

Ep #151: Everyone Is New at Something



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 151.

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, happy Tuesday. I hope you are doing well. Here we are, the middle of November. You are days away from Thanksgiving break. And I know it's really sad. We have been grappling with our grief on not being able to gather for Thanksgiving because Thanksgiving is about gathering, being with friends, being with family, being in large groups and celebrating, sharing food, being inside, all of the things that are not COVID-approved.

And it's been emotionally discouraging, I will say. So, if you are struggling with not being able to gather, we're with you. We feel for you. And I want you to allow yourself to feel sad. It's okay. And I also want to invite you to think about how this is a win for you. How is this a benefit? How is having time not in a big group serving you? What can you gain from this experience of not being able to have that traditional Thanksgiving that you and your family or your friends like to participate in.

I know, for us, we typically get together with large groups of people and this year we are thinking about – and granted, I'm recording this in October. So, we'll have to see how the COVID trends are going, in which direction. And we have been discussing just having Thanksgiving with the three of us; my husband my son, and myself. That feels very foreign to us, very different. And I think it could be an opportunity for a lot of closeness and fun.

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So, as sad as I am that we're most likely not going to be able to gather, I am inspired by new traditions and new experiences. So, I just wanted to share the love. I hope you guys are doing okay. I hope that you are able to find joy and really truly embrace your Thanksgiving holiday break. And if you're not from the US and you're not on a break right now or you're not experiencing Thanksgiving or any time off, know that the holidays are quickly approaching and regardless of how you celebrate your December traditions that you may have to experience the holidays in a very different way.

So, look for the silver lining if you can. Try to intentionally choose positive thoughts. And I know that feels hard. We feel very fatigued, which actually is next month's theme. We're going to talk about fatigue. And 2020 has really been the year of fatigue in terms of our thoughts, our emotions, our decisions, our ability to be away from our loved ones, our ability to tolerate politics, our ability to sustain quarantines and COVID-approved activities and all of those things.

So, I just want you to know that you are not alone. The Empowered Principal network is here for you. Please be sure to join in the Empowered Principal Facebook group because that's where we get real. We talk about these things and you have a group of likeminded leaders who will support you no matter what.

So, okay. I just want to say that this month is not just for brand new leaders. So, I know I've been talking about new leadership and the thoughts, emotions, and actions that new leaders experience. But today's podcast is about being new, even when you're not new.

So, everyone is new at something. Even if you have been a leader for a while. This year has certainly offered us, all of us, the opportunity to feel new.

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Teachers and administrators are all feeling new to the pandemic, to online learning, to hybrid learning, to coming back into person learning. So, even if you have kids back on campus fulltime, the way you're approaching your day is going to be very different compared to years past.

You can be a veteran teacher and have transitioned into a new role, and then you feel new. You can also be a veteran principal and feel new this year because we're in uncharted situations, right? Leading through a pandemic, nobody has done this before.

Now, let me say this. If you don't feel that you're new or that you're struggling with anything, then you, my friend, you're either in complete disbelief and you don't know what you don't know, or you're choosing to stagnate. Probably at a subconscious level.

Basically, what that means is that you're sitting too far into your zone of comfort. In order to evolve and feel more empowered, you must be on the edge of new. There must be something new about your life.

Now, you may be feeling right now that you have too many new things going on, and that's okay. The experience of too many new things is really pushing you to see that you can take on more than you realized or that you don't want to take on this much.

This year, you are really exercising your belief in what you are capable of handling. And let me just be honest, it really sucks. It really does. It does not feel good. But I want to offer this. To hate the experience of being new at something or feeling new, to hate that experience, to hate that process only adds misery to that growing pains.

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So, there's no getting around the growing pains. There's no way to just say, "you know, I'm going to pretend that we're not in a pandemic and I'm just going to go back to the way things were." You don't get to do that.

And if you are doing that, you're trying to be delusional, you're trying to convince yourself that you're not experiencing the 2020 year and all of the newness that has come with this year.

Let me share a personal example of how you can layer on misery to the experience of being new. So, this is totally outside of the context of school. But I think it so perfectly illustrates how to embrace being new.

My husband and I got out of our workout routine when the quarantine went into effect. So, it was kind of a double-whammy because we'd moved from our beach condo over back into Silicon Valley. So, we had the move, which has just uprooted all of our routines. And in addition to that, within I think 10 days, 10 or 12 days we were in quarantine.

So, not only had we moved. Now, we were in our new place with no new routines and we couldn't create a new routine because normally we would go to the gym. And I'm very routine based. I love it when I have a routine that's working. So, I don't have to argue with my brain about when I should workout or for how long I should workout or where I should go to work out. Should I go to the gym? Should I do a home workout?

When I have a routine, it's just one less decision that I have to make. So, I can save my decision energy for other things. Well, COVID hits and then there's no more routine. The months go by and Mitch and I are very hit or miss about trying to get in any kind of movement for the week. Sometimes, we're taking walks, sometimes we're not. Sometimes, we're working out or doing yoga, sometimes we're not.

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And especially when Alex was home, we really had no routine. We were just kind of a mess, right? I think everybody was like that. And in the beginning, it was actually kind of fun to, like, “I don’t have to work out. Let’s bake, let’s cook, let’s have fun together in the kitchen.” And that went on for a few months and it was really fun.

Alex is a great cook. We had so much fun baking together and making homemade pasta. Everybody was just having fun in the kitchen. Something to do, right?

But after five months of this and Alex eventually goes back to school, Mitch and I look at each other and we both realize, “Oh, shoot here. We’ve gained a few quarantine pounds.” And we really want to get back to some kind of routine.

So, Mitch decides to sign up for an online workout program. And we’ve been at it for a couple of weeks. And I want to tell you, it feels really hard, both physically and mentally. So, we’re getting up early to do the workouts. I get up and the first thing I do is I roll out of bed, put on my workout clothes, go down and do the workout. That’s how I work out best.

And when I get into a routine and that’s my routine, I don’t have the mental argument in my mind. But because I’m still getting into routine, my brain is like, “Let’s just sleep in, I don’t want to do it. The next one’s going to be so hard. Oh, I’m sore.” My brain is just coming up with all these arguments.

But because I understand how my thoughts and my emotions impact what I choose to do or not do and I understand what my brain’s doing and why it’s putting up a fight, I can decide to let it be hard and consciously have a fun attitude about it.

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So, what I'm doing is noticing myself. I laugh at myself when my brain wakes up and it's like, "Don't workout. This other thing is more important. Just take the day off. You're kind of sore." So, I laugh at myself and I'm like, "No, let's get up. I hear you. I hear it. But we're going to go workout. Get the things..." I try to set my stuff out ahead of time so I just have to get up, put on my workout clothes, go downstairs and get to working out.

And then, I laugh when I notice myself, "I've got to get water. I've got to get a towel." My brain's trying to put it off as long as possible. So, I kind of have fun watching myself do that. And then I hit play, we get going and I'm like, "Okay, not so bad, not so bad. Yay, I'm doing it." And I get into the groove.

And then, at some point, my body starts to fatigue and I feel myself messing up the routine or the steps that they're teaching you, and I just laugh at myself. Today, I was like, I could not coordinate this move and it was so funny.

But I'm sharing this story with you because the workout itself does feel hard. And I'm messing it up. They're doing these really complicated things and I'm having to allow myself to do the modifications when I need to. But I'm also laughing at myself. I'm shouting out when they're pumping us up, "I can do it. I'm not giving up," or whatever they're saying.

So, the workout itself feels physically hard. And I have that mental challenge of getting myself up and getting myself downstairs and pushing play on the workout tape. But I'm also choosing not to hate the workout.

I found myself saying today, like, I actually don't hate working out. What I hate is not being able to do it to the caliber that I want to do it. Which really means that I'm not hating the workout. I'm just hating that I'm not good at it yet. I want to not be new at it, basically, right? I don't like that I'm new.

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I hate that I'm not good at it and I know I would enjoy it more if I could keep up with everything, if I knew all the steps by heart, if I had it memorized and then I could do it with more ease.

Working out isn't hard when your body knows how to do the workout. And you actually look forward to it. It's fun because you want to push yourself even when the physical aspect is challenging.

So, right now, what I'm doing is I'm training myself to enjoy myself even though I'm new, even when I'm new. I want to learn how to embrace not knowing how to do it all and do everything with ease right off the bat. I want to earn my achievements.

I don't want to hate the process the whole time and only enjoy it when I finally get to a place where I'm good at it. because guess what, here's what happens. We hate, hate, hate it and we keep doing it and eventually we kind of get good at it. and then, all of a sudden, it doesn't feel like a challenge anymore and then we're like, "Well that's too easy," right?

So, we either get to this, we don't like it, we get there and then we feel complacency. Or we hate it so much that we quit doing it because we hate the process. That is why people quit. That is why people quit workout routines, that's why we quit jobs, it's why we quit anything right? It's because we tell ourselves it's so awful when we're new and that we don't want to be new, we don't want to feel the process, that we just want to be good at it so we can feel good.

But what you can do is train yourself to feel good about it right now. Right now, when you're new, feel good about being new so we can feel good about it being hard. And when we do that, we are far more likely to continue trying to succeed than we will if we're forcing ourselves to do something new that we hate and we'll only feel good about it once we get good at it.

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And the same concept applies to doing new things as a school leader. Look, there's always going to be something new about school leadership. I anticipate many new things coming down the pike after this pandemic. School may never look the way that it did before. And maybe it shouldn't.

If you think about COVID beforehand, we definitely had gaps in where we were and where we wanted to be. We definitely had challenges and problems. We definitely had issues with equity, issues with kids not getting the services they need, teachers not having the resources they need. There were so many problems and challenges before COVID.

COVID has simply created a different set of problems and challenges, but it's also created an awakening and an opportunity for us to expose those problems in a new way. We now might be able to solve problems because they're more aware of them than we were before COVID. And the process for evolving always looks the same.

So, what is that process? This is the Empowered Principal process that I teach to my clients. It's as simple as three steps. Number one, align to your values. This pandemic has been an awakening. We have been awakened from being on autopilot and being super-busy and subconsciously ignoring the truths that we didn't know how to change, or we were afraid to tackle.

So, this year has given us the opportunity to think about what we value as a leader, why we value it, and what we want to do about moving forward and aligning to those values.

Step two is about deciding. Once we know what we value as a leader, then we have to make decisions about the priority of those values. This is really hard because you will have things that you value and you will want them to be equal. But they will also be in opposition of one another.

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So, you may value supporting teachers and you may also value honoring your boss and your district. These at times, although the values feel like they're equally important, they may also be in conflict with one another. And when they do come into conflict with one another, you have to notice that conflict. And you will have to make a decision in that moment, depending on the particular situation you're in, and decide which value you're going to align with, which one will be the priority.

Let me share a real-life example. A client of mine was in deep distress because the district made a sudden decision to move back into fulltime in-person learning. Naturally, some of the teachers were stressed out. They were afraid to teach in person. They didn't have a lot of input. They didn't have a lot of time to process what was happening.

The transition was happening over the course of a week. And there was a huge upheaval. The principal, brand new leader this year, felt their fears, the teachers' fears were warranted, could totally see why they were scared, felt like they wanted to support the teachers. And this client also, while valuing the teachers and wanting to support them also valued what the district was doing. They could see the value in aligning with the district's decision because of the impact it was having on students and families by not being in person.

So, the principal was really torn. They felt that their value to support teachers was valid and they felt that the value of aligning with the district, showing a united front and stepping up and deciding like, "Okay, this is what's happening. Let's get behind the decision," and taking very swift action to make people feel as comfortable as possible.

There were two really important values to this person. So, what we had to do is we had to walk through the decision-making process in order for this client to feel good about the decision, to feel aligned with a value, make a

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decision about which value they were going to align with so that they could stop spinning and move forward with an action plan.

Now, what happens here is you go through this challenging process of deciding the priority and then, step three is honoring the priority. So, once you've decided which value is going to be the priority, which is just a matter of choosing what you're going to believe in that moment, then you can move forward with an action plan.

However, there's a difference between creating a plan of action and then doing and implementing that plan of action. You have to honor it. You have to stick to it even when thoughts and uncomfortable emotions about the other value comes up. This also feels really hard because when you want to value them equally, what you'll try to do to feel comfortable is you'll try to honor both values. You'll toggle back and forth between the values. So, you'll want to support the teachers and you'll want to support your boss's decision.

So, you're going to feel discomfort back and forth, back and forth. This is why honoring your decision and sticking to that priority and grounding yourself in that alignment, it helps you weather the storm, I like to say. It tethers you down in the storm because no matter what, no matter what, you will feel discomfort when you have to align to a priority, when you have to prioritize a value and you have to let something that you also value be second.

You're going to feel discomfort either way because you're either going to feel the discomfort of aligning to one value and letting one go, or the opposite. This is why it's really important to get to the heart of your value priorities. Doing this process is what brings stability for you when the other value comes up.

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So, in the teacher's case, teachers are going to come at you. They're going to be mad at you because you are aligning with the district and you're supporting the district decision to go in-person and they're feeling really scared and want to quit and you're going to want to jump over and be like, "No wait, I support the teachers."

Or, if you decide to align with the teachers, you're going to feel very scared to have a conversation with your boss. But jumping back and forth between the decision will be more painful for you in the end because you are going to lose trust on both sides. You're going to lose trust in yourself that you can stick to that one priority.

So, this process, it's really simple. You align to your values. You decide and prioritize. And then you honor them. The process is simple, but it's not easy. You're going to feel conflicted. You will be challenged. It will feel hard. You're going to fail. You will not like it. You will be overwhelmed. You will want to quit because you won't yet believe that there's an easier way or that one day this will get easier.

You're going to want to feel better right now and your brain's going to tell you that giving up or giving in is the best option. This is normal for your brain to do this. It seems like you're fighting with yourself. And in a way, you are.

And this is where it's helpful to invite another brain into your scenario. This is why having a coach who understands the obstacles that are in your way and who has a very neutral viewpoint about your situation can help you overcome those obstacles.

So, if you want to succeed as a school leader, you cannot avoid feeling new. You have to embrace the feelings that come from being new. And

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hey, everyone out there is having feelings of being new. It doesn't matter the number of years you have been leading.

If you're brand new, of course, you're new. If you're a veteran, you're feeling new and you're probably really upset because you don't want to be feeling new. There are always going to be circumstances that arise, that make you feel new.

If you decide you want support with this, simply reach out to me and let me know what you'd like help with. I've got you I've got your back. Join the Empowered Principal Facebook group and sign up for a consult call if you're ready to go even deeper in embracing being new. Have an amazing empowered week and I'll talk with you guys next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

If this podcast resonates with you, you have to sign up for the Empowered Principal coaching program. It's my exclusive one-to-one coaching and mentorship program for school leaders who believe in possibility. This program is designed for principals who are hungry for the fastest transformation in the industry.

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