

Ep #150: New Leader Emotions



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 150.

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. And hey, if you're new to the podcast, a very special welcome to you. You have come to the right place, my friends. This is a space where we actually talk about how you are feeling.

And I know, there's a lot of conversation about how stressed out and exhausted teachers are feeling. And trust me, I'm right there. I support them 1000% and I can't imagine all that they're having to do.

I saw this one teacher who had like five different electronic devices, an iPad and a computer and a camera and the microphone and all these different things, trying to ensure that everybody was getting all of their needs met all at once. It's really crazy. It's super-crazy. So, I get it. I get that teachers are stressed out. But very few people are actually thinking about how the principals are doing, how the principals are feeling, how are they leading during all of this with minimal support?

You know, principals really aren't ever quite in the spotlight when it comes to be human and needing emotional support. And in some cases, principals aren't even invited to the table for conversation. In one school district here in the Bay Area, I have some friends who work at this district, and the district administration has been collaborating with the teacher union to ensure that the teachers are feeling safe about returning to work and they're promising that they're not going to come back until people are at a

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place where they feel safe, they feel confident in the procedures that are being put into place.

And this entire time, during these conversations, not once did they ask the principals how they were feeling. So, the teachers union actually asked the district if they had checked in with the principals. And the district did admit that they hadn't.

So, unbeknownst to them, the principals were grappling with the decision to either work or resign. Because for some of them, going back in person, which is what they were trying to discuss, when was the natural best time to transition from hybrid learning into fulltime student learning, what that meant for some principals, they were grappling with this decision to either completely resign or quarantine from their own families.

And I know one of the principals was considering renting an apartment or living in a hotel so she could stay away from her own family. She wanted to keep her job and she wanted to keep her family safe. And she was having to make this decision about keep the job or not. I want to keep my job. I don't want to lose my job. I need my job. But I also need my family to be safe.

So, can you imagine being in this position where you're expected to go back. Nobody's checking in with you and they're just assuming that you're going to do the work, whatever happens, no matter what. And this assumption that principals are just going to do whatever the district decides without consideration of the impact that it will have on your life, it infuriates me.

And this, unfortunately, this experience and what my friend was sharing about her district this is the same experience many of you are having as well. Districts and counties and state leaders are making decisions that

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have a direct impact on your life with little to no consideration of checking in with you to see what you're thinking and feeling, how this is going to impact you and impact your families.

Somehow, the site leaders seem to lose a voice when they transition from teaching into leadership. And because, for many of you, you're now an at-will employee, you're not backed up by a union most principals are afraid to speak up because you don't want to lose your job. I get this. I know, I've been there.

This is an area of conversation that needs to be further addressed and I know I personally need to do some more coaching around it and I need to think about how to support you through it. And I promise, I will do that.

So, the way that I see this in this moment, there are two ways to approach it. We have to make a decision about what we believe before we can determine what action we have to take. And the two ways I see this going is either, number one, accepting what is. So, choosing to accept what is, that people aren't going to check in with you and they're not going to ask for your opinion. You're not going to get the input. And then coaching yourself or getting coached on how to process that.

And there are some people who want to accept what is and then want to coach themselves on when they feel frustration, how to get back into alignment by accepting what is. That is one way to approach this. The other way is to say, "Hey, wait a minute. What I value is I want to be unhappy about this. I want to feel frustrated. I want to be enraged that this is not acceptable to me. I don't want to accept what is." And then you have to coach yourself on deciding to take actions that align with that belief system, that approach, those feelings.

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So, we're either working towards helping ourselves accept and allow what is, or we're having to coach ourselves on having the courage to stand up for ourselves and speak up for ourselves and take the actions that are required to create change.

Now, in all fairness, there is a balance of both of those. There are times when you're very convicted to your beliefs that things should change and you're going to do the actions that you need to take in order to try and create change. And within that, there will be times where you're going to accept things as they are.

So, there will be this motion of wanting to evolve things and then the acceptance and allowance. I can see this all coming together and I promise you, I'm going to work through this myself and do a podcast on this. But I want you to know, it's on my radar. I'm thinking about it. I know you are experiencing this in real time, which is why I brought it up now.

I just had these conversations recently over the weekend with my friends and I just can't stop thinking about how principals, their lives are being put on the backburner and their experiences are not being considered in this entire process of transitioning from in-person learning to home learning, to remote learning, to hybrid learning, to hybrid learning, back to in-person learning.

So, I want you to know, I hear you, I value you, I see you. I understand that you are very important in this process and that your voice does need to be heard. And we are going to continue to explore this. I just had to say it. So, I promise, end of rant right now, but more on this topic to come.

So, on with today's show. And that is new leadership. This month, we're talking about what it means to be a new leader, how it feels to be a new

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leader, and how you have to evolve your self-concept as a leader in order to step into your leadership empowerment.

So, last week, we talked about that gap that you experience when you step into a new leadership role. You are the leader you currently are, and then you think about the leader you want to be. So, there's where you're at and where you want to be. And there's a gap there and you have to evolve your self-concept in order to step into that empowered leader role.

Today, we're going to talk about the new leader thoughts, emotions, and actions that you tend to take when you're a new school leader. And this whole podcast is really about giving yourself permission to be new.

As a new leader, you have made a giant leap. You've jumped from a position where you felt successful and confident and secure as a teacher into a position where you feel new and uncertain.

There is definitely a gap in what you believe about yourself as a leader and what you want to believe about yourself as a leader. And as I said, we talked about this last week. That gap is supposed to happen. You actually want it to be there. It means that you are doing something really big and really important.

You are increasing your value and your contribution to the world, to students, to education. It will feel scary and overwhelming. I want you to let it feel that way. It's exciting and exhilarating to know you're doing something beyond what you thought was possible.

I remember having to pinch myself over and over again. I just couldn't believe that I was actually a principal, after so long, after not thinking I would ever go into school administration, and then getting kind of invited to

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consider school leadership, into going through all the motions of becoming a school leader and then landing the job.

I actually applied for a position within my district and I didn't get it. I was so crushed. I was so crushed. And later on, I found out that they had intended to hire me all along. But I had applied for an AP position at a middle school and they knew they were opening a new school in the district and were holding out for me to take on the new school.

So, at the time, I was crushed. I didn't think I was going to make it. I didn't want to be a principal. I wanted to be an assistant principal to kind of spread my wings and learn how to do the job. But I got the job and I was so excited. I was shocked at even my own commitment to achieving it.

So, my self-concept had not yet evolved. I, of course, did not believe I was capable of being a leader. But there I was in the position. I was like, "Okay, here we go." It was really fun and exciting and I was scared at the same time. So, all of the feels; really proud, really accomplished, really excited, really happy, really inspired, and also very doubtful and very worried and fearful of what was going to happen and what people were going to think.

And my superintendent at the time had to believe in me and in my potential for me because I couldn't do it for myself. The gap was too wide. So, until I was able to step in and believe in myself, my superintendent had full belief in me, full confidence that I could do it, knew I would be new, knew I wouldn't know, knew I was going to screw up. But he believed in me. It was amazing.

So, I'm so grateful that he mentored me into making that decision and to believe in me until I could believe in myself. He was kind of my version of having a life coach. Even though I didn't have a coach back then, he was

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my version of a coach. He was the support that I needed to build up my self-concept and to help me bridge my gap in my own belief of myself.

So, as a new leader, you too are going to have many thoughts about yourself and about what other people are thinking and doing. So, you will spend a great deal of time thinking about what others think, about what their opinions are. You're going to believe that they know more than you do, that you should check in with them. You're going to think about what to do and how to do it.

You spend a lot of time in that doubt, thinking about what you should do to overcome the doubt. You're going to think that you need more training, more information, a certification. You're going to think you need input from others. And that's what grounds you when you're new.

You're like, "If other people can help me through this then I will feel better. I will feel more assured because I can't assure myself. I'm not capable of that. The gap is too wide."

And because you have thoughts about what being new means, you'll spend a great deal of time in this doubt. You're going to doubt your ability to lead, to make decisions, to prioritize, to know the correct priority, doubt yourself in making an impact. You're going to doubt being aligned and committed to your values. You won't be able to think long-term because you'll be responding to each separate thing in the moment.

Your brain won't be able to create a system or a process. It's going to get up every day and just do that thing in that moment. It will see everything as separate. It won't see the connectivity between all of your actions. And that's okay.

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You're not going to have a schedule or a plan of action. So, you're going to spin out a lot. You're going to feel unqualified and insufficient. And these situations are going to feel painful because you will think that either they shouldn't be happening or that they should be different than they are.

Your emotional state will be impacted by these thoughts. You will want to know this ahead of time because when you're in the middle of spinning out emotionally, when you're actually in it, it's going to be difficult to recognize that your thoughts about your newness as a leader is what's creating the emotion.

Because when emotions are high, intelligence is low. It's hard to see that our thoughts are creating our emotions and that the way that we're feeling impacts every decision we make and every action we take. Your leadership approach will be driven by doubt.

You will make decisions based on how you're feeling at the time and how you believe that decision will make you feel. So, for example, if a teacher said she was going to follow up with a parent and then she didn't and that parent called you and chewed you out and you had to kind of clean things up, you are not going to be happy. I wanted to be happy. You're not going to feel happy about that experience.

But when you're upset, and if you react to that emotion of being upset with the teacher and being upset with the situation, what you're going to want to do is call that teacher out for not following up. And you may decide to insist that she call the parent back and apologize.

You make this decision because it makes you feel good to call her out. You feel right or you feel justified in your decision. It's like that feeling of calling somebody out and being like, "Yeah, I'm right, you were wrong. Now you created pain for me so I'm going to call you out for it and make you feel bad

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about having me feel bad.” And you’re also going to think you’re justified as a leader and you are taking responsibility as an empowered leader because it’s your job to make sure she’s following up.

Now, there’s nothing wrong with that approach. But it’s the emotional state you’re in that determines exactly how you approach her. It’s the nuance of how you approach her. It’s like, when you’re angry and you react in that anger, the way you speak to her, the tone that you use, the words that you choose, the decisions that you make and the way that you engage with her will be directly impacted by how angry you are, how upset you are.

So, what I invite people to do in this moment is pause. You feel the emotion and you pause before you make that decision. That pause is what gives you the space and time to choose to intentionally act versus react.

But in the moment, what’s happening is you want to feel better. You’re driven by the urge to get relief from the frustration of the angry parent phone call. And in your action of asking the teacher to reach out and apologize or make things right or put some closure to this situation with the parent, your hope is that by telling her to do that, there will be closure on your end so that you can drop the stress about the situation.

Our goal as humans – all of us – is always to try and get out of negative emotion and stress and to get into relief and to more positive feelings, more comfortable feelings. So, everything we do is driven by emotion.

We want ourselves to feel better. So, we take action because we believe that those decisions and those action will help us feel better. Do you see that?

Now, because your emotional state always impacts your approach, you’ll notice that your thinking about needing other people’s approval, wanting

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people to like you, and you're also thinking, "I'm new at this. I don't know what I'm doing." And those thoughts, wanting that approval, wanting people to like you, not knowing what you're doing, feeling like, "I'm new at this and I don't get this and I'm overwhelmed." You're going to feel a lot of doubt and a lot of worry.

And because you're feeling a lot of doubt and worry, you're going to spend your time as a new leader seeking input, asking a lot of people, pondering decisions, questioning yourself and checking to make sure you've done it right. You will have an urge to do it right, to make the right decision, and to get approval from other people.

The result of all of this is that we further buy into the belief that we're new and that we have to take these actions in order to make decisions and lead our school. And we will do this, we will continue this process until our self-concept evolves and that gap starts to close. And we will start to believe more deeply that we actually do know what we're doing and that we do have some answers and that we have experience. And we no longer need to check in with everyone all of the time in order to make decisions for our school.

And this is the process. So, being new is supposed to feel like this. It's supposed to be messy. You are not going to have a schedule that's pristinely planned and perfectly organized in your first year or even your second or third year. Allow yourself to spin out. Allow yourself to be new. This is how you learn. It's how you learn to be a veteran principal. Nothing has gone wrong.

So, next week, I'm going to talk about how to embrace being new and how to choose to enjoy being new and some ways to do that. And this will help you evolve even faster.

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But for now, this week, just be aware of our new thoughts and emotions. Notice your self-doubting and how you act when you're in a state of doubt. Pay attention to those actions and the actions you decide to take when you are experiencing doubt, fear, overwhelm. Notice how you spend your time when you're new. You don't have to change your actions. You don't have to even change your thoughts or feelings. You just want to notice the STEAR Cycle in motion.

That awareness is everything. Our thoughts about being new trigger an emotional response. Those emotions impact how we spend our time and the actions we choose to take. Just notice it all. Take it all in. Don't try not to be new. Do not try to fake being a veteran principal when you're not.

Be new. Stand in that newness. Experience new leader thoughts and emotions. Allow yourself to take new leader actions. This is the process. It's how you learn to become an experienced and an empowered school leader.

So, have fun being new. Let it all unfold and be wild. It's okay. Alright, guys. Have an empowered week. I will talk with you next week. Take care.

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