

Ep #120: The 50:50 Balance of School Leadership



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, empowered leaders. Welcome to episode 120.

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 there, my very empowered and hardworking school leaders. Welcome to the podcast. Happy Tuesday. It is April. We are in the middle of a crisis. We are in the middle of a pandemic. And this is the second episode in this month's series on empowered school leadership during a crisis.

Today, we're going to talk about school leadership and the fact that there has always been uncertainty in the world. There has always been uncertainty in our positions as school leaders, in education, in teaching, in learning, in students, in their families. There has always been uncertainty.

People perish. Accidents happen. Wars exist. Students fail. Teachers stress out, parents complain, problems don't get solved. New problems are always coming up. There has always been uncertainty in our jobs. We don't know whether we're going to keep our position or stay in our position or keep our jobs.

We don't know if teachers are going to be successfully teaching students. We don't know which students will succeed and which will fail. We don't know which parents will be supportive or which will be complaining and upset. We don't know how our boss is going to respond to our leadership. We don't really know anything.

We don't know how the testing is going to come out. I could list on and on all of the things we don't know about, but here's the problem, but here is -

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not even the problem. Here is the beauty in this. The beauty in this is that life has always been uncertain. The pandemic of COVID-19 has just shifted our focus rapidly from all of the certainties we've created in our life, in our profession, in our job, our career, shifted it over to all of the uncertainty in the world. All of the scarcity in the world. All of the fears. All of the unknown.

That is what's creating the pandemic, the worry, the panic and concern and the feelings of exhaustion and the feelings of not doing enough and not being enough and not knowing enough and not learning quickly enough and not being able to execute and implement ideas and remote learning enough.

We have created a sense of uncertainty by focusing on uncertainty. If you think back to just a few months ago, what you thought were your biggest problems at school, perhaps it was a particular teacher you were trying to up-level, or it was trying to get to classrooms, or perhaps it was that feeling of scarcity of time, not having enough time to do all of the things, or maybe you had a parent who was down your throat and coming at you sideways.

Maybe those were your hardest things you were dealing with earlier in the school year. You were never contemplating how to implement online remote learning within a week's time. You never thought of that. It never even entered your mind because it wasn't in our reality. It wasn't a problem.

So the problems that we were dealing with at the beginning of the school year, they're not even in our thoughts right now because we're dealing with new thoughts. And that's because our past experience of school leadership, we had problems.

Life was 50:50 back then. 50% of the time we felt some success, and 50% of the time we felt some failures, and 50% of the time, we were solving

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problems and 50% of the time we were trying to problem-solve and frustrated that we couldn't solve a problem.

Now we're in the present moment and we are just living a new 50:50. There are pretty awesome things about working from home, and there are pretty awful things about working from home. It's just a different 50:50. And if you can embrace that and explore that in this moment while you're trying to lead your staff, your students, your community through this time, through this crisis, through this pandemic, you're trying to lead them from home, there are just different problems.

There are not more problems, there are not harder problems. They're just different. This is the 50:50. So the same situations you were dealing with back in the beginning of the year or the second trimester might still be true. You might still have 10% of students who are not prepared to graduate. But you're not really thinking about that right now because you're thinking about how to set up Zoom and how to get meal services to kids who need food, and how to set up homework packets for kids who don't have technology available to them.

And here's what's interesting; we had problems back then. We're in new problems right now. And in a year from now, you're going to have problems that feel bigger and harder than this pandemic problem because you are in it then. So your past self felt like those were the hardest problems. Your current self in this present moment feels like the pandemic and leading from home and leading online and remote learning is the hardest thing.

In a year from now, whatever problems you have then, your brain is going to tell you that those are the hardest problems. Because whatever the brain is working on in the moment is going to feel like the hardest thing. Our brain is always going to tell us that the hard work it's doing currently in the moment is the hardest worst moment it's having.

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So the problems we're facing now are going to be perceived as the most important and the most challenging. That happened in the past, it's going to happen in the future. It's because it's 50:50. It means we're always going to have experiences of uncertainty and challenges to face and struggles to feel no matter what.

We aren't on hold this month or next month, waiting for school to resume back to normalcy. We're not on hold. This is the new normal. This is the normal. This is life. This is the normal for right now. Life is happening as we speak in this moment, as you listen to this podcast. In quarantine, life is happening.

Children are still waking up each morning, growing each day, and wanting to learn. Adults are getting up and going to work and seeing new problems and creating new solutions. That's what work is. We go to work on problems, creating solutions, finding new ways, being innovative. That's what normal is.

We just have a new problem to solve, a new challenge, a new way of looking at life that we haven't looked at before. We've been looking at how life felt so certain in the past, but if you go back to the past, if you could go back to the past, you'd see that you felt just as uncertain 50% of the time, and you felt certainty 50% of the time.

As a leader, know that no matter what the circumstances are, yesterday, today, or tomorrow, the experience of leading your school will always be 50:50. And I sure wish I had known this in the beginning of my career because I felt like it was 100% uncertainty. I felt miserable all of the time.

And that's because I layered the experience of being new with the shame and guilt and thoughts that I shouldn't be feeling new, that I should know what's going on, and instead of should-ing myself, I should have said, "Ah, this is the part that isn't fun. This is the 50% that doesn't feel good. This is

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the 50% I don't like doing or I don't know how to do or that I don't want to do. This is the 50%."

And then just saying that could have neutralized my thoughts and my emotions about being new and not knowing what to do and having people be mad at me and not knowing how to fix the problems, or thinking that I should be able to solve it all. All of that chatter in my head as a new principal would have helped me suffer less.

Now, let me be clear. It doesn't mean that I would reduce the percentage of the tough times I had. It's still going to be 50:50. But it would allow me to accept and allow the hard 50% of school leadership.

Whether you're a veteran and you're just stressed out because you had all your ducks in a row, you had all your systems in place and the carpet was pulled from underneath you and now you're just totally out of whack and discombobulated, or you're a brand new principal and you think, "You know what, I didn't know what I was doing anyway so this isn't that different than before. I still don't know what I'm doing, it's just a new not knowing. I didn't really have systems set up in place. This actually feels a little bit like a relief and I'm just going to go with the flow and figure this out," kudos to you.

Your 50% good might be that this isn't that much different than the not knowing before. Veteran principals might be having a harder time and feeling more challenged because they had their systems in place. They were more experienced. They knew what they were doing. They felt lots of certainty, and now they feel lots of uncertainty.

Their 50% of the year might have been the first half that felt certain, and their 50% might be the second half that feels uncertain. We all have the 50:50. It just looks different for everybody else. So believing that it should all feel good is going to add negativity to your experience.

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And when you believe that it shouldn't be 50:50, you think it should be 80:20, you can argue whatever percentage you want, I just like to go with, well, half the time it's 50:50 and hey, if it ends up being 60:40 at the end of it all, awesome. Or 70:30 or 80:20, awesome. We get to determine what percentages that is, but denying that negative experiences and negative emotions should exist at all creates more negative emotions.

You're not reducing the amount of negative experience you have, but when you add on top of it, that layer of that thing shouldn't feel bad, and then we end up making it harder by being upset or angry that it's not being easy or fun all of the time. 50:50 just means that 50% is going to be awesome and 50% is not going to be awesome. That's all it means.

And believing that everything should be magical actually creates less than 50:50 for you. You feel negative more of the time. Do you see how that comes true for you? So really what this message is to say is that no matter what, in your past, in your present, or in the future, when your brain thinks I just want to get through this and get back to when life was good and normal and certain, that belief is what's going to create extreme disappointment when you realize this is it. This is the 50:50. We're in it right now. This is life.

And when we get "through" it, and we get to the end of this year or we get to the beginning of next year, there will be another set of 50:50. Life is always going to be uncertain, but it doesn't mean that we should focus on the uncertainty. Focus on what you can be certain about. Focus on what feels good and stable and secure. What can you make stable in your life? What routines can you put in place right now? What controls do you have?

Life is always going to be 50:50, but that doesn't mean that we should focus always on the negative 50:50. Acknowledge it when it's here and then look for the 50:50 that's good. And one tip I want to add to you is the amount of time you're spending spinning in the negative part of what's not

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going well right now and how hard it is to lead your people when you're doing it remotely, you must also spend an equal amount of time focusing on the good.

What benefits are coming out of having to lead remotely? What are you learning from this experience? How are you growing as a leader? What benefits do you have from working from home? How has it changed the way you think about school and education and teaching and learning and students and children and families and your boss? What are you making all of this mean?

If you're going to spin in 50:50, you have to give the 50% positive just as much time as you are of the negative 50%. Don't make it harder on yourself by spinning in the negative emotion. Alright, I'm keeping this month's podcasts short and sweet because I want you to listen to them multiple times. I want you to know that you have plenty of time to reflect on how to evolve your thoughts and your emotions and how you can focus on the positive 50% as much as you do on the negative.

Life is always going to be 50:50. So you might as well embrace the sweetness along with the struggle. Got it? Alright, have an empowered week. Reach out if you have any thoughts, any questions, or you're really struggling. And remember, I do have a special offer right now for school leaders.

Eight weeks of private personalized coaching with me to get you from now to the end of the school year through the pandemic. This is unprecedented times and you don't have to do it alone. I'm here for you. Reach out, let's do a consult call and get you to the end of the year. Take care.

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

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learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.