

Ep #122: (Part Two) Moving Forward: Goals



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Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to Episode 122.

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. Happy Tuesday. And if you are new to our podcast, I welcome you. I am so happy to have heard from so many of you about how this podcast has been helping you lead your school and reduce your stress and your anxiety and your frustrations about the job. I truly am grateful for every person who has taken a moment to let me know how this podcast has impacted them. And that is my purpose.

I have realized, through the pain and the struggle of my own challenges as a school leader, that it was my calling and my purpose to serve the world and the field of education and to each of you in this way, in this manner. This is why I'm here and it warms my heart to know that my authenticity and my sharing of these stories and what I have learned and what I am studying and how it's helping you evolve the way that you lead your school and live your life.

I'm so honored to help you in this way, so thank you for letting me be a part of your work week and for letting this podcast be a part of your learning. I'm really appreciative.

So, I hope that this finds you very healthy and very well for you and those that you love. I'm recording this podcast on April Fool's Day. I promise not to pull a fast one on you. And for those of us living in California, we were just informed, as of midnight last night, that our shelter-in-place has been extended to May 3rd.

So, if this is still the case by the time this episode airs at the end of April, then we are less than one week away from reintegrating back into our

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social circles and into the world outside of our homes. And this means, for many, if not for most of us, that we're going to want to coach our brains on what getting back into the world means for us, just like we had to process how it felt to go into isolation and into quarantine and the struggles that were apart of having to work from home and lead our schools from home and have our families with us 24/7 and help them through the process, help our staff through the process.

Just like we had to coach ourselves in the beginning, we're going to have to coach ourselves through the change and transition of going back into the world and being out of shelter-in-place. So, once again, you're going to have thoughts about what this change will mean for you both personally and what it's going to mean for you professionally.

And your thoughts might be in alignment. You might feel the same about your personal life or situation that you feel about work. Perhaps you're excited to go back to work and you're excited personally to get out of the house and get going and get socializing.

Or you might feel aligned in the sense that you're a little afraid to go back and what it all means and you're a little afraid to re-socialize and reintegrate. It might be in alignment that way. Or you might feel some dissonance. You might feel like super-excited.

Maybe you're dying to get back into the classrooms and into campus and get back to work and you're ready to not be working from home. But when you think about your kids going back to school, maybe you feel a little more hesitant to send them and get them socializing again. What if they get the bug? Your brain may be worried about that. Or maybe you're worried about going back out to restaurants and eating food and being around people again.

I know, like, my brain's a little bit nervous about reintegrating back into normal social experiences again. So, I'm excited to get back into some normal things and I'm a little hesitant in others. And you might feel that too.

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You might feel this dissonance in wanting some of the things to go back to normal, but also appreciating some of the things you have and being a little nervous about going back out into the world knowing that this isn't going to be, like, the all clear. Nothing's going to be perfectly safe, perfectly sound.

We won't be exempt from the potential of catching a virus or potentially being a carrier. We don't know. So, we have to coach ourselves through our thoughts about what it means now that we're going to be going back out into the world around people and our campuses and what that's going to look like for not just for us, but for our own families, for our friends, for our staff, our colleagues, our students, their families, the community, all of it.

So, I know I personally am much more focused on sanitizing, washing my hands. And I'm so mindful of what I touch in public now. Or when I go back out, I'll be thinking about those things much more than I ever have. And I'm sure that we thought about those things subconsciously, or even consciously from time to time. But it wasn't a prevailing thought in our day.

And I'm betting you're having similar thoughts and thoughts that you never thought you would ever have to think before, right? You've probably thought about online meeting platforms more than you ever thought you would in your entire life.

And it's kind of funny when you stop and look back at all we've been prompted to think about over the last six to eight weeks. And I'm sure that your brain is continuing to have new thoughts as we venture into these last weeks of school. And depending on what's currently happening right now, either you're going back and you're having to think about that, or you aren't going back and you're having to reconcile what that means, not being able to see the kids again, not being able to have some closure to the school year.

But I want to point something out here. Six weeks ago, when the quarantine first took effect, our brains were spinning in confusion and

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overwhelm and doubt. And we might have been in resistance to school closures and online learning and remote leadership because we didn't think it was possible. We didn't think it was going to work. We didn't know how to do it and we really struggled and our life-work balance was just tipped over on its side. Work felt harder and more consuming than ever before

But as we got up each day and we tried again and we failed again and then we started solving problems and then we learned from yesterday's work and yesterday's mistakes or fails and we started to create this new little rhythm and routine for ourselves and our family. We got a system in place for working from home.

And it might not have been perfect, but we were able to, eventually, like calm down, check on our students, get our staff up and running. And we started shifting into problem-solving mode where we were asking questions and figuring out new things and connecting with people online.

What we did is we acclimated to our situation and we lived through the experience because we started changing the way we were thinking. We went from impossibility to maybe this is possible, to like, okay this isn't going to be perfect but at least we're doing something, into, like, okay we're starting to get a little rhythm and routine here.

Now we're shifting into, if this is the case, we may be shifting into going back to school, or we've heard by now that we're not going back to school. And either way, we're having to transition into that next phase.

Now, did we love all of this process? Was it comfortable? Was it easy? No. It wasn't. We did not love it at all and it was not easy and it was not comfortable. But did we have to grow and evolve ourselves and our belief in what was possible, both from ourselves and from others?

Did we have to step into our empowerment and believe new thoughts and possibilities? Yes. We did. We went from believing things were not possible, not even in the realm of our thoughts, into the idea that something like this was possible, even though it was difficult. But we figured it out. We

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learned we can do hard things and we got through it, even when getting through it was really messy and pretty ugly.

Look, if we could glide through life easily and look amazing and glamorous while doing it, I'd be all in. If I could sell that, I'd be a bazillionaire. But here's the thing. Since we're on planet Earth and living a human life, at least for me, I have finally decided to embrace the reality that life is not all good. It just isn't.

It's not supposed to be. You know why we know this? Because it's not. I'm also embracing that I don't want it all to be good. I don't want a flatline life. If everything was always good all the time, there's no variants. There's no spontaneity. There's no up and down. There's no comparison. It's just flatlined. I don't want that.

I welcome the crazy and the unknown and the scary and the discomfort. It's all a part of the experience of being alive. I say bring it on. Choosing this mindset as a school leader was one of the best decisions I ever made during my tenure as a principal because it allowed me to recognize that not all days were meant to be great.

And this allowed me to experience the good days as really amazing and to embrace them because they weren't every day. I didn't get to have them in my pocket every single day. It wasn't a given. And I also got to allow the bad days just as they were; the reality of some of my days was that they were rough.

So, as you look back on the last six to eight weeks of your time as a school leader, leading from home, and you think about where you were in the beginning of those weeks and where you are now, you can see how life does march on, even when we're thrown a curveball, even when life as we knew it came to pretty much a full stop, as life as we knew it beforehand.

But what we know now that we didn't know then is that we're capable, resilient, and able to adapt to any challenge that we face. This is why part two of moving ahead, today's episode, we're going to talk about how

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setting future goals is an important part of staying out of misery when times become really challenging.

And here's what I want to say about present-moment thinking versus future-thinking, thinking about our future. I've seen clients use both future-thoughts and current thoughts to sabotage themselves and feel terrible.

In one case, thinking about the future creates a ton of fear because it's the unknown. And in this case, where we're at right now, it's fear of catching the virus, fear of dying, fear of our friends or family dying, fear of the economy and whether we're going to lose money or lose our jobs or lose business or lose in the stock market, fear of not having enough food or personal items, all of the things.

And when we think about the future in terms of all the bad things that can happen, we lock down in fear, in this moment. And we act on those fears right now in the present moment. And that's why every store in town has been sold out of food and supplies. Because people were having thoughts about not having enough at some point in their future.

Their brains were projecting into the future, thinking about what they weren't going to have or what they were going to run out of at some point, and what they did in response to that in order to feel better right now in the present moment was they went out and bought tons of things so that they could feel better now. Thinking about their future, they were using their future to scare themselves, then they kicked into action so they could feel better now.

The tp and the Clorox wipes that you now own are not what is making you feel better today. What's making you feel better right now, today, are the thoughts, I'm prepared and we have enough. We're shifting from that scarcity mindset into abundance mindset.

And our brains are so consumed with taking action right now based on our future thoughts because we want to feel better about the thoughts we're

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having in our future. But notice that when we do that, the actions that we're taking in our present moment are driven out of fear, and that feels terrible.

So when we're thinking scary thoughts about the unknown of our future and we panic, and then we act on that panic, we're actually experiencing the fear now. We're pre-living our future worries right now, when in truth, you have enough food, you have a shelter, you have running water, you have so much abundance.

But we don't stop and think about what currently in this present moment we have. So we create a negative experience in our present moment because we're forecasting future pain.

Now, on the other hand, when we're consumed by all the change and we're down deep into the trenches of figuring out moment to moment what we're doing, how to do it, how to communicate it, it can seem like thinking about the future and planning for our future in a positive way, like setting goals and having aspirations and getting excited about the anticipating of future possibilities, it feels like a moot point.

Our brain is saying like, why bother? Thinking about the future is hopeless. All I can do right now, the capacity I have right now is just thinking about this minute and the next minute and the next. How can you even suggest that I spend time creating goals for my future when the future is so uncertain? Why waste time planning something that I can't control?

And you might feel that this concept of planning for the future in order to feel better now isn't appropriate or relevant because there's so much going on in this moment that you just don't have the time or the luxury of thinking about the future. And we might even judge those who do take the time from working now when things are hot and we're trying to triage to stop and plan for the future.

But I want you to know this; life is going to continue. We are not going to be in quarantine forever. And even if we were, we still have the power to choose how we live our lives in quarantine. Even if lockdown became

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permanent and our lives forever changed and our old freedoms were no longer available to us, we still get to decide how we're going to live and think and feel.

We might as well decide how we want to show up and live each day and live every single moment of what we do have. We don't get to control our death. We don't get to control how long the quarantine lasts. We don't know how much time we have left on the earth or how much time our loved ones have. We don't get to control that part.

So we can spend time spinning on the things we don't have control over and worrying about them and what's going to happen and just let life happen to us because we don't think we have control, or we get to spend the time that we have left living. Living every day. Living every moment. Feeling all the emotions, experiencing all of the experiences.

You have control over how you live and experience your life right now, today, tomorrow, and every day until you die. Your situation is going to shift and change over and over and over again. You won't be the principal of your current school one day. You won't have children who are young and need supervision one day. You won't have children who live at home one day.

Bad things are going to happen, amazing things are going to happen. All of the things are going to happen. Your life will continue to change and evolve. Some of you are going to get married. Some of you are going to get divorced. Some of you are going to meet the love of your life for the third time. Some of you are going to have kids, some of you aren't going to have kids. Some of you are going to have grandkids.

You don't know all of the things. They're going to be half amazing and half awful. That is the what we signed up for when we were born into this world. Amazing things can happen. Let's plan for them. Let's look at the 50% that feels good and focus on that. And when the bad things happen, we'll figure them out.

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In order to move ahead, we must embrace the possibilities of our future and decide that we're going to make the very best of every moment that we have left. The best part about thinking about your future right now and setting goals for your future is that it helps you feel better today.

Because it gives your brain something positive to focus on. You might be in a living hell right now in just overwhelm, confusion, frustration, exhaustion, misery, you don't feel like you can take it anymore, you just want out, you want to end this pain right now. But when you think about what possibilities lie ahead of me, what do I want my life to be like, what do I want to feel, what do I want to accomplish, who do I want to be, that can breathe life back into you right now in this moment.

You don't have to sit in the misery all day, all night, all week. You can give yourself 30 minutes to get your favorite journal, get a nice pen, grab a cup of tea, go to your favorite chair or your favorite room in the house and just let yourself daydream and explore like a kid does. Go into fantasy land. What would it feel like to have an amazing life? What do you want out of this experience? Who do you want to be? How do you want to impact the world?

Just let your brain play. Let your brain have something positive to focus on. If you're going to let it spin on negativity for 50% of the time, you got to give the positivity thinking 50% of the time. You've got to give it equal air time, equal play time. So if you're going to be in pain, you've got to give it some pleasure. The brain loves to seek out pleasure, avoid pain, and make things as easy and loving as possible. That's what the brain does. Give it that opportunity.

It takes the present moment pain away when you allow it to focus on your future and to create goals. And it also reminds us that this won't last forever. This day is going to be a memory. In a very short few weeks, quarantine will not be a thing, whether it's now, in a week, or in a month or who knows how long, but it will be a memory and we're going to look back and we're going to be like, wow, what happened? What was that all about?

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And what did I learn? How did I grow? Who did I become in the process? And finally, thinking about our future right now can help put our actions this day forward and in the future into perspective. So what actions do we want to take right now that are going to have an impact on our future versus what actions are we taking just to survive or get through the quarantine?

So there's proactive actions and there's reactive actions and there's that buffering and that I don't want to feel all the bad feelings right now, so I'm not going to experience my life, versus I'm going to proactively plan my life and I'm going to let myself have some reprieve from the pain of the news, the pain of thinking about all of those who have lost their lives and their loved ones who are mourning the life without their loved ones.

It is sad. But if we stew in only the sad and only the hard parts and only the things that we're not doing well, we're beating ourselves up for not being perfect and not being the strong leader we thought we were, or that we were when we're on our campus, that doesn't serve you. It's not helping you. It's not helping you, it's not helping your family, it's not helping your staff or your community.

So give your brain something positive to focus on. And I hope, my empowered leaders, that this may inspire you and give your brain time to play and frolic. I love the word frolic. Let's frolic. Let's frolic in the possibilities of what your future can become. What is it that you want to do after this experience has ended? What are you learning right now that you can apply to your future?

Maybe you discovered learning strategies and leadership tools that you would not have ever learned if you hadn't been in quarantine. Perhaps you're way better at technology than you thought, or maybe you learned a new skill that you can now share with your staff. Teach them the STEAR cycle. You've been learning that. That's an amazing tool, teach it to your staff.

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Maybe you've spent time journaling to help you process all of this experience, and now you're interested in sharing that story, you inspire other people. Who knows? Maybe you learn to play guitar. Maybe you're just so proud of yourself for finally learning Zoom. Or maybe you had time to read up on leadership books.

I know a lot of people have been catching up on all the reading that they never got to do because they were so busy being at school. What has been a positive outcome of this? Focus on that. There are so many gifts from this experience. You can also laugh.

Laugh at the silliness of quarantine. Bring some levity to the heaviness of the sadness that this virus has caused and find the joy and notice the joy that it's bringing into families. How many days have you been in yoga pants? Count them. Laugh about it with your friends. Get on social media and don't read the nasty stuff. Read the positive stuff. It's all fun.

See if you can capitalize on these experiences and make them a part of who you're becoming a school leader. I wish you a very empowered today and an empowered future. Have a great 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.