

Ep #119: Your Role as a Leader During Crisis



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to Episode 119.

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 friends and my empowered leaders welcome to April. And this is no April fools, I'm sad to say. I have been recording all new podcasts for the month of April and actually the end of March because I want to talk about, in real time as much as possible, what is going on for each and every one of you; which is complete disruption and complete brain disruption, complete habit and routine disruption, and complete change in your lives.

And last week, I talked about how to coach yourself through the changes that are inevitable that are coming up, and that we had no anticipation for and how we deal with change that is coming at us at a rapid pace. And I hope that writing down your ideas and your thoughts and the emotions that come with them have been helpful in helping you see the stories that we're telling and using the language that we're using and how it's impacting our experience of COVID-19 and school closures and remote learning.

So, with that, I want to talk about what I believe our role is as school leaders during this chaotic time. And I hope that this way of thinking will help you decrease your stress and reduce the amount of story that you're telling yourself regarding what you should or shouldn't be doing, or what you should or shouldn't be fixing, or how much you should be helping or contributing or managing or creating as a result of being a school leader.

So, when I was a school leader, I can say this for myself, and I would aim to guess that many of you feel the same way. And that is this; when we are leading a school and we are charged with the responsibility of being a

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school leader, we operate from a state of believing that it's our job to control situations.

We think that it is our responsibility, that it's our job description to go in and lead our school and fix problems. And we also operate under the illusion of those around us. And what I mean by that is that parents and teachers also believe that your role is to control situations and to fix them.

So, not only are you coming in with this concept of what your role is in school leadership. You're also being fed and being impacted and influenced by the expectations and illusions of other people around you; those you serve. And I've seen it. I've experienced it. I understand. They demand that you fix the problems that they're having, or that the problems that are going on campus, or they want you to control student behaviour, or they want you to solve their problems. Because what they really are looking for is for you to relieve them of their pain.

They believe that they don't have the knowledge or the authority or the power or the answers that you do. So, they think that you are the person to fix their problems, their jobs, their situations and that because you're the school leader it therefore it is your responsibility. I'm sure you've all experienced this before where someone said to you, "Well you're the school principal that's why you make the big bucks, figure it out," right? I had people say that to me all the time. And I thought, they're not that many more bucks than what you're making but we're not going to go there.

So when people believe that because of your positional authority that your job and your role as a school leader is to fix all the problems and to do all the things and be at all the meetings and to know all of the technology and all of the curriculum and be everywhere at once; a tall order, I know. When you don't fulfil those and they still feel anguish or pain from a problem that they are experiencing, they're going to want to blame you and then insist that you do something about it so that they don't have to do something about it so they don't have to feel the impact that comes with a new situation, like the coronavirus.

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So, I know there are thousands of memes out on Facebook and social media, joking about parents having to home school, parents having to be with their own children for hours on end, having to either find childcare or find ways to teach them or to provide services for their children that they weren't expecting to have.

Everyone has been thrown off guard. Everyone is in change fatigue. And everyone is in a state of, "What's the fastest way to solve the pain and my problem?" And that is to blame other people. That is what our brain does when it doesn't want to keep working to solve the problem on our own. We fatigue and we want to just blame other people.

But what we've noticed is that we have to slow down. This is a lot going on and we need to slow our thinking down, our brains down. And we have to think about what our role is in this situation and what control we actually have versus what we think we should have, or what others think we should have, or what we want to have.

We wish we could control the technology. We wish every student could have a healthy and warm meal three times a day. We wish that parents weren't frustrated with us. We want to be able to control how our parents are responding, how our Superintendent is responding, how the government is responding, how teachers are reacting. We wish we could make all that happy and easy and pain free.

When we're the leader, we can take the burden of responsibility by overextending ourselves in what we believe our role is as the leader. And believing that we should be able to do more than we are doing or that we can do is going to put you in a constant state of an anxiety, stress, worry. Because you're going to be scrambling about making as fast as decisions as you can in order just to keep up with all the new input and the new information that is coming by the minute, which is going to lead to further confusion and miscommunication and exhaustion on your part.

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So, our role as a school leader right now is not to solve all of the problems. I believe we are a level of first responders in our community. We have to triage the problems that we are seeing and experiencing. And I know, as a school leader, you feel the urge to jump into action and believe that taking lots and lots of action is the solution. I am doing it too, I've noticed how much more I am working and faster I'm working and trying to be as available to school leaders as possible through all of the means; through the podcasts, through Facebook, through social media, through live videos and trainings, through my email list. I'm trying to double down and get to work and be of service.

But what we have to do when we are leading groups of people, is we have to notice that our role, right now, is not that we're going to solve all of the problems and do them all well and perfectly and beautifully. We have to triage. We have to understand that our role in school leadership is, at least in this moment right now, it's very basic. It's to make sure that people feel safe. They just need to know that someone is in charge, someone is making decisions, someone is making them feel certain and safe when there's nothing else out there feeling certain and safe. That's it.

People want a sense of certainty in this time of uncertainty. They want to feel certain. And the way they are trying to feel certain is there trying to control things outside of their control which makes them feel even more out of control and more uncertainty. And when they can't make sense of what's going on and they realize, no matter what they do or how they act, they can't change the situation or make it better, they turn to you.

So when teachers, students and parents turn to you, you have a choice to make. You can turn to your district leaders, you can do what they're doing, basically, and turn to the leaders and look up to them and tell them it's their job to create the certainty. Or you can decide, "How can I help people feel more certain? How can I help myself feel more certain and my parents feel more certain? And you can say, "Hey district, up to you, not me," which is

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blaming and deflecting. Or you can just decide that your role right now is to create certainty for yourself and those around you.

And I would like to say that this is not the time to wait for your bosses and the county and the state and the government to bring certainty into our lives. The bigger the group of people that a leader is trying to create certainty for, the longer it will take. Your boss, the district, whomever you're working with directly, is affected by those around them; what the county is saying, what the state is saying, what the government is saying. And they are responding to all of that chaos.

So, you have to ground yourself in what you can do just for your school site, for your school community and you can decide that it's possible to feel certain, as a leader, during these uncertain times, without trying to control the chaos around you. Stop focusing on trying to control other people or what the virus is doing or being consumed by where it's spread or what it's doing or what other people are doing. Being frustrated that school has closed or that you have to learn how to remote teach or feed children or learn new technology, all of that creates more uncertainty.

So, what you want to do, is you want to create certainty by the way that you think about all of the situations you're faced with. We start by believing that it's possible to experience a sense of certainty and calm in the middle of all this chaos.

So, I know your brain is asking, "But how? I'm not feeling calm. How do I feel calm?" You have to start with your own feelings, we talked about this last week. What are your thoughts and feelings about the virus? What are your thoughts and feelings about school closing, about the government, about what medical professionals are doing, about the people who aren't staying in quarantine are doing, about your teachers, your parents your kids? Write it all down.

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There are going to be some thoughts that create anger, thoughts that created sadness, thoughts that create regret or you're feeling like you made a mistake. You're going to feel all the feels. You might feel extreme gratitude. You might be so grateful you're able to work from home, grateful that you didn't get sick, grateful that no one was impacted directly in your school community. Perhaps you're feeling tons of gratitude right now and you're feeling some clarity about what it means to be a leader in this type of environment, in this type of situation.

It's actually, just as I'm thinking about it now, I feel so honoured. And I feel so full of life and so full of possibility in leading school leaders through this process. And I want you to tap into that energy and gratitude and honor that comes with leading your school through this time of complete – I don't know what else to say but uncertainty. It's complete uncertainty.

So, you want to very much tap into your thoughts and emotions right now and notice how you're approaching it. Are you waking up feeling chaotic? Is your brain feeling chaos? Is your body vibrating with chaos? Mine tends to do that. I have to be very cognizant of not jumping out of bed and wanting to do ten-million things and create extra support for people.

I have to be triaging my time, my effort, my energy and giving some time and effort and energy to my family who's at home, who normally isn't at home. So instead of locking myself away and working longer and harder, I want to be more intentional and I want to use this energy to ground myself and to feel what I'm doing is the right thing and that I don't have to overwork. I just have to choose the work that I'm going to do and choose how I'm going to intentionally show up and serve all the people who are following my lead. And that's what I ask of you.

Ground yourself through thoughts that you think. If you believe that the coronavirus is causing you big problems and causing you big headaches and creating all kinds of exhaustion and fatigue and frustration, you'll get

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into a bigger state of agitation. You will still get through this chaos no matter what, but it's how you're going to look on the other side that's going to be the memory of the experience.

So, how do you want to remember leading your team through this time? Do you want it to be chaotic? Do you want it to be panicked? Do you want to be overworked? Or do you want to use this opportunity as a chance to manage your brain, to train your brain thinking thoughts, to a practice emotional resiliency, to know you can do hard things; things that are harder than you ever thought before?

I know I am being tried and I'm working through my own thoughts and emotions and I'm sure you are too. And I feel like I have been repeating myself over and over, but it truly comes down to this; we ground our self through our thoughts.

We are in the business of people and management. And the way that we lead through chaos and the way we guide our school and the role we can assume right now is simply to manage our own thoughts and emotions, and triage the actions that we want to take and the urges feel to take, and keep ourselves as grounded as possible.

When your energy is calm, you lead with calmness. When you lead with calmness, people follow with calmness. If you want to create a school and an environment in which people are responding calmly and collected and grounded, it starts with your brain. You are the leader and that is your role. Your role is to create certainty and trust and safety and calmness; first within yourself, and within the school year leading.

Have a calm, empowered, amazing week. I will talk with you next week, take care bye-bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit

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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.