

Ep #157: Closing Out 2020



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 157.

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 empowered leaders and welcome to the end of 2020. Congratulations. We've made it. You made it through one of the hardest years in school leadership ever. And I know there was a time when you didn't think you were going to make it. None of us did.

We didn't think we were ever going to make it through 2020. We resisted 2020. We hated on 2020. It felt like 2020 kept coming at us. It didn't end. You didn't think you could make it, or you could do it in school leadership, but you did. You're on the other side of this year.

Today's podcast is about acknowledging your resilience and your growth during the past year. And building up your belief in your self-concept of who you are as a school leader, that no matter what comes your way next year, because I'm not saying even though 2020's over, it's going to be a bed of roses.

We're not saying that unicorns are coming out on January 1st. It's not necessarily that we're going to get easier, but this is a milestone to acknowledge that we did hard things. We felt uncomfortable emotions, we were able to navigate school leadership in the hardest year ever.

You did that. You, personally, I'm talking to you. You listener out there who felt all the feels, who struggled, who was discouraged, who was sad, who felt grief, who felt loss, you made it. You have the skills to handle last year,

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this year, the coming year, and we want to focus your brain on what is good in your life and what is good at school as much as the brain defaults to thinking about what isn't good and how hard it was and all the negativity.

Our brain defaults to the negativity because it's designed to look for pain, it's designed to protect you, right? It's looking for all the bad guys and all the struggles and all the potential obstacles. So it's designed to focus on the negative. You have to intentionally turn its attention and redirect it, just like you would a child, redirect your thinking to also look at the good, also look at possibility, also look at the successes you've had and celebrate them.

Leadership will always be 50/50 and we need to give 50/50 airtime to both the lows and the highs. So let's talk about how to clear space for 2021. We're going to talk about letting go of 2020, processing it, and then opening ourselves back up and creating space and possibility for 2021.

So we start this process with a brain drain. I want you to get a piece of paper and write down all of your thoughts and opinions and judgments and disappointments and challenges and worries and fears, all the things about 2020. Let your brain exhaust itself with all of your opinions about the year.

And it doesn't matter how ugly the opinions are. You can say whatever you want. It's just a piece of paper. No one else is going to see it. Say what you want, however you want to say it. I want you to write down exactly the words, the language that your brain uses, that's really important to see how you're thinking on to paper.

So if it swears at 2020, if it's cursing 2020, I want you to write it down, even if it's saying all the bad words. Write it down. You can toss the paper out or burn it or do something with it so your kids don't find it if you're worried, but I want you to use the exact language that comes to your brain.

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This is important because you're releasing the authentic thoughts and the authentic feelings that you're thinking about 2020. Let your brain judge everything. So what I want to say is as you're writing these thoughts down, you may have an emotional reaction to the thoughts. You will have an emotional reaction to the thoughts, let me clarify that.

Now, you may become emotional, meaning you may cry, or you might feel some anger or frustration. You might feel the intensity of vibration happening in your body as you write them down. That's okay. It's allowed. It's normal. It's called being human.

So when you write things down, I've done this, and what happens is you start to feel a lot of pain in some way, shape, or form. Either in - mostly it's fear or it's anger or grief, in terms of what you've lost. So whether you weren't able to go to a family wedding, or you weren't able to say goodbye to a loved one who passed away, you weren't able to have a funeral.

Maybe you weren't able to go see your new grandbaby, or you weren't able to go to graduations or birthday parties or other celebrations, life celebrations. I know for my son, he's a senior. We're contemplating what's going to happen if we can't do a graduation for his college. That could be a reality.

But I want you to think about all the things you feel have been a loss. Bridal showers, baby showers, the holidays. Not being able to spend time with family and friends at the holidays, not being able to go to parties, or even going shopping, or doing your traditions. Going to travel, getting to go on vacation.

There are so many things that we weren't able to do that have nothing to do with school. There's a whole list of things around school that we feel

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sadness about. I want you to get it all out on to paper because that helps you release attachment to it. It helps you let it go.

When you hold on to it inside your mind and inside your body, you can't fully release it. So that's step one. Do the brain drain. Use the exact language that your brain is providing you. Let it say what it wants to say. It's okay, I promise. You won't get in trouble and I won't tell anybody.

Step two, I want you to summarize that story. The story of 2020. What's the title of 2020? What's the summary sentence of the year in a nutshell? My sister and I, we text and talk quite a bit, and so much has gone on. Her best friend lost her dad during COVID, so obviously they weren't able to have a funeral in the way that they would like to.

He was a very prominent man in his community, has served tremendously in his community for years and years, was a lovely human being. And they could not celebrate his life in the way they wanted to. It was so painful for her. Not to mention that maybe six to eight weeks after her dad passed away, her dog that she loves dearly was diagnosed with a very aggressive cancer and was given two to four weeks to live.

The dog, as I record this, the dog is still with us, and my sister's friend is saying goodbye in this year. And it's - anyway, we talk about this all the time, like what's happened in this past year. And my sister will hashtag me #2020sucks. And we kind of joke about it.

But that's my sister's summary of the year. 2020 sucks. And maybe that is your summary. I believe - I've thought about this and I've done this exercise. My summary of 2020 interestingly was 2020 has been an awakening. I fully believe that 2020's legacy for us is that it has been an awakening in so many ways. It's definitely been an awakening for education. It has rocked our boats in a big way.

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It's been an awakening for our country, for civil rights, for equity, for justice. And just for our privileges, to be so fortunate to live in the United States of America where we have a free country and we're able to come and go how we want, to be able to travel whenever we want to wherever we want, to dine out where we want, to shop where we want, to be with our loves ones whenever we want, all the things that we had access to and privilege to in 2020, or prior to 2020 I should say, those things that we took for granted prior to 2020 have become the things that we most value now that we've seen and felt what it's like not to have access to those daily privileges.

Slowing down in 2020 has invited us to awaken to ourselves who we are as school leaders, who we are as educators, and who we are as humans, who we are personally. That has been such a blessing of 2020 and I really do believe that in hindsight, people will see how 2020 was an awakening for all of us across the globe.

Three, I want you to finally process the emotions. Whatever emotions you've been resisting, whatever sadness or grief or anger or frustration or disappointment you have been holding on to, I want you to process them. And I know I keep saying this, but it truly is the path to freedom from these emotions.

And many of you are going to resist this part, and I resisted as well sometimes. I don't like to feel terrible. Nobody does. But let me offer this perspective. When you let yourself feel the disgruntlement that you have with 2020, the worst thing that happens for most people is that you cry. And perhaps you have the ugly cry session, the really down and dirty cry.

That's the worst thing that happens with emotion. Some people might get angry and maybe they throw things or punch the pillow, or you might express your emotions in a different way. But a lot of people express

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emotion, negative emotion in tears. When they're angry, sometimes they cry, or when they're sad, they cry.

We all do that. Crying is a release. And I don't have all of the science behind why it is a release, and I don't know that scientists truly know the reason behind that release, but it does give us release. So if the worst thing that can happen for you is that you're going to feel terrible for a period of time and that you're going to cry, and that maybe another outcome of processing emotion is that you are in a funk for a day or two, you just crawl into bed and you stay there, or you just don't get anything done, you're not productive for a day or two or three, whatever it is, how long it takes you to process, it feels like giving yourself that time and space to just feel terrible and sit in that until it passes is a terrible waste of time, but I'm here to show you and to offer to you that it's the best use of time.

Because holding in the emotion and resisting it doesn't release it. So it's actually taking up energy and time and it's making you less productive. You know when you're feeling frustrated about something that's happened at work and you chew on it and you ruminate over it for days or weeks and you think, I should have said this, or I should have done that, or your brain wants to get revenge or get back and retaliate, all of that energy and time and focus that your brain is having on that issue, instead of just feeling the anger, feeling the frustration and processing it for a period of time and then releasing it and letting it go and detaching from it, we spend more time.

So processing emotion does not take time. It allows you to let go and create more time. Resisting emotion feels so much worse than allowing it. You know that feeling when you feel yourself on the verge of tears but you hold it back because you don't want to cry, or you don't want to be seen as weak, or whatever, you feel like crying is not for you, especially if you're a guy and you've been trained to not cry, that big men don't cry or whatever

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the saying it, it takes so much mental and physical energy to hold back tears.

It really does when you think about how much energy in your brain and in your body that it takes to hold that back, versus when you let yourself just think all the sad thoughts and cry them out, eventually your brain will think those same thoughts and not cry in response to them. What you make the thought mean changes over time, after you process emotions.

So for example, when my mom passed away, which will be - let's see, I'm recording this on November 18th. And my mom passed away on November 23rd, so it's coming up on a year very soon. Five days. So when my mom first passed away, I couldn't even say it out loud. I didn't want to say it. It felt too painful.

And as the days went on, I finally had to announce it to people and let people know. And when I did that, it felt very numb. I felt like I was being robotic about it because it still didn't feel true to me. And then a few weeks later - so she died the week of Thanksgiving. We obviously didn't celebrate Thanksgiving in the same way we normally did.

And a few weeks later, I came back to California, came home, and as I thought about my mom and many, many thoughts flooded my brain, then the tears came. I was kind of in my home, in my safe space with my husband, and I could let those tears flow.

So I cried every time I thought about her. And then on New Year's Day, I finally surrendered to fully letting myself mourn. I crawled into bed - I was trying to write a podcast on New Year's Eve. I don't know what I was thinking. You know what I was doing? I was avoiding.

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I was completely buffering from feeling these emotions. So I was trying to write, I think it was an email or a podcast or something. And at 3pm, I finally gave up. Mitch was on a bike ride. I crawled into bed at 3pm on New Year's Eve day and I just cried. I cried for my mom, I cried that I was thinking a lot about my business and how, at the time, I was thinking how I hadn't given it my full attention because I was being with my mom.

I just let myself feel sorry for myself and feel sad for my mom and sad at my loss. I just let it all out. Eventually, to the point I kind of drifted off to sleep and I woke up a few hours later and I came back and the thoughts came back. The same thoughts were coming through my mind, but I noticed that I didn't have that need to cry anymore.

I didn't cry. I kind of cried it out. I still had the thoughts; they were still there. But I didn't cry. I just thought them. And I felt the heaviness was still in my body, and especially my heart in my chest. And I just let it be there. And then that feeling kind of drugged along with me for a while, and over time, I continued to have thoughts about my mom, but they didn't evoke the same intensity of emotion as it did in the beginning.

And that's because over time, my brain made those same thoughts mean something slightly different. So when I had thoughts about my mom passing, it went from just like, immediate pain to kind of some bittersweet memories, and I would cry happy tears, thinking about all the fun, and then I started feeling joy when I thought those thoughts.

And it's because I processed the pain that I was able to see the beauty in the pain and the beauty in the loss and the beauty in the grief. And I gained perspective from processing that emotion. I opened myself up to accepting that she's no longer alive in her human form.

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And then eventually, I started having thoughts about her, the same thoughts, but they allowed me to feel connected with her and feel happy when I thought them. And for you all, 2020 is the same. We now have very painful, raw thoughts in this immediate moment about how it has changed life, how it's changed school, for our students at school, for our children at home, and perhaps forever.

There are things we are not going to be able to get back from 2020 and wishing that we could, it's going through that same grieving process that we go when we have to say goodbye to someone we love. But until you process those emotions, the happier thoughts and feelings aren't available to you.

So I really invite you to try this process out and see what happens. Here's a quick recap of the steps to processing emotion. Identify the emotion. What are you feeling, why are you feeling it? Allow the emotion. Breathe into it and do a body scan to see where the emotion is present in your body.

Step three, describe the emotion. What does it feel like? What's the clinical description? Does it have a color? Does it have momentum? Is it stationary? Does it feel very heavy or light or tickle-y? What is the emotion you're feeling? And then process the emotion.

Let it be present, focus your mind on the vibrations, notice how the emotion comes in waves, allow it to process and exhibit itself in the way it needs to come out of your body. And then as you think those thoughts again, those waves of emotion will rise and fall, and you can allow your body to succumb to that, to release that emotional energy.

Now, once you've processed emotion, which feels like the hardest part, we now give our brain equal airtime to the good stuff, to the happy stuff, to the positives. We want to encourage our brain to give 50% of its thinking time

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and its energy on what's working, what's good, and what the benefits are of this past year.

You guys, there are positives and benefits to this year. You have gained amazing talents and skills and resiliency and knowledge about yourself, about others, about school, about teaching and learning, about your own children, about what you're capable of. There's a lot of benefit here.

It does require you to train yourself to think in this way. And when you do, this is where higher level thinking and higher level solutions will come to you. So what was good about the year? Think of all the good things. Think about your personal wins, your professional wins, things you have let go because of COVID, things you don't think about anymore, things that used to feel really important or things that mattered or took a lot of your time and attention that you completely released.

Or what other 2020 situations were wins for you or successes? Another thing you can do is measure your level of belief. So on a scale of one to 10, what is your belief in possibility? What is your measurement in your level of influence as a leader? What is your impact as a leader? What is your level of inspiration as a leader? On a scale of one to 10, give yourself a score. Be honest. And just notice where you feel like you are.

And then finally, what worked about this year? What did you learn in this year? And then what do you want to do differently next year? Simple as that. Finally, it's time to release. When you fully process, you will feel ready to release and detach from the pain, painful thoughts that is, of 2020.

So once you have fully processed emotion, you can ask yourself, okay, now what? Now how do I want to feel? What do I want to think about 2021? How do I want to experience next year? What do I want to create for myself, my family, my school? And what am I open to this coming year?

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How open can I be to possibility next year? What does success look like for you both at school and in your personal life?

And finally, how can you create a joyful life this coming year? Every year we want to go through this process. So this is the perfect opportunity to practice. So take a moment and acknowledge the successes, as well as the disappointments of this past year so that you can energetically release the past and focus on your future.

This is how you generate hope and excitement and anticipation and enthusiasm for the upcoming year. It's what gives you vitality in life and purpose and passion. Think about what is possible and look towards the future from a place of inspiration and optimism and vigor.

Being a school leader is being a thought leader. It's thinking about how to evolve education and how to inspire those we lead. It's about giving ourselves time to feel and release those disappointments and failures in order to create space for innovative ideas and solutions.

And by the way, it's also the kindest thing that you can do for yourself and those around you. When we own our feelings and process them, we save others, we save our staff and our families from bearing the burden of how we feel and our moods. It's an energetic cleanse.

Your body, your mind, and your heart all need it. So please, please, allow yourself to process, release, and reset for the upcoming year. Cheers to you and cheers to 2021. Happy New Year. Welcome 2021, we are so happy to see you. I love you guys so much. Have an empowered week and I'll talk to you next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

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