

Ep #159: Future Vision



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 159.

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 Principals. What is up? Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. If you're new, I'm so happy you're here. We've had so many people listening to the podcast and loving it. And I'm loving all of you so very much. Thank you so much for the love and the support. And I love creating this podcast for you. It's the most amazing part of my workweek, next to working with my clients.

But I really do, I love this podcast so much. I love the value that it provides for each and every one of you. I love how each of you take the podcast information and apply it to you specifically.

So, when I'm giving this information, it's not a one size fits all, but each of you are able to take the information and make it mean something meaningful for you, applying it to your specific situation in your case, whether you are in a big school, a small school, a large district, a small district, private or public, Catholic school. I have clients in all of the arenas, elementary school, K8, pre-K8, K12, middle school, Catholic schools, private schools, public schools, all across the board.

And this information and these tools and strategies, they're universal. So, I'm so proud of you for taking them and utilizing them and implementing them in the way that works best for you. I'm so proud of you guys. Thank you so much.

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And with that said, I hope that you're still feeling a sense of being refreshed from your break. It's been a couple weeks now and I know how quickly that can deteriorate. So, I hope that the break was restful enough and fulfilling enough that you're still on cloud nine for having had that time off. And I hope you are energized and ready to start focusing on your future, on all of the possibility that 2021 has in store for you.

You know, the universe wants you to have everything that you want. It wants you to experience your leadership legacy and your life and it wants you to accomplish all of your dreams. We're going to talk about dreaming and creating a future vision for yourself today. But I want you to know that the universe is on your side.

Things aren't happening to you. They're happening for you. And we're going to talk today about how to rein some of that in by creating a future vision for yourself, having a future vision of what you want education to be and who you want to be in the role of school leader, who you want to be in your life and in the legacy that you're creating.

And when I say legacy, I don't just mean as a school leader. I mean the legacy of who you are as a human on this planet, contributing to the future vision of education. It's so exciting to have a vision, to have a plan, to dream bigger dreams and to actually take steps that get you closer to that goal.

This month, we're going to be talking about creating that vision for 2021. I realized that a New Year's vision or a New Year's resolution, it sounds really cliché and kind of cheesy. I get it. But I think that this year, more than ever, it's critical to acknowledge the importance of future thinking.

We got pretty pounded by 2020. All of our vision – remember back in the beginning of 2020, it was like, “2020 vision...” We were talking like that. My

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first podcast of the year was on 2020 vision. I looked back and I was laughing because we had no idea what was coming our way and how that vision was crushed, basically, by this pandemic. And we had to readjust what our vision was.

But in that adjustment, we got real with ourselves. We got to get honest with ourselves and we got to pare down what we really want and what we really think matters and what we truly believe and the tapping into the essence of who we are and who we want to become and what we want to experience and how we want to contribute. It got real in 2020.

And with that awareness and that awakening comes a newness and a freshness about the potential for what you can become in your school leadership role. The upheaval of this past school year may have you questioning whether a vision serves any purpose. And I get that too. It feels like the future of education is so unpredictable right now that planning out a vision for yourself professionally and personally, it feels like a moot endeavor.

And I want to be explicit here for a second. What I mean when I'm talking about you as the school leader having a future vision. DuFour and other educational researchers discuss the value of having a school vision as a principal. And I want to say right out, I fully support all of their work. I love Richard DuFour. I loved his work. I loved his resources.

They were some of my leadership bibles while I was a school principal. And I implemented their processes when I was creating school-wide mission and vision and values across the board, absolutely 100% love their work.

But what I am referring to in this context, in this podcast for you is a personal vision for yourself as a professional, as a school leader, combined with your vision for your ideal lifestyle, what you want to accomplish,

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create, contribute, and how you want to experience life as a whole, the style of life you want to have, the person you want to be in the world, how you want to show up energetically, visionary-wise, being a thought leader, being a school leader, being a visionary in the field of education.

You can have and create a shared vision with your school community. But that vision is separate from your personal experience as a leader and in your life. You cannot separate your professional vision from your personal vision because you're one human. So, you need to create your personal vision that includes your professional goals and includes your personal goals and creates an energy of who you want to show up as in the world while you're at work, while you're at home, while you're out in public, right?

So, when I say having a future vision for yourself, I'm referring to a life vision; who you want to be in the world as a principal, a parent, a partner, a friend, all of it. The vision I'm suggesting you create is all about your desire and your dreams for all of it, all-encompassing your professional goals and personal goals.

So, why is having a vision important? One, it tethers you. Having a plan for yourself feels very grounding. It creates safety and security in your mind. Your brain loves to know that there's a plan. So, having a vision helps your brain feel like there is a purpose and a plan and a process. You can see the end in sight. It gives you a beacon to guide you and it tethers you through the storms.

School leadership is not easy and you will have stormy days. But that vision helps tether you and grounds you and protects you from those days that don't go well, from the days where a parent really comes at you hard, the days when you didn't make those test scores, the day when your boss chews you out. Those days, having your greater vision helps tether you when you're having a rough go of it.

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For example, when you know the kind of leader you want to be and you're having a hard day, you can stop and think about "Who am I in this moment? How do I want to show up? How do I want to be remembered? How do I want to remember this moment? How do I want to have solved this, even though I'm feeling angry or even though I'm feeling embarrassed or shamed by this person? How do I want to show up? Do I want to react in the moment or do I want to follow and be aligned with who I want to become as a leader?" So, that vision tethers you in those stormy moments.

Number two, it grants perspective. It's easy to get lost in the daily grind of school leadership, as you know. There are so many little details we get caught up in. And without a bigger vision, you start to question what the day-to-day work even means.

You're wondering, "Am I making a difference? Why am I doing what I'm doing? Does this really matter? Am I gaining ground here? Am I going forward in my progress?" Having a vision for your year and for your career and for your life invites you to step out of those weeds for a moment and take a big breath, take a look at what's going on, gives you that perspective of why you're doing what you're doing.

It also lets you accept the small fails that come along the way. Because you understand that those fails are in pursuit of the bigger win. No vision, no life, no leadership path is completely smooth. There are definitely going to be fails along the way. And when you have a vision, the more tolerant of the fails you can be, knowing that you're working towards a greater, bigger accomplishment.

So, for example – I've said this one before but I love it so much – if your vision is to become the Principal of the Year in three years – and you know who I'm talking to right now, one of my clients. This is his goal. And I love it so much, I'm going to use it a million times because I want all of you to

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want to become Principal of the Year. Whether you get an award or not, I want you to believe you deserve to be principal of the year. Maybe I will give out Principal of the Year awards, who knows?

I want you to believe that you are worthy of being Principal of the Year. That's why I'm using these examples. But let's say your goal, your vision is to become Principal of the Year in three years. You're not going to let one angry parent meeting break you down or deter you from your greater vision.

What you're going to do is you're going to reframe that experience. You're going to use it as an opportunity to learn and grow yourself into a stronger leader who knows how to handle those situations in the future.

You're going to look at what worked, what didn't, what did I learn, what will I do differently? Which gets you closer and closer to your ultimate goal of being that rock star principal.

So, when you have a vision, you have the perspective to take those parts of the job that otherwise you would write off as just being a miserable day and saying, "What's the benefit in this? Why did I experience this? What can I learn from it? And how do I want to do it differently next time?" That's what rock star principals do.

Number three, this is the third reason why you want to have a vision for yourself. Focus and constraint. Knowing where you're at and where you want to go and who you want to be helps you determine what activities and tasks you say yes to and which ones you lovingly decline.

When there is no vision, you're more likely to say yes to everything willy-nilly because you don't have anything helping you decide. So, you just say yes to everything and then you're overwhelmed and then you're resentful,

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and then you feel kind of lost. You're like, "Why am I doing all of this?" There's no greater purpose to it all.

Leaders with a vision make decisions about what actions to take based on what aligns with that vision. So, it allows you to constrain your energy and do only those things that get you closer to the goal.

Reason number four, proactive versus reactive leading. Without a vision, you lead reactively. You're simply responding to the events of the day. This style of leadership feels like you are the recipient or the victim of whatever comes your way.

It's the actions of just whatever comes in the door, you're putting out the fire or you're dealing with all day every day. And in the end, it just feels like you're on the hamster wheel and not really getting anywhere and not really doing anything of value.

Leaders with a vision feel more certainty in their actions because they have a plan and they know what they're doing and why they're doing it. And they weed out all the unnecessary distractions and spend their day prioritizing what they want to spend their time engaged in.

So, for example, if your vision is to be a principal that all the kids know and feel connected to, your workweek is going to involve significant amounts of time engaged with student. You're going to block out time to be in classrooms, on the playground, in the lunchroom, at dismissal. You are going to be out there. That is how you'll spend your time.

And when you're out there doing your thing and everybody knows, this is my vision, this is who I want to be as a school leader, and this is what I prioritize and how I value spending my time, what happens is the other things are minimized.

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The meetings get minimized that don't fit into your vision. You're going to spend less time putting out those little fires that hold you up in the office all day because you're going to be happy to delegate them and let somebody else handle the things that don't fully align.

Now, of course, there will be hiccups. Like I said, there's no smooth path. But when you truly prioritize that, the little things somehow magically get done by other people, or they just dissipate, somebody figures it out for themselves.

When you have a vision, you don't feel that need to control every single little aspect of the job and micromanage it because you have a bigger picture. You get to the big rocks, as my old superintendent would say. Or my former, I shouldn't call him old. My former superintendent would say, "Put the big rocks in first and let the pebbles fall where they may." That's what you do when you have a vision. You put the big rocks in and only so many other pebbles can fit in.

Finally, number five, having a vision is just more fun. Having a vision of who you want to be as a leader and how you want to experience school leadership as a part of your full life, it's just way more fun. It might not seem like fun to take time out of your day, to dream it up and develop the plan and to review the plan. I get all of that. It can feel mundane. But that's what gets me jazzed up.

I think your vision is the most exciting, most enthusiastic thing you can look at because when days feel hard, you can look back to the vision and you'll be like, "Oh, this is why I'm here. I'm willing to go through the pain of some of these hiccups to get to the end goal."

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It's the anticipation of achieving your goals that feels fun. It's that excitement of getting closer and closer to the achievement and to the end goal.

You can live without proactively creating a vision for yourself, of course. But having one gives you milestones to celebrate along the way versus passively just going through the motions of school leadership, which in turn, if you think about it, when you have milestones to celebrate, that makes work more fun. It makes the journey to the vision more fun.

Now, for some of you, you might still be thinking that education's just too messy, or at the very least, just too complicated for a vision to even work because you're thinking that you need external circumstances to behave themselves and to work better and to align so that you can then accomplish your goal, right?

So, I want to go there for a minute and I want to challenge your brain on that. I want to ask you, is it true that education needs to be clean and consistent and ideal and perfect in order for you to experience your life and your career the way that you want it to?

I would challenge that. But in the flipside, let's just go to the place where let's just say it's a fact, education is forever going to be messy and messed up and there's going to be problems, there's not going to be enough of this or enough of that. Let's just go there and say that's a truth. That is the reality of the world. Education is messed up.

And I get it. It's hard to realize a vision when there are so many uncertainties, especially in the past couple of years with school leadership. But let me offer this. You can let that be true, let education be messy, let there be conflicting priorities, let there be not enough resources. You can let all of that be true and still decide to create a vision for yourself.

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Because you can have a vision of what you want education to be and to look like and to feel for you and still work within the realities of the current situation. It doesn't have to be an all or none experience. It can be an and both.

So, it's not a win or a lose. It's not an all or a none. It's a matter of wins and losses. It's a matter of triumphs and failures. You will make gains and you'll have setbacks. We all do. Education does. Every human does. The system always has and always will have its plusses and minuses.

So, instead of looking at it as, "Well, this doesn't matter because it's always messed up," that's an all or none thinking. Instead, try to embrace the and. It's going to be messy, and I want this. We're going to have some failures, and some accomplishments.

Giving yourself the pleasure of creating a vision for yourself and striving for something bigger than you think is currently possible, it's fun. And even if you don't make it to that end goal, you know what the saying is, if you get 80%, you're that much further along than you would be otherwise. It really holds true.

What we don't want to do is determine our capacity for growth and accomplishment by looking to our past accomplishments and failures. That's why I titled this Future Vision. Because many of us create the vision of what we think is possible for ourselves based on what we've already done or already know how to do.

We look to our past, "Well, I know how to do this and this so I make my vision just a little bit ahead of me." Versus no looking back, only looking forward and focusing on possibility, what you want to create. There is a part of you that knows exactly what you want out of your life, what you want out of school leadership and out of your career.

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Some of you have your eyes on becoming a superintendent. Others of you have your eyes set on becoming a professor and going into instruction or research. Some of you want to go into consulting or coaching. Some of you want to stay right where you're at. There's no right or wrong.

Your vision to remain a school principal for the next 10 years is just as valiant as the person who wants to become superintendent. There's no better. Know that.

Having a vision that's focused on the future is essential. We base our vision not on what we've been able to solve, achieve, and change in our past. We want to base it on the possibility of being able to create bigger and more expansive results in less time.

We want to spend our time thinking about something new and massive that we've never achieved before and how it's possible to achieve one day. I mean, this is what we do with kids, right? We teach them to look into their future. Why are they learning what they're learning? For their future.

They've never had to apply algebra before in their lives on the regular, so the reason they're learning and growing and failing and succeeding and taking tests and writing papers, it's all for their future. And I want you to think like that.

You're doing this all for your future self. And what does that future self want? Who do you want to be? What do you want to create? And why do you want it? Having a future vision based on future possibility is what will perpetuate you and push you into achieving something beyond your wildest thoughts right now.

So, next week, we're going to talk about how you think about your vision and how those thoughts directly impact your ability to achieve it. So, we're

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going to get into the nitty-gritty of why this future vision matters and how your thoughts about it determine ahead of time whether you're going to achieve it or not. So, we're going to go there next week.

This week, I want you to work on dreaming. Dream about your vision. Celebrate your past accomplishments, but dream about your vision, who you want to be. And I want it to be something bigger than you think you can actually achieve. Go big or go home.

Alright, have fun planning out your visions and I will talk to you guys next week. Take care. Bye.

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