

# Ep #143: Empowered Decisions in Spite of Fear and Doubt



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

## Ep #143: Empowered Decisions in Spite of Fear and Doubt

Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 143.

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.

Hello my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. And welcome to the end of September. How are y'all doing this week? I'm thinking about you. This week and this month, I might add, we've been talking about our most empowering tool that we possess and will ever possess, and that is the power of decision.

We've been exploring the components of decisions, the anatomy of a decision, how we make decisions, the process that we use, and as we shared last week with my good friend and client Dustin, we talked about how to make decisions even when they're scary, even when you feel fear and doubt.

And what's fun about Dustin, he's so in, he's all in. He was really nervous to do the podcast. I'm so grateful that he opted in. And what we decided to do was to continue to interview him throughout the year, a couple more times, and track his progress and track what he's going through so that you, as a new school leader, can hear his experiences and know you're not alone.

And know that what you're going through is normal and it's to be expected, and how to allow yourself to feel the emotions that come with being a new school leader. So Dustin is going to be one of my clients who is willing to share his story, and I'm so grateful, so thank you for that, Dustin. He's going to continue to share so you can learn from his experiences.

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Today, I want to dig in a little deeper into coaching on this whole concept of decision making, and I want to talk about how doubt creeps in, fear creeps in, and how fear and doubt impact the decisions that you make for yourself and your school.

This decision-making process is so significant for you to understand at a deep level because it truly does impact everything about your career and your life. I'm specifically going to focus the conversation on two types of clients today. I'm going to talk about brand new principals and female school leaders.

I'm focusing this message for these two groups in particular, it can apply to anybody, but these two groups of people are on my mind because these are the clients who tend to struggle the most with making intentional empowered decisions. They struggle because of one emotion, and that's doubt.

And doubt is a form of fear. It's a fear of doing it wrong, a fear of not being liked, a fear of having to own the outcome of your decision and what will the result of that decision be, and the fallout of that decision be. And then you've got to deal with the fallout. That's what our brain's telling us. We are afraid of doing it wrong, not being liked, being socially outcasted, losing our jobs. Our brain goes down to the worst-case scenario, but that doubt, that self-doubt is a form of fear.

Now, I know not all brand-new leaders struggle with this. And not all female leaders struggle with decisiveness. But I'm speaking to patterns of behavior and coaching that I've experienced with clients. New leaders doubt themselves because they believe that they don't have the answers, they don't have the experience or the knowledge, and that they can't be decisive. It's not the right time. They don't know enough yet.

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Female leaders tend to doubt themselves because as women, as young girls, we were trained to believe that other people must weigh in on our decisions, that we're not supposed to make decisions on our own, that we can't handle taking full responsibility and ownership of our decisions and those outcomes.

It's really disempowering the way that females are taught about decision making, especially when it comes to your time and your money. Because those two assets, we have our brain, we have time, we have money. Those are our assets. Our brain makes decisions. That's why it's so powerful. It generates creativity, it generates new ideas. It's the most powerful tool you have.

So learning how to manage it is everything. Time and money are your other assets because without time, you can't create anything and without money, you can't solve problems that you wouldn't be able to solve otherwise. So money is an exchange of value, and when we have decisions around our money and we don't have clean money thoughts, we get freaked out.

When we don't know how to manage our time well, we get freaked out and we get overwhelmed. And those three things can't align to be the best version of yourself, the most empowered version of yourself. So females, this is not a knock on being a woman, on being female, having a female brain.

I want you to hear that. I know, I'm a female, I know this, I know how this brain works, and so many potential clients come to me and they freeze in their decision. They want to hire a coach, they want to work with me, but they freak out about money or they feel they have to ask somebody else to help them make the decision, which then will default when the brain is overwhelmed or confused, it defaults to no.

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So just know that I'm noticing this. I want to publicly announce it and talk about it on the podcast so that you can start to do some of this thought work for yourself, to create more empowered decision making as a new principal, as a female principal. And if you're a brand new and female principal, you've got the work to do, my friend, okay?

So making decisions on our own for ourselves and from a place of empowerment can feel really off putting to some female leaders because we are really uncomfortable and actually, this is for the guys too, let me be clear. But we worry. Women are perceived as being compassionate, kind, sensitive, non-judgmental, and we don't want to be viewed as callous or egocentric or selfish.

So we've been raised to not stand in our power and not own our decisions. And that inherently impacts how we make decisions across the board. So in order to make aligned decisions, we need to understand the thoughts and the fears that are preventing us from having the comfort to make decisions, the confidence, the courage to empowerfully decide for yourself and your life and in your business or your career.

So I'm going to challenge your brain today. I'm going to push your thinking but know that I am doing this out of love. I want you to see your own power and your own possibility. You have so much more power and possibility than you even realize. I want to show you how your thoughts interfere with getting the results that you want in your career and in your life.

And it will push your buttons. Some of these things are going to challenge deeply-rooted belief systems. You may find yourself in resistance while you're listening, and you might want to not listen. You might want to ignore this or dismiss the podcast. And the reason I know this ahead of time is because I myself experienced this as a client.

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When coaching challenges a belief that you value or you hold on to really tightly, or you cannot see past it, it just feels like it's absolute truth to you, it can feel like the coaching, the questioning, the exploration of your thoughts is a personal attack. You get very defensive. That's what I do.

I want to defend, you might have the urge to explain or to justify yourself, or you might just get really mad and shut down. I know, I do it too. But this happens because we're so attached to the thought or you might have a story or belief system, and you just can't see the separation in your mind between you and the thoughts, that they're thoughts, that they aren't true or false, they just are thoughts. We can't separate and that's because they're created in our own brain.

So it's no wonder you feel attached to them. And what I help clients do as a coach is help you separate yourself just a bit, just enough to be able to see that they're thoughts. They still feel true, the emotion is still present, but you gain this little peek of awareness where you're like, okay, I can see that's a thought, I can see how the opposite might be true, or how another thought might be of more value and service to me, but I'm not quite there. That's okay.

All I want you to do is recognize that you have attachment to certain belief systems. They feel very scary, they feel like you're dying, and you cannot make another decision, or that you can't make a certain decision because of what you think it'll mean. So just know that this podcast is kind of coaching 2.0.

And I really decided to bring this topic up because I have been watching how clever and convincing our brains are and I also see how painful a thought can be for clients and how it holds you back from having the things you really, really, deeply desire and want.

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And for most school leaders, what you want is to enjoy your job and feel good about your decisions and have connection and impact with people and have a life outside of school. So I know what you want. I understand that. And I understand what's blocking it.

And it feels like what the problem is is everything that's happening outside of you, but it's our thoughts about what's happening outside of us and then our inability to decide, our fear holds us back in indecision and then we spin, and then we feel worse, and then we create evidence that we're not good decision makers and it goes on and on.

So let me start really quickly by reviewing the STEAR cycle. For those of you who are new to the podcast, welcome. One of the tools that I use, which is an adaptation of the model from The Life Coach School is called the STEAR cycle, and it's going to be important to really understand this as we dive deeper into what the tool is and how we use it or misuse it in terms of our decision-making power.

So the STEAR cycle is just a tool that we use to look at our thoughts, to notice them, to recognize them, to create awareness of how they're impacting our lives and our decisions. S stands for situation, which is anything outside of us. Everything outside of you, from the weather to politics to school to your job to your boss to the students to remote learning to COVID, all of it is a situation. Traffic, all the things.

All the things that bug you, other people, that's all situations. Those are neutral until our brain has a thought. That's the T in STEAR. Thought stands for a sentence in your mind. A thought is just a sentence that pops into your mind. Your brain is wired and designed to create thought.

You have tons of them, thousands of them every day, and the thought about the situation is what triggers your emotional response, your

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emotional reaction. That's the E. E stands for emotion. An emotion is a vibration in the body. It can be extremely pleasant; it can be extremely unpleasant. There's a scale. Negative 10 to positive 10, and then there's neutral.

We have a whole slew of feelings that we feel, and this is the gift of being human. It is what it means to be human is to experience thought and emotion. It's the gift of our humanness. Our emotional state impacts the way we decide to approach the situation that we're thinking about.

So when you're thinking about work and your to-do list and all you have to do, and your thought is there's so much to do and not enough time, and you're feeling overwhelmed and you're feeling stressed, when you're feeling that way, it will influence the decision you make.

Sometimes that decision becomes I'm going to work extra hours, I'm going to work 80 hours a week, I'm going to work on my nights and weekends so that I can keep up. It believes that that's the solution. Other times, you might feel overwhelmed with your to-do list and completely shut down. You just get so overwhelmed you're like, I can't deal with this anymore and you resist. You avoid the work, you procrastinate, which the result of that is creating more work.

So the thought about the situation triggers an emotional reaction, that emotional reaction determines and kind of influences how you're going to decide to approach or act, things you're going to do, things you're going to say, things you're not going to do, things you're not going to say, and that approach is what determines the result that you create in your life.

And the STEAR cycle is in constant motion all of the time, whether or not you choose to recognize it and realize it. So it's really fun to see it when it's working well for us. Making a decision is the act of choosing to believe a



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thought. So I tend to put decision in the action line because you are in the act of making a decision.

But really, what happens is that it's choosing to believe a thought. It's the act of choosing to believe a thought is true. And it happens in a second. So let's just say really quickly you're deciding to buy a new car and you're trying to decide what kind of new car you want to buy.

So the before the decision process, and I've talked about this in earlier podcasts, you go through the process of gathering information, collecting data, asking people, researching, whatever it is you do that makes you feel good, the process you use to determine a decision.

All of that pre-work is the before. So you have all kinds of thoughts while you're gathering this decision. So you might talk to people who have the same car, or spend time researching the maintenance issues on that car, the fuel use on that car, you might love the design, or you might love the interior, or the color of the car. Everybody makes car decisions differently.

So lots of people test drive cars, but the way that you make decisions about cars is the way you make decisions about everything in your life, just so you know this. The way we do these habits and patterns, it doesn't matter what the decision is, we tend to do it in the same way.

So eventually, you come to a moment where your brain decides, it's a moment of decision. I'm either going to buy this car or that car, and you select down, you make a decision. That moment is deciding to believe that x car is the best car for you. That is the moment of decision. You have a sentence in your mind that summarizes all of the pre-work you did to come to that decision.

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The act of decision is the moment you choose to believe the thought, this is the right car for me. Already when I say it, this is the right car for me, it triggers an emotional reaction. It feels right. It feels aligned. It feels happy. It feels justified. It feels researched. You feel grounded in your decision. This is the right car for me.

When you have that thought and you believe it to be true, you feel very aligned to that decision. Your emotional state might be excited, relieved, aligned, energized, it depends on how aligned you are to that belief, how much you attach to the belief.

You feel this way because you followed a certain decision-making process that feels very comfortable for you and you also felt that you had control of the decision-making process and the final decision, that you were in charge of the say.

When you feel aligned and comfortable with the decision and the process you used, you're going to feel agreement, it's going to feel good in your body, and then you will take action based on that decision. And the actions you take as an aftermath of that decision, an aftereffect, are what creates the results of having the new car.

So whatever process you use, it's all your thinking, and then you have a thought, you believe the thought, you attach to it, it feels good and aligned, that allows you to take action, that creates the result of going out and getting the car of your choice.

When you're in school leadership, there are many decisions you make very quickly with confidence, and you don't really give them a lot of time and energy. But there are also decisions that you face where you feel doubt, uncertainty, fear, worry, stress, or maybe torn, like indecisive. You have

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pros and cons that are of equal value to you and you feel torn in this decision.

Making decisions when you're in doubt and fear will always result in you questioning your decision and leading your school with uncertainty, which then further creates inconsistent outcomes and results for yourself. So in order to learn how to feel more certain as a leader, you need to take a look at the thoughts creating the feelings of doubt and fear.

So common thoughts that come up often for clients are things like I need more training or more time, more experience, more money, more resources, more information. I don't have the experience to make this decision, I need to check in with my boss, my spouse, my partner, we have to run this decision by somebody.

I can't make this decision without, fill in the blank. I need time to think about it. I'm too busy to think about it now. I need more time to think about it, which really just means I want to see if I'm going to feel better later about the decision versus sitting down and getting real with myself and deciding right now.

I need permission to decide. Female leaders, I'm looking at you. Actually, new leaders too, I'm looking at you. We think we need permission to make decisions. That's never true. If that's pushing your buttons, I'm glad because this one really pushed my buttons. It makes me still like, ugh, when I think about it. But I no longer really do believe this.

I make my own decisions, I make my own money decisions, even though I'm married, I make my own career decisions, I make my own business decisions, even though I have a business coach. I make my own decisions. I own my decisions because if I own them, then I get to be responsible for creating whatever outcome I want.

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Another common thought that holds people back in fear and doubt is I want people to like my decision. School leaders, I know we want to be liked. I want to be liked. I want to be liked by all of you. But I don't control your thoughts and emotions. You as a school leader want to be liked by your staff, by your teachers, by your parents, by your community.

Unfortunately, it's not our job to get into their head and decide their thoughts and emotions for them about us. So let's use another example. Let's say you want to hire a secretary. Lots of you are in the process of hiring, or you've just been hiring people because I know school is now in session for you. I'm recording this in August, so I know you're a month in.

But let's say you need to hire a new secretary. So the situation is, hire a secretary. That's completely neutral, some people have no thoughts about that, some people have very neutral thoughts about that, some people get really worked up about it.

So let's say your thought is I need help with my decision. I need to ask for more information, more input, I need to run it by somebody, I need to get permission. Something around the idea that you need help making a decision. Whenever you believe that you need more of something or help in making a decision, the feeling is doubt. You're doubting yourself.

So when you doubt, what actions do you take? How do you approach the decision-making process? You check in with somebody else, you gather lots of input, you ask a ton of people what they think, waver in indecision, you procrastinate, or you use somebody else's opinion to make the decision.

You don't own the decision. That is the result. The result of your thought, I need help with my decision, I feel doubt, I do all these things to get other people's input and more information and waste a lot of time in indecision,

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the result of that is you don't own the decision or the outcome. You're not fully invested in your new secretary.

If your superintendent says hire this person, then it's your superintendent's decision. And this means you're not fully owning the decision. This is my secretary; I'm going to do everything I can within my power to create a successful situation for him or her.

So when you don't own the decision and the secretary isn't doing well, your brain just goes ahead and blames the superintendent. But it abdicates your responsibility from trying to support this person and creating an environment in which they can be successful because you're thinking the superintendent hired this person, they're no good, now I need to do it again.

Versus fully owning the results. If you hired the secretary, I don't need help with my decision, I have certainty, I'm going to make the best decision, the action is that you get the information you need, you conduct the interviews, you make a decision, that is an action that you take, and you fully support and own that decision, which is another action you take, creates the result of that decision being effective and it being a successful decision.

Because when you own it 1000%, you like the person you're working with, and even if they're new or struggling, you're invested in helping them figure it out. Do you see that? You see the difference? It's very subtle. So many times, when we think we need help with a decision and we're in doubt, what we're really trying to do is abdicate responsibility of that decision so that we don't have to feel the burn of it not working out. But we also don't have to take responsibility for the work that's involved to make it work out.

And I know, these thoughts feel very true when we're thinking them. They feel sound and reasonable and responsible to get more information to need

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help with the decision. And here's the thing; the thoughts themselves aren't right or wrong. They're just sentences.

So all the thoughts I labeled earlier, those are just sentences. Your brain interprets them as being either important or very true, or not important and not true. Deciding you need more information before you make a decision might actually help you make that decision a lot easier for you.

It could be true that you do need some more information. But it's also true that you don't. Sometimes you just have to make a decision when you don't have all the information and you don't have time and you don't have other people's input, and you are still capable of deciding. You just make the best decision you can in that moment.

So you can make a decision with tons of information, or you can make a decision with no additional information or input. Your brain's just telling you that you need that additional input because it believes that the information is what will guarantee a right decision. Can you see that?

You want to make the right decision because you want things to feel good and you want people to be happy, so that makes you a good leader, right? This whole cycle is going on and on. But instead of believing the thought, I always make the right decision with the information I have, which I believe that thought's very empowering. You always make the right decision with the information you have. It's such a powerful thought.

It generates certainty, which allows you to be more decisive and move forward with your actions that that decision instigates, which results in you feeling more confident, more certain, and having control and momentum of your decision and your leadership.

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But when you believe the thought, “I need more information and input before I make a decision” or, “I need help making this decision,” that thought generates doubt and urges you to forever want more input. You end up chasing your own tail because you’re constantly seeking out help for your decision, more input, more information, and you never grow confident in your decisions.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with you running your decisions by someone. Let me make that clear. But there is a difference between making a decision for yourself and figuring out those next steps, and maybe running that by somebody. That’s very different than asking somebody else to help you make the decision or somebody else for input, especially when that person was not involved in the before process.

So if you ask your superintendent to help you decide on your secretary, or maybe you ask the HR director or somebody, who do you think’s the best person? What should I be looking for? What should be my criteria for this person? What do I need them to know how to do?

When you don’t answer those questions for yourself and you go to somebody else and lean on their answers, first of all, they don’t go through the decision-making process with you in the sense that they’re not in the before. They’re not the ones gathering the information, making the reference calls, doing the interviews, and having to work with them. So they’re not in it like you’re in it.

This decision isn’t for them. And they don’t have to deal with the aftermath of the decision. So you asking other people for input only confuses you. It convolutes your decision. It makes it harder for you. Versus what do I want in a secretary? What kinds of things are important to me? If I did know, what would I be looking for? What kind of energy? What kind of

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knowledge? What kind of skillset? What kind of experience? Am I willing to be open to everybody who's coming into the interview process?

Exploring your thoughts, your emotions, and empowering yourself that you are capable of making a decision will put you in such a better place as the person who's hiring the secretary. Because at the end of the day, even though the district is the person who actually technically hires them, it goes through the process of HR, and the district really is the person or the institution who's paying the salary for this person, they aren't the ones invested in the decision because you're the one dealing with this person on the daily.

Believing you need confirmations for your decisions will create evidence for you that you always need more confirmation. That is not empowered leadership. I see so many women and so many new leaders say that they have to run their decision by somebody else so that they can feel confident in their decision, they can confirm it's the right decision versus confirming it for themselves.

That is not the solution to feeling confident and creating confidence. Confidence comes from having the courage to make up your mind, even when you're feeling uncertain or afraid. And then taking actions to figure out how to make that decision work. How to get to work at making it work.

Let me finish out by saying this. Doubt is the death of decisions and indecision impacts your entire life. Doubt generates more doubt. It becomes engrained in every kind of decision that you make across the board. Indecision takes up your time and your focus and mental and emotional energy.

It slows your ability to be highly efficient, making you less effective as a leader. Being less effective as a leader inhibits your ability to advance your



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career and have more influence and make more money. There is no upside to believing that you need help making decisions or that you make decisions from a state of doubt. There's no upside for you. It does not serve you at all.

So what happens when you do feel doubt, when you don't know how to create the certainty that you need to make a decision? It is possible to feel doubt and fear and to decide anyway. Something I've learned very recently to do with myself is to observe my STEAR cycle in real time.

I've been deeply coaching myself every single day and I'm seeing when doubtful thoughts creep into my awareness, I stop right there and I write down, what am I thinking right now? What am I feeling? What am I thinking? What am I feeling?

And when I feel the doubt, I usually see some negative thoughts coming in, thoughts that aren't serving me. So instead of reacting to that doubt and going on autopilot, how I used to handle when I felt doubt, which was gather more information, ask other people, I stop.

And here's what I write down. So in the STEAR cycle, I write the situation I'm thinking about, the thoughts I'm having, I write down self-doubt and fear, and then the action line, the approach line, the A line, I write down catch myself, refocus, intentionally decide what action to take right now. Decide that I know what I'm doing, and I know the next step.

That's what I put in my action line. And that is how I'm catching myself to change my patterns and habits. My patterns and habits of thinking, my patterns and habits of feeling, and my patterns and habits of action, of my approach. I'm shifting them because I catch it right between the emotion and the action.

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That is so magical when you're able to do that. The way you make decisions impacts everything in your career and your life. If you want to spend this school year learning how to make empowered decisions for yourself and learning how to create results to make that decision the best decision you've ever made, you can literally learn how to, one, make powerful decisions, and then two, make sure that that decision was the best decision you ever made.

You create best decision ever made as a result. Decide right now. Make a decision to schedule a consult with me because it's going to be the best decision you ever made. Learning how to make empowered decisions, saying yes, being all in, 100%, knowing that this is the solution you are looking for ahead of time, just leaning in and knowing I don't know what this coaching is all about but I know it's the answer, that one decision will help you get on a call.

And it's really fun, guys. It's not scary. Get on a call with me. Let's learn how to make empowered decisions and create the result of every decision you make being one of the best decisions you've ever made. Go forward, my friends. Make empowered decisions in spite of fear and doubt.

If you're new, just know that there's no getting around the doubt. Accept it and allow it to be present with you all year long. It's just going to be there. Invite it in. If you're female and you tend to default to indecision, I want you to know that it's not your fault. You've been taught how to function this way. You just have to unlearn that decision-making pattern and habit that you've been taught.

It's totally okay. I know how to do it. I can help you. And by the way, it feels so freaking powerful to make your own decisions and to own them 100%. Have a great week. I'll talk to you next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

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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](http://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](http://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.