more neutral light, and we prepared this person for the meeting the next day. They have the meeting, and I get an email within the hour after that meeting took place, and this is what the client emailed me. It was short and sweet. It said, "Thanks for the session yesterday. Just finished the meeting. It went well. We even had a few laughs during it. I couldn't have done it without you. Thank you."

That is everything to me. It brings tears to my eyes. It feels so amazing to help you guys through the day to day grind of school leadership. This is what I live for. I told my client not to worry. This is my job. It's to help you through the day to days. It's kind of funny because we feel like we should be spending time thinking about how to make the big, impossible achievements become possible. That is absolutely part of what we do. Yet, what makes us feel exhausted, and overwhelmed, and chronically stressed are those day to day interactions we have.

When we can learn how to clean up our thoughts on the day to day stuff, the little things that bug us that we don't think are a problem, but they infiltrate who we are as a leader. Then we'll have so much more energy and room to tackle those bigger issues we face. So, dealing with the day to day is what I help school leaders do when all of a sudden, they realize they have more space and energy to start thinking about the bigger challenges. They have more room for ideas and solutions because they're not weighed down just trying to survive the day.

I want to celebrate this principal's win. This was a big deal. and I'm so proud that they reached out for coaching when they needed it, and that

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they implemented the coaching that we did coach on, and they were able to actually create the result of a more peaceful and pleasant meeting.

This outcome isn't just for my client. Think about it. It also made a better situation for that parent. and then eventually, for that student. That's why this work is so, so, so good. I just love it. So, kudos to that client. Don't want to call them out in case they're here, but congratulations. You have earned it.

Okay. On to the topic of the day. Today, I want to discuss the illusion of control. I just finished reading, well, actually, listening to the audio version of the book, of a book that is titled *The Illusion of Money*. It's a great book, and I loved listening to it because the author, Kyle Cease, is a comedian who's transformed into a transformational speaker. So, he adds a lot of humor into the way he reads the book, and it makes it just so much more fun to listen to.

It was recommended to me by a fellow coach, and it sounded intriguing. I was like, "Oh, I want to check this out." Anything to clear up my money blocks, to clear up my thoughts about any illusions that I have. Everything I listen to, you guys, I think about you and how can I translate what I'm learning into my client's needs.

I couldn't help but think about and adapt the concepts he was sharing into how we have illusions around time, how we have illusions around control and money, and all of the things, and managing ourselves, and managing our schedules. There's so many beliefs that we hold onto that we think are so, so true, but they're not. If we can just open ourselves up to possibly believing that it's not the way we think it is, that we can gain so much more out of it.

So, today, I want to spend the time talking about the illusion of control. I've talked a lot about time and how to manage your thoughts around time in

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past episodes. You guys can always go back and check those out, but today, I want to focus on this illusion of control because I have many people who reach out to me who struggle with perfectionism, and wanting to be liked, and being afraid to make decisions because they might be wrong, and this intense urge to know and control things outside of themselves.

So, let's start by asking ourselves what it means to have control or to be in control. When I think of having control, I think of having control over myself, my thoughts, my emotions, my actions, and my results. That is what I believe now. That's what I believe it means to have control because the only thing I can control, that I know with certainty, is myself. It's my thoughts, it's my feelings, it's my actions, it's my results.

I didn't always think this was the case. I used to think that having control meant being in a position of authority that granted me the control. So, when I was a teacher, I was thinking that the position of being in a teacher gave me control over my students or even some of the parents to some extent. When I became a principal, I thought that I had now control over my school, control over the way things should go with the staff, or the kids, or the parents, or the community, or whatever.

That illusion of control comes from the idea that the position grants us control, but really, what's happening is that the authority that comes with holding a particular position gives us the illusion that we have or that we possess control over situations outside of us. It's easy to see why that this positional authority equals control. We have tons of evidence that tells us and tells our brain that that's true.

We think our boss has control over us because they have positional authority. We think that the police, or elected officials, or whomever have control over us because of the position that they hold, but if you dig deeper into this idea, you'll see that them having real control over you would mean

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that they, the people in the authority positions, can make you think, or feel, or do things against your will, and we know that that's not true.

We might choose to behave a certain way in order to avoid certain consequences. Like maybe our boss tells us to follow these directives, and we choose to follow them because we don't want the consequences of a negative review or being dismissed, but it's still within our choice. We tend to blame. We say our boss made us do it, but that's not really the case. They didn't physically come in and make you take all of the actions that followed the initiatives. Can you see the difference?

I talk about this in depth on episode 91. I talk about how to build a relationship with your boss and why your boss doesn't have control over you. So, listen to that one if you're struggling with those thoughts about that feeling of somebody having control over you. I'm using this example again to kind of highlight why we believe positional authority is control, when really what it is, is the authority to take certain actions because of the position that somebody holds. There's a difference there.

Keep in mind that you have positional authority when you are a person in position that you get to take certain actions because you're in that position, but it doesn't mean control, it doesn't equal control. It's a little bit different. So, back to us and thinking about our control, and what we control, and the illusion of needing to have control in order to create results because we think that having control means having the ability and the capacity to have control over situations that are outside of us. I keep saying that for a reason.

We think that being in control of outside circumstances means that we actually are controlling them and that we get to control the outcomes. Not only that, we believe it's our responsibility to control people in situations. So many leaders believe that it's their responsibility and their job to control student behaviors, parent behaviors, control the way their staff teaches and the way they handle themselves.

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We think that because we are the leader, it's our job to get control and have everything around us be a certain way. We think, "Well, there should be good behavior by all people." Everything should be happy. Everyone should follow the rules, and all the policies, and the procedures, and that we should be constantly improving test scores and student progress.

We think that leadership should be this constant, steady upward motion of success and achievement. We also think that knowing information allows us to have more control, and I have a great example of this. I was coaching a client the other day. She was in a situation where she felt that something shady was going on, but she didn't know exactly what had gone down, and she was pretty distressed about it. She was upset that she didn't know the truth of what was going on.

When I asked her why she felt she needed to know the truth, it stumped her a little bit. She had to think about why she felt that urge, that need to know so desperately. Then she said, "If I knew, then I can fix it, or I can at least change it. Just knowing would bring me peace." She wanted to know because she wanted to try and control her feelings, and have the situation be controlled, and have a different outcome.

She believed that if she knew what happened, and the truth of what happened, then she could better understand it and take actions towards fixing it or changing it. It all sounds super reasonable, normal. It's like, "Yeah, I want the feedback. I want to know how I can improve or change myself," but we also really want to know what happened, so that we can think about the control outside of us that takes place. Right?

There's nothing wrong with wanting to know information, but what we do with ourselves, what actions do we take when we don't get to know. That is the question because there will always be things that come into your awareness at school. You'll hear a little trickling of something, but you won't know all the details. You won't have been there. So, it's kind of hearsay, or

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it's second-hand, or you get bits and pieces of information, but you don't know the whole picture. That happens all the time.

It especially happens when it comes to decisions from the district level. You'll hear a little rumbling of something going on, and then a decision comes down the pipe. You don't really know what happened or how it came to be that way, but then you have to implement something, and it really impacts you, and you're just dying to know why. It's interesting to me, like, why do we have this feeling of needing to know? So, what do you do when you don't get to know something? How does it feel to know that you don't know something? How do you act when you want to know, and you don't get to know? It can consume you. Right?

That's because we believe that knowing and having control over things outside of us is going to solve problems and that, in turn, will make us feel better. So, we're always striving to feel better, and we buy into the illusion that having control or getting more control and having knowledge, which is control, is the solution. This will take us on a merry go round of chasing control all year long.

So, the question becomes why? Why do we chase control? Why do we feel the need to have it? Why does it consume us as humans? The answer shouldn't surprise you, or at least it won't surprise you, but you won't want to hear it. It comes from the desire to feel a certain way. When you believe that you have or are in control, how do you feel?

Think of a time when you felt you were in control. What's the emotion that comes up when you're thinking, "I'm in control," or, "I have control"? The emotions that come up for me are a sense of security and certainty. When I feel that I've got a handle on things, I feel much more certain and much more secure about who I am, and what I'm doing, and what I'm creating. That need to feel certainty, and safety, and security is a universal human need. All of us want to feel these things.

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What's fascinating about these emotions that we're driven by is that we believe that they come from having control outside of our circumstances, outside of us. Number one, we fall into this trap that we actually believe we have control over things outside of us and then two, we believe that the control or that illusion of control is what brings us the security and the certainty. I know it feels very true. My brain thinks that too. I struggle with this totally. My brain wants to believe that having X number of dollars will make me feel more secure, or that having more control in my business or at my school site, in your case, will mean that you're more secure in your job.

The illusion of where security comes from when we lead our schools is very enticing. We think that security comes from having control, and we chase that end of the rainbow day after day. So, I'm guessing that you're wondering this question. If it's not control, then where does my security and my certainty really come from? How can I feel secure, and safe, and certain when things around me are out of my control? That's a great question. You already know the answer. Your brain is arguing with the answer, but you know it.

It comes from the thought that you think. So, how can we create evidence to prove to our brain that certainty and security come from our thoughts and not controlling things outside of us? The truth is that you have to look for it. You have to seek it out. You have to find evidence, and situations, and circumstances, and people who create certainty with their minds. It is possible to feel certainty regardless of your situation.

Think about this. Are there people in, quote on quote, worse situations that feel more certain than you feel? Have you watched the movie *Invictus*? Mandela was in prison for 27 years. He could've made that mean a whole slew of things about him. He could have made it mean that the prison guards had complete control over him, that he was a victim of his surroundings, that he had no control, there was no hope, and therefore, he had no sense of security or no sense of peace, but he didn't do that.

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He chose. He actively and intentionally chose to think that he was the master of his fate, the captain of his soul. He found the piece of security and certainty within himself. He didn't need his surroundings, or his circumstances, or people, any situation about him to change in order for him to feel that. He had to practice every day thinking those thoughts that generated the peaceful feelings, but allowing that, and letting himself do that, and practicing that allowed him to feel a sense of control because he took control of his mind. That's where your certainty, and security, and sense of control comes from.

You have no control over things outside of you. Attempting to do so, and continually failing, is what makes you feel exhausted, overwhelmed, burned out, frustrated, and afraid. There is a difference between taking action from the thought, "What can I do to create new results?" versus taking action from the thought, "What can I do to control the outcome?"

One comes from a place of owning what you control, which is ever only yourself, and the other is searching for a way to control things outside of you, trying to force a result. Do you see the difference? I'll know that clients are trying to control outside situations when they say things like, "I need to figure out how to get the staff or the teachers to do X, Y, Z. I need more influence. I need more control," or, "I just want to know what I should do to X, Y, Z. What can I do to control blank?"

Their brains are believing that if they just found a way to control others, or the situation, or that they had just the right amount of information, that then they'd be able to accomplish their mission and feel a sense of security, safety and certainty. What I suggest is that they focus on finding thoughts that generate those feelings of security and safety for themselves, and then plan their actions from that emotional state. Think about it.

How would you approach your staff if you didn't need them to change in order to feel secure and certain as a leader? If you believed you were a great leader, even when they made mistakes or didn't follow a protocol,

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what if you didn't need to control them in order to feel safe and certain in your job? How would you approach your staff if you were constantly in a state of certainty and security?

I'm guessing you'd be much more compassionate, much more patient, much more open, much calmer. Doesn't that feel better to you as a leader? The illusion of control and that having it will create the results we want is so alluring because it seems so true. I have to remind myself that it's an illusion all the time. Wanting to control things outside of myself and wanting my business or my money to be responsible for creating my own feelings of security are all evil temptations.

So, just notice when you're being sucked into wanting to control, control your staff, control an outcome, control test scores, control technology, control children, and ask yourself why. What am I really looking for? I'm feeling this need to control. What am I really trying to create? Most likely, you're wanting to feel secure. You're wanting to feel certain. You're wanting to feel confident. So, what is it you're looking for? What are you looking to achieve, and how can you create that within yourself through your thoughts?

As leaders, it's easy to get caught in the control trap. As educators, we are even more inclined to get caught in the control trap. We've been conditioned to believe that the institution of education is in control of knowledge and learning, and that as educators that we need to be in control of our students' learning and behaviors.

We have to consciously work to un-condition our own beliefs about control and shift our focus into controlling our thoughts. It's not easy and it's not comfortable work, but it is what will turn the impossible goals into possible ones, one thought at a time. Have a very empowered week, my friends. I will talk with you next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

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P.S. I'm going to be offering a free masterclass training on Tuesday, February 18th at 4:00 p.m. Pacific, which is 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time. All you have to do is join my mailing list, and the link will be in the show notes for the mailing list link to my website. When you sign up to be on the email list, many of you already are, but if you're not, what the heck, get on the email list because you're going to get access to these free trainings.

I'm going to be teaching and coaching. So, you will want to be live for this event. So, put it on your calendar and block off the hour. It's only 60 minutes. I'm going to teach, and I'm going to offer coaching for those who have issues they're struggling with, so I can help you on the spot in the moment. So, be sure to sign up for the newsletter, be sure to sign up for the link. Register for the class so that you can get access to the training and the coaching totally free just because I love you.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit [AngelaKellyCoaching.com](http://AngelaKellyCoaching.com), where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.