

Ep #137: Allowing an Emotion



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 137.

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. How are you feeling this week? I can only imagine that you have so many emotions going on right now at the beginning of this new school year.

Again, I feel like I can't begin to speak to exactly where you might be in this moment as you're listening because by the time that I record these episodes and send them off for production, your situation has changed multiple times over. So I have no idea how to coach you in this exact moment because at the time I'm recording this, schools are still up in limbo.

Some are planning to open, others are not. It's just all over the board. Cases of the virus are spiking in many parts of the country and the conversations about school opening, it's all across the map. Everything is going on. You don't know what's going to happen, your leaders don't know what's going to happen, government officials don't know what to do. It's a mess.

So I want you to take heart in knowing that there is no single human on this planet who knows the answers to this. You can let yourself off the hook if you're thinking to yourself that you should have a plan and you should be prepared and you want to be ready and you want to know how to handle these things.

I was talking to one of my clients earlier today and she told me that she's experiencing a lot of general anxiety because she likes to know what to

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expect and then to have a plan and be prepared. And I was thinking, most educators are the same. We all want to have plans and be prepared ahead of time as much as possible because we believe that it helps us gear up and be ready because when the school year gears up, we got to be geared up and we want to be as prepared and planned as possible, right?

That's because plans make our brains feel safe. Your brain likes to know that there's an answer to any potential problems that might be coming at you this coming year. And prior to COVID, we felt more secure as school leaders because we created a plan and every year that we create a plan and we rolled it out, it usually went somewhat as planned, right?

And even though we truly didn't know how each year would play out, we still felt this sense of safety and security in the act of creating a plan and being as prepared as possible. It's like being prepared for an earthquake.

Every year when I was a principal, we would do this huge earthquake drill and my secretary was amazing. She was like the queen of organization and systems. So she had all these crazy systems in place. It was so efficient, so effective. She spent hours being prepared.

And every year we would go through this kind of simulation across the entire district. Full on kids outside. It was a two-hour event and we had to call in and all these emergencies would come up and we'd have to figure it out. It was really well done.

And we would plan and prepare for this every single year and we'd tweak our responses and get better. But truly, even though we had all of that in place, and it is important to do that, I do agree. My brain really thinks that that's important. In the end, we can't really know and be fully prepared for an actual real earthquake.

We don't really know how severe the earthquake will be, what buildings will be damaged, will there be fires, will there be injuries, how many injuries, will there be deaths? Just the thought of the reality of that would freak my brain out. But having the plan and being prepared helped my brain relax

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and not think about what happens if there's an earthquake at campus every single day.

I was allowed to give myself other things to think about and other things to focus on because we had that plan. So our brains love to have plans. And this year, more than ever, we feel so much more uncertainty because there really isn't a plan. The plans keep changing. People are trying to make plans, they're trying to predict what we're going to do and what's going to happen.

But as new information and new data comes in, people are reassessing and shifting priorities and changing their minds. And for you, at the site level, this is really frustrating because your brain wants to have a plan and it wants the plan to stay in place and stay consistent because it believes that the plan is certainty.

And since this year, the plans are going to change daily or even more than daily, your brain is on constant guard, looking, looking, looking, wanting the plan and then not getting the plan and then being on guard, worried that the plan's going to change. And you're mentally exhausting yourself when you are wanting to hold onto a plan.

So if you're experiencing anxiety because you like to know what to expect and to have a plan, there are two things you can do. Number one, just go ahead and create a plan for yourself. What plan can you put in place, knowing that there's going to be changes, knowing it's not going to be perfect? But what plan can you create that will create a sense of certainty for yourself right now? Just think about that.

You can decide, if I were the superintendent, here's the plan I would make or here's what I want to do in my school under my jurisdiction, this is what I want to do. So just come up with a plan. Give your brain that plan and then you can say, hey, we got the plan, calm down, don't worry about it.

The other thing you can do is to self-coach yourself and realize that school leadership before COVID wasn't truly ever certain. You know this is true.

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Anything is possible on a given school day. Things happen at school that you can't even dream would happen.

I always used to say you cannot write this stuff. You cannot even plan this out, no matter how hard you try. So you really never do know what's going to happen, but when you create the plan and then you tell your brain, look, I create certainty by having the plan, by knowing I'm capable of handling whatever comes my way, then you can give your brain permission to relax.

So create the plan, even if you don't believe the plan is going to work, just make the plan. And then when your brain starts to worry, you can tell it to relax. Alright, I just wanted to throw that in there because it was on my mind today thinking about how many clients are feeling anxiety and stress about not having a plan. Just create the plan. Who cares if you don't use any of it? Just create the plan for your own sanity, for your own relaxation over the summer.

Alright, so as we're talking about the emotion of anxiety, we're going to spend today talking about how to allow emotions to be present in your body. Last week, we talked about what emotional resiliency is and why it's important for us school leaders to expand our capacity to feel emotion.

We're going to today, dive into the process of what that actually looks like to allow an emotion. So what is allowing an emotion? Allowing an emotion is simply being open to the experience of the vibrational presence in our bodies.

Emotions are a vibration in the body. They can be incredibly intense. They're actually one of the worst experiences that we ever feel, but they're also the best experiences we ever have. Anything we ever do is all based on what we're thinking and feeling. We're chasing emotion.

The reason we want anything to happen is because of the way we think it's going to make us feel, the way we act in our lives is because of the way we're feeling. It all begins and ends with emotion.

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So when you can learn how to allow emotion, there's nothing that can stop you. It's so powerful. Why is this so important, other than it's the most powerful tool on the planet? It is important because there is a difference between sidestepping your emotions versus allowing them to happen.

So when you sidestep, you're trying to either fix it or not have to feel that emotion, versus accepting that it's just going to feel horrible and that you can handle horrible. We've been taught that there are good emotions and bad emotions, and that we shouldn't have to feel the negative emotions, we shouldn't allow ourselves to feel bad emotions.

And the reason for this is simple. One, because they actually do feel terrible. We've all had negative emotions and they feel awful. And two, our emotions can make other people feel uncomfortable. So we're taught from a young age not to express negative emotion because other people don't like the way it makes them feel.

And what we need to understand is that emotions are neutral. We kind of need to unlearn what we've been taught about emotion and relearn that emotions are completely neutral. Our brain labels them as positive or negative, based on how we experience that vibration.

And yes, some emotions are really intense. But think of this; when someone loses a loved one and they experience intense grief, even if you're witnessing the grief, you don't label their grief as bad or negative in the sense that they shouldn't be feeling it or that they shouldn't be expressing it.

We acknowledge that grief is the appropriate response and it feels very aligned to how we think that person should be feeling. Or if we're the ones experiencing grief, it's our truth to feel the grief. We feel aligned to the grief. We want to feel grief when we lose a loved one.

We don't judge ourselves for being sad that somebody died. We don't judge other people when they're sad that somebody that they love died. At least not in the beginning, right? To be honest, we have opinions in our

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culture about how long people should grieve or not grieve and the way that they should grieve. And we fatigue of their grief, so we don't want them to grieve for too long because then it's like, we start to judge basically like, what's wrong with them, why can't they get over it, you need to move on.

And there is healthy grieving that's productive and unproductive grieving, which we can get into a whole conversation about productive emotion and unproductive emotion, and that's kind of what we're talking about here is productive processing of emotion is allowing the emotion, acknowledging it, and processing it and letting it go through us.

No emotion has to last forever. There's a difference between kind of clean pain and dirty pain, and clean pain is that true emotional reaction and response and processing, and dirty pain is where you get into the story, taking yourself back to your childhood or back years into your memory about a time where you felt pain and then you bring it into your future, into your current status, and you keep playing that tape over and over again. We're not talking about that.

We're talking about that pure, raw, truthful emotion. We typically as humans, we don't judge people when they're experiencing that type of emotion. We expect people to be angry when there's been an injustice and we expect people to be sad when there's been a loss, so there's grief.

We acknowledge that negative emotions have a place in our lives as humans, which means that every emotion is meant to be present at some point. Where we get stuck isn't on the more obvious emotions like the ones I just mentioned. It's the smaller, softer, more persistent, more generalized emotions.

Things like anxiety, stress, overwhelm, confusion, frustration, dissatisfaction, boredom. These emotions are more likely to be playing in the background and we typically don't even acknowledge that they're in that background playing. Even though we kind of feel them vaguely, we don't fully acknowledge them and give them space to be seen and heard and felt and processed and moved on.

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So acknowledging that part of the human experience is emotion and that there is no emotion you can't handle and that all emotions are valid and that they're all neutral, it makes life so much easier. So instead of hiding and fighting and pretending and avoiding and sidestepping and rushing through an emotion, we can simply agree that they're just a part of being alive.

And once we get to this point, then we can begin to allow and to process the emotion. So what is the process for processing emotion? I created a process for handling your emotions and allowing yourself to feel. This is something that I recommend when you're first doing this that it's best to be in a safe and private space with lots of time because otherwise, you might find yourself holding yourself back or trying to control the emotional response that's going to come up for you.

So when you're in this space and you're wanting to process emotion, you need to just settle in and then step one is identify the emotion. What are you feeling? Ask yourself to label the emotion. What is it that you're feeling?

And the second part of this step is just why am I feeling it? What am I feeling? Why am I feeling it? And then list all the reasons you feel this way. Why are you feeling angry? Why are you feeling bored? Why are you feeling dissatisfied? List them all down. List the reasons. Get it all out. Label the emotion and then list why you're feeling that.

And the list is just going to be a thought download, like a brain drain of all the things that you're thinking that's creating that emotion. And then step two is to acknowledge the emotion. Allow it. Acknowledge, oh, I'm feeling angry right now, I'm feeling waves of anger.

You're going to breathe into it. You're going to feel the waves come in and out. You're going to do a body scan and you're going to notice, where do I feel this emotion in my body? Where is the vibration most intense? Start from the top of your head, you scan down, you'll feel the emotion maybe in your jaw or in your throat.

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A lot of times when I really meditate or get into my body, I feel a lot of tightness in my throat and in my chest. And then sometimes I feel it in my stomach where I'm feeling that sickness or nausea or pang. That usually comes up for me like, embarrassment or shame or guilt. Something like that.

So two, you're going to acknowledge and allow the emotion. And then step three is to describe it with words. What does it feel like in your body? And I love this recommendation was from another coach was to give a clinical description.

So if you were to describe your emotion to a doctor, how would you describe it? Like if you broke your arm, you would describe the broken arm. You do this with your emotion. Here's where I'm feeling the pain, this is what the pain feels like, it's sharp, it's dull, it feels big, it feels small, it feels tight, it feels stabbing, it feels soft and jiggly, whatever.

Does it have a color? Does it have a shape? Does it have a size? Does it have movement or is it stationary? Is it feeling heavy or light in your body? The more you can describe the emotion, the better it will feel because what you're doing is you're separating the emotion from who you are, who you're being. So that's step three, describing the emotion.

Step four is processing it. This is the hardest part. You're just going to let it sit there. You're going to let it be present. You're going to focus your mind towards the vibrations that are happening in your body. You're going to let the waves of emotion come and you're going to let your body release it in however it wants to.

Most people tend to cry when they're releasing and processing emotion. Some people might scream, some people might want to pound their pillow, other people might just sit in solitude and silence. Let your body release and process that emotion however it wants to. This is why I invite you and encourage you to give yourself time and space and be alone if that's how you process emotion.

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You can get into a strange space if you're processing emotion with somebody else and they don't know how to hold that space for you. They might be uncomfortable that you're uncomfortable and then they help you buffer. They help you avoid or distract you from feeling the emotion.

So if you can do this alone, it's best. And just allow your body to release. Cry, scream, collapse, whatever it is that you are feeling. And finally, the ability to allow emotion is truly the foundation of what social and emotional learning is.

Social and emotional learning is the ability to engage socially and manage the emotion that come from the thoughts we have about those social interactions. So SEL involves teaching students how to interact with one another, how to identify and label emotions, how to process and allow the emotions without responding to those initial urges.

We have to practice this as adults if we're going to expect it of our students. And finally, just to give you some of my - the sentences I choose to believe, the thoughts I like to practice thinking that help me process emotion are the following.

There is no emotion I cannot handle. I am willing to feel any emotion. No emotion lasts forever. And when I use those sentences and I think about them, I feel really empowered. It helps me realize that processing emotion, it's not easy or when we have a process for processing, it doesn't make it better or more simple or they go away faster.

It's truly a willingness to allow them, to allow ourselves to feel awful, to feel embarrassment, to feel judged, to feel criticized, to feel rejected, to feel shame, to feel regret, to feel all of the feelings that come with being human and being alive and being a school leader.

You aren't going to be able to evade your emotions. And the more willing you are to allow your emotions as a school leader, the more influential and impactful you can be in leading your school. Because when you know how

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to allow any emotion, you can hold space for others, which we're going to talk about in a future podcast.

And then you can move past the emotion and move on to actions and solutions. So I hope this has been helpful. If you want support allowing an emotion because it's very intense, please reach out. You know where to find me, angelakellycoaching.com. I will catch you guys next week. Have an empowered, amazing week. I'll talk to you next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

Hey, principals, listen up. I've created a professional learning program for you and your team to build your capacity and lead your staff through the empowerment process. I've designed personalized growth experience for you and your school. You'll learn how to apply the leadership triad to empower your staff and students.

This is the moment where the perfect time and opportunity meet. Education will never be the same and I have the tools to help you navigate the change. To learn more, sign up for a free consultation at angelakellycoaching.com/programs. I'll see you on the inside.

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.