

Ep #118: Coaching Yourself Through Crisis



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to Episode 118.

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, and welcome to the very unexpected end of March. I had an entirely different podcast episode and month planned for March and for April, but because of Coronavirus and the impact it's having on schools and school leaders, I've dedicated this week to rewriting and creating an entirely different message for you listeners.

I want to offer the most support that I can through this process, and just know that the podcast will be accommodating your needs, and your questions, and your thoughts and concerns as best I can, in real time as I can, and that I will also be able to coach you live in real time on the brand new Empowered Principal Facebook group.

Please be sure to join that. Totally free. You can follow me. I'm going to be offering Facebook lives, Facebook trainings, and answering any questions that people have, and posing some questions for you to ponder and consider as we navigate this new territory of our time in school leadership.

With that said, I'm going to talk about how to manage your thoughts and emotions and coach yourself during the chaos of the Coronavirus. This will be a topic of conversation throughout the month of April, and I'm also offering a very special coaching package for those of you who want individualized, personalized coaching, and support from now through the end of the year.

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If you're interested in that, please just sign up for a free consult call. We will touch base, I'll give you a call, we'll talk it through, and we will plan out an eight-week program that's designed specifically to the struggles and the challenges that you are uniquely facing in your position.

All right. Let's get started. I want to highlight that I truly believe that this experience that we're going through, this situation, is the absolute best time and opportunity for you to practice or learn how to self-coach, and to manage your thinking and the way that you're feeling because the thoughts and the emotions, they drive every decision and action that you take, which creates the results that you have in your leadership role and in your life at large.

There are so many thoughts going on for us right now, both professionally and personally, and we're having thoughts personally, how we feel about the virus and how it's impacting ourselves, and our family, and our friends. So, you're in your mind, and you're having this reaction to what's going on in the world from a very visceral, personal mentality and mindset.

Perhaps you're feeling a lot of fear, and panic, and worry about you and your loved ones getting sick, or catching the virus, or what's going to happen, or we don't have enough food, or we don't have enough toilet paper, or maybe you feel kind of annoyed.

You think this whole thing is a little bit of an overreaction, and it's creating unnecessary suffering, or financial impacts for those who aren't able to work, and the kids aren't able to get the food, and you might feel anger, or frustration, or just resentment that all of this is going on.

So, your brain is having a lot of thoughts and reactions to what's happening personally. That might be positive, it might be negative, but if you're are having negative thoughts about the situation, and you're feeling down, or

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you're feeling depressed, or you're feeling just super anxious, know that they're coming from the thoughts you're having in your mind.

The way that you can feel a little more calm, a little more serenity in your day, is to practice bringing those thoughts to neutral. I'll talk a little bit more about that today, but I want you to see that it's the thought about what's going on that's creating the anxiety, the panic, the fear, the frustration, the resentment, the anger, all of those emotions that we're feeling. We might be feeling a lot of emotions based on a lot of thoughts that we're having. It's all okay, but just know that this work that I'm sharing with you can help you neutralize your thinking.

The same is true with our professional life. We're facing a very brand new situation that we've never faced before, which is requiring our brains to think differently, to learn quickly, to take actions we've never imagined having to take as a school leader. So, our minds end up swirling around with all of these thoughts, and actions, and situations that are coming at us so quickly.

This is when coaching ourselves is most needed. It's also interesting because before the Coronavirus, we truly thought we were really busy, that we were overwhelmed, and that we were tired before these changes happened. But now, when we're looking at all that we have to do now, and all the changes that we need to make, and the actions we need to take, and we're really changing the entire way we do business in schools right now. Our brain is having to go on overdrive, and work really hard, and it certainly does not like doing that.

We are in, what I call right now, change fatigue. This is when so many things are happening all at once, and we feel like we are more exhausted, more stressed, and that we're working harder than we've ever worked before. That's because our brain isn't on autopilot. It's not able to default to what it knows, and it can just go on auto drive.

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Everything that you had planned to do from now until the end of the year from where you work physically, your physical residence of work, to how your team teaches, to how you are going to test or not test, and how you're going to handle end-of-the-year celebrations. All of that has changed.

That's because we can't rely on predictability, or habits, or routines, and our brain loves, it loves certainty. It loves consistency, and reliability, and predictability, and efficiency, but I want to say that it also loves spontaneity and things that feel new and shocking to it.

That's why we're so drawn to the news. We can't help but watch videos of what's going on in the world, and listening to the latest and greatest information out there, and the numbers, and the statistics, and what's going on in Italy. All of the things. Our brain is drawn to that because it loves like the excitement, and the spontaneity, and the uncertainty of what's going on in the world.

There's nothing wrong if a part of you finds this chaos a little bit exciting or exhilarating. That's not wrong. It's normal. Our brains are really designed to have some fun, and have some shock value, and some exhilarated feelings when things change up sporadically or unpredictably. That's totally normal.

So, on one hand, we embrace the excitement that comes along with going through something so dramatic, and it feels good to be able to change up our routines so there's not monotony, but also, as we dive deeper into this and we realize the impact that it's having, and the long-term effects it's having on us, we are seeing that there are changes we don't want to happen, or that we don't like, and that we just want to go back to normal, and we just want to go back to routine, and we want to go back to what used to feel so complicated but now seems really simple in our lives.

We're having to learn things that we aren't especially motivated in or interested in. We have to take actions that feel very cumbersome, and

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monotonous, or just very struggle and hard. We have to experience change fatigue because many of our routines are all changing at once. I relate this to my new move into my home. We recently moved into our new home about three weeks ago, and the first week we moved in we had no sense of routine.

Things weren't unpacked. We had no idea where anything was. Our clothes were still in boxes. We barely knew where our toothbrush was. We didn't have groceries. We just didn't have anything. Then two days after I moved in, I went to Seattle for a week for a training. That delayed the house getting into order.

So, when I came back, it just felt brand new all over again and just totally discombobulated. Everything I needed to accomplish took so much longer because we hadn't established any routines yet, and the same is happening for your brain right now. There are no routines established because you've never lived and worked this way before.

You've never had to create an environment that's remote. So, it's going to feel like you're required to have extra focus, extra stamina, and extra brain power. Just know that when you feel this extra fatigue, it's to be expected. How do we coach ourselves through this time? My goal is to teach you how to neutralize your emotions as much as you can with the STEAR Cycle while you are experiencing this change fatigue.

If you're new to the STEAR Cycle and new to the podcast, first of all, welcome. We're happy that you're here. I want you to go to this week's show notes, or you can go to AngelaKellyCoaching.com/downloads and you can download a copy of the podcast Quick Start Guide that provides you an introduction to the STEAR Cycle that I talk about in all of the podcasts.

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So, the way that we neutralize emotions is by tuning into our thoughts. The way we do this is by noticing the words we are choosing to describe our experiences. I've been observing the language that principals are using to describe their situations and experiences, and it's very clear who's managing their thoughts versus those who don't yet have these tools.

One of the thoughts that was shared online was, "I feel like I'm working more now from home than I've ever worked before. I need a vacation." At first glance this, it seems like this principal is just sharing a fact that she's working more from home than she was before at school. This actually may be true. It might be a situation that she could prove. She could prove that she's putting in more hours at home than she was before.

That is a circumstance or a situation. I want you to notice that even if it is a circumstance and not a thought, it's what her brain is making it mean and how she's interpreting the longer hours. She's interpreting those longer hours as a negative situation. She needs a vacation. That extra statement at the end of her first statement shows you that what her brain is making, "I'm working longer hours at home," mean is that it's a negative impact.

It's impacting her ability to feel, and act, and get results from a negative space. Working from longer home can have several meanings. You could make it mean that you're totally exhausted, and overwhelmed, and unhappy, and that you're working so much more. When we make it mean that, we spend time focusing on how much time we're spending at working, and then we feel disappointment in how much work we have to do.

The action that we take is that we stop working because we're thinking about how much we're working, and we end up taking a moment to post it online, and to share it with other principals who are probably working longer hours, and then they're tuned into that, and then we stop and we look for the responses.

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Are other people feeling the same way I am? Which in time, turns into us having to actually work a longer workday because we've stopped completing work tasks, and getting our job done, and we're extending our workday by thinking about how much longer we'll working, and how much time we're spending working, and how different it is to work this way, and let's complain or share our thoughts about our time that we're working, and we actually end up making our workday longer.

Do you see how that comes full circle? The comment feels so innocent, and it is innocent when you're unaware that it's creating your results, but the comment impacts how we feel, and how we act, and how long we actually end up working. We create the results of our life with the words we choose to describe it, and when we add collective thinking and collective emotions to our own stories, it amplifies them.

People who share their hardships with others over and over amplify the way they experience those hardships. I want you to really hear this. Be mindful of the language you choose to express your experiences. The words you choose are what creates the way you experience any situation, including the one we're in right now.

As a school leader, you are in the business of management. You manage schedules, materials, students, staff, and a campus. You manage all kinds of things. You also need to manage your thoughts and your mind. It's actually the most important management that you can ever do as a leader, and all you have to do to start managing your thoughts is to create awareness of the thoughts you're thinking.

Write them all down. Get them onto paper. Notice which ones stand out or bring up intense emotions for you. When you do this regularly, you'll start to see patterns in your thinking. I love to do it in the morning first thing, and I also will do it anytime I notice I'm experiencing a lot of negativity, or unfocused work, or unfocused productivity.

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Writing down your thoughts takes under five minutes, and even if you only do this aspect of the process that I teach for mind management, you are going to see how much the words that you choose impact your emotional state. Words create meaning in our brains, and meaning impacts our emotional state.

Notice how you talk with your friends and your colleagues. Notice the stories your brain loves to tell over and over. Notice the stories that other people tell. See how their language impacts how they are feeling and acting. It's really fun to be the observer of thought and language. It pulls us out of victim mode and into reflective mode, and it also neutralizes our emotions very quickly.

So, start today. Start feeling better today by taking note of your own thoughts. The words and the language that you use, and the stories that you tell. Do you like the stories? Do they feel good or not? Notice what those around you are saying. Notice the stories that influence your stories, and how do they influence your stories? Are you buying into those? Do you say like, "Yeah, that's exactly what's happening right now in my life"? And you can create that collective thought and a collective emotion around the experiences you're having given the situation we're in.

Can you see how these collective conversations are creating the experience that you're having with the current state of affairs? Can you see how it's impacting you? When you start to tune in, you'll see how impactful this exercise is. It sounds very mundane, and it sounds very simple, but I want you to see how quickly the thoughts create the emotions.

What you'll find is that when you see the impact it's having, you're going to want to erase the negative thoughts, the thoughts that make you feel bad. You'll want to remove them from your story altogether, but instead of that, instead of trying to just hide them or eliminate them, instead try shifting a

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word or two within the sentence that makes the story feel more neutral to you.

So, instead of saying, “Gosh, I am working way longer at home than I was when I was at school.” You can say, “Hm, I'm noticing that working from home feels like a lot more work than working on campus.” The situation hasn't changed. You're still working from home, and you still may be working longer hours than you were before, but the situation shifts from happening to you to just noticing it.

You're noticing the change that's happening. You're noticing the shifts that you're making, and that they're just happening. You are still you. You're still a principal who's leading a school and a school community. You're just doing it from home with new tools and different technologies.

My friends, you've got this. You can neutralize your thoughts and emotions, and even if you can't, you can sit with them and just notice, “My thinking is creating my emotions.” You can see the difference between life happening to you and life happening for you. Go and create an amazingly empowered week. I'll talk to 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 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.