

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 162.

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 happy Tuesday, my Empowered leaders. And Happy February. Welcome to February of 2021. And for those of you in California, I want to say happy shelter-in-place orders lifted.

So, if you're listening to this podcast in real time, today is Monday, January 25th of 2021. So, if you're listening to this podcast in the future, just know we are still in the thick of the pandemic. And I'm recording this at the end of January. And California has been really struggling with significant COVID cases and a big surge since about October.

So, we have all been in shelter-in-place again since Thanksgiving weekend, so it's been the end of November, all of December, and pretty much all of January. So, our governor, just this morning, announced that the restrictions are lifting and restaurants are going to be able to reopen next week. I'm not sure, hopefully we'll get back to the nail salons and gyms and all of that. But one step at a time.

So, we are in the midst of reopening and it's really exciting and I'm superhopeful and really wanting to move our lives forward and help you as school leaders move your lives forward and your careers forward. And I have to say, this second chapter of shelter-in-place has been a challenge for me personally.

I've noticed a big difference in myself this time around. The first time, when we first sheltered in place, I was able to really keep grounded and keep perspective and stay pretty positive and very committed to jumping in and helping all of you with that transition into remote learning and the struggle of working from home with your own kids at home and being a new school leader for the first time during COVID and during this pandemic.

And so, I was really putting my energy into all of that and I thought nothing really about staying home. I just was grateful we were all healthy and safe and it didn't really affect me in the sense that I was feeling personally distraught about the disconnect and separation from being able to be with friends and family and colleagues and clients and just even strangers, just being with other people.

This time, as I imagine with many of you as well, this shelter-in-place felt like a setback. I felt really discouraged and I knew it was because of the thoughts I was having about it and what I was making them mean. I was thinking, "Gosh, this is never going to end, this is taking forever. I'm never going to see other people again. The vaccination is taking forever. It's such a mess. We keep going backwards," on and on. My brain was just like, enough already. And it was pouting and it was throwing a tantrum.

And so, with this excitement of the restriction being lifted, I felt this sense of hope today. But I noticed this afternoon, my brain was saying, "Wait a minute, you can't go out. You're at the back of the vaccination line. You're not even close to getting vaccinated. All of your friends and family are getting vaccinated, but not you." Which to be fair, it is a mix of truth and a little bit of mind drama because obviously I have a large circle of friends who are in education and are going to be in that vaccination group ahead of me because they need to get back in school and they want to be with the kids and the families.

So, a lot of my friends and family are in education getting their shots. I have older family and friends who qualify because of their age group, and so they're getting the shots. And I'm healthy and fairly young and it could be a while before I receive the vaccination. So, there is some probability that it's a fact that I will have to wait.

And even my husband, who works for a medical device company, his company is giving all the employees vaccinations but they are not extending that to their families, which we were kind of hoping that they would. Nevertheless, my husband's going to get vaccinated and I won't. That's fine. Except my brain doesn't think that it's fine. So, my brain wants to be very impatient and very victim-y about this second shelter-in-place and the pandemic and all of that.

I have to also share with you, in all fairness, that meanwhile that's all going on in my head, the workaholic part of my brain, I think the feminine energy is like, "I want to be with the people and feel all the love and the connectedness and the hugs and get the vaccine and go about my business." And then the more masculine energy in me wants to continue working as hard as I have been. It's kind of enjoyed the shelter-in-place.

It's saying, "Wait a minute, can't go anywhere so we might as well work some more. And the longer you're sheltered in place, the more work you're going to get done." It's all of that, this forcefulness of working the – I see the need, so many school leaders who need mental and emotional stability and support and guidance and help and they need the love and they need the tools. And I have them and I'm standing here shouting it out and trying to reach as many people as possible through the podcast and through my books and through my video trainings and through my webinars and through social media, that there is something tangible for you to use and implement in order to navigate all of this.

and not just to Pollyanna feel better, but to actually understand it and process it and make decisions from a place of empowerment and understanding versus feeling like it's happening to you and feeling very victimized and feeling very disempowered.

So, my brain has been kind of going back and forth in these opposing desires. Like, I love being in shelter-in-place because it's like, well, there's nothing else to do. Let's get to work. And then on the other side it's like, "Wait a minute, I need to be with the people." So, if you're feeling this push and pull, I hear you. I feel you. I know that this experience has been different for all of us and we have had some similar themes, similar feelings about wanting to be with those we love and wanting the freedom to come and go and go to restaurants and travel and go on vacation and be at school with the kids.

So, it's really struck me through the month of January that I am a life coach. I am a certified life coach. I've been through two certification programs. So, I have years of training and experience with mental and emotional wellbeing. And I have access to the best life coaches in the world.

I have tools and strategies in my belt that most of the general population doesn't even know exists. And guess what, folks? I still feel really crappy sometimes. I still get sucked into my brain's negativity and I let it take me down the rabbit hole of despair.

I started thinking that if I'm wearing thin, if I feel kind of on shaky ground, if I feel this low-level energy and kind of this blah negativity, I can't imagine for all of those who don't have any idea of what's going on and why they're feeling the way they are and they have no clue that there are tools available to help them. And what happens is, our brain thinks, "Oh my gosh, I'm feeling terrible. That must mean something's wrong with me personally. I'm broken or I'm doing something wrong or I can't change this."

There are people who have no idea that there's a way to reframe how they're thinking and how they're experiencing this year's events. And while they aren't in control of all that's going on in the world, or even that they have any control over that specific situation that they're personally facing, they also have no idea that there are tools available to help them and differentiate between what you can control and what you can't and how to do that.

There are tools to help you feel better, tools to broaden perspective. And most importantly, to help people allow themselves to process painful emotion.

There's no place on the planet, there's no circumstance or no time in which you arrive at a destination in your life where you will feel void of having to experience negative emotion. There's no place where you can go to where you don't have to feel bad in some way, shape, or form. Coaching is not about just thinking happier thoughts to avoid painful feelings.

Coaching is about noticing thoughts, having an awareness of the thoughts, and acknowledging them, especially the ones that feel painful, and then making a decision as to whether you want to keep thinking about that in the same way and whether or not you want to believe that thought to be true for you.

So, in my case, I've had a series of thoughts about life and business and, over the past couple of months, they've kind of gone down this rabbit hole. And the more I thought about them, the more I allowed them to take up space in my brain, the more they impacted my mood.

And left unchecked, these thoughts, they shift from being a simple thought that kind of pops up and crosses your mind, like floats by like a cloud in the sky, to the clouds keep coming and keep coming and getting bigger and

darker. And that thought that was this gentle, just kind od passing by cloud, it turns into a fact. It turns into, like, a rainstorm.

And we think it's just the way it is. We change it and shift it from a thought into a belief. And this happens with such subtlety that even people with the most managed mindsets – there's a lot of life coaches out in the world – people with really managed minds still have thoughts that slip into their belief systems. And over time, our brain has determined that what was once just a passing thought has no become and we've actually created it to be our reality of our own life experience.

Think of it this way. For some of you, when you first got hired, you might have had the thought, "I need to do what my boss tells me to do." Now, you're not consciously walking around campus thinking that thought, "I need to do what my boss tells me to do." You're not thinking it on the front burners. It's in the background playing, like ambient music.

"I need to do what my boss tells me." So, every time you get an email or every time they schedule a meeting or every time you're told in person, "Go do this thing, take care of this, do it this way," that thought in the back says, "Got to do what my boss tells me to do," and it drives your actions.

Now, you might not like what you're being asked to do. You might not want to do what you're being asked to do. You might even resist it or not agree with it, or feel very opposed to it. But if the thought that's a belief system in the background is saying, "Well, you've got to do what your boss tells you," you just do it. you do not question it. you don't even think to question it because it's just to ingrained in your mind because it's been thought over and over.

You never thought about having a boss when you were a little kid. When you're seven years old, you're not thinking about thoughts about a boss.

Now, you might be thinking thoughts about your mom or your dad or your parent or your caregiver, whoever raised you, those adult figures in your life.

You might be thinking, "I need to do what mom says, dad says, caregiver says, coach says, mentor." You're thinking those thoughts, and at some point, that belief system – which we were probably taught, like respect authority and do what the authority figures say and it's our job to do what we're told," you've probably been told directly, do what you're told. We've been trained to think and believe that we should do what we're told, especially by an authority figure.

So, when you became a teacher, you probably thought, "I need to do what the principal and the district tells me to." When you were a student, you probably thought "I need to do what the teacher tells me to." And now that you're a school leader, you're having the thought, "I need to do what the school board or the superintendent or the president of the board or whatever tells me to do."

So, this thought, which has been reiterated over and over in your mind went from being a thought you had about people in a position of authority and power over you into it molded and melded into a fundamental belief system that just feels like fact to you. It's pure fact. It just is what it is. It feels so much like absolute truth that you don't even think to question it.

So, what coaching offers, and the practice I'm inviting you as a leader to consider, is to be open to questioning those very beliefs, those thoughts, the ones that you don't even know are there. That's what a coach does. It helps you see thoughts that you don't even know are there because they're so a part of your being that you don't ever think about it.

I mean, how often do you stop and think about your feet? You don't think about your feet all day long. They're just a part of you. They get you to and fro. They get you from bed down to your car, down to school, around the campus and back home.

You're not often thinking about your feet, yet they're an active, integral part of who you are. These belief systems are the same. They're just part of who you are. And unless somebody says to you, "How are you feeling? How are your feet today?" You're like, "Oh, my dogs are barking," right? "My feet are tired. I'm in heels. My feet are cold." You don't think about your feet unless you're getting some sensation from your body communicating up to you. That's the same with emotions.

Your emotions are a vibration in the body that's communicating your thoughts to you. But we don't realize that and we don't know that for the most part. And that's what I'm here to teach people. I'm here to bring that awareness to school leadership because of the value of the impact that it will have, number one on you and your life, your personal and professional life, your career, your work-life balance, your impact as a leader, your legacy that you're going to leave behind. But the ripple effect, the effect on your teachers and your staff and your school culture and your students and your families and your community, and the way that you experience the job.

It really is possible to be a school leader and have fun. It's possible to be a school leader and work hard and create results. It's also possible to be a school leader who has work-life balance, who isn't constantly stressed, who isn't trying to answer yes to everything and everyone 24/7.

We want to get into the practice of questioning all of our belief systems. The most foundational belief systems that feel like they're just truths of the universe. And oftentimes, the thoughts that we write off as truth, meaning

the thoughts we don't see to question or change, we create a lot of mental and emotional pain in our lives with these thoughts.

And as you know, mental and emotional pain leads to physical actual physical pain; headaches, ulcers, stomach aches, insomnia just to name a few, heart issues. There are so many biological reactions and results and responses that the body has to mental fatigue, to emotional fatigue, to that lack of understanding what's going on in our minds and in our hearts and in our souls and how that's all interconnected.

When you're feeling terrible, like really bad, it usually gets your attention. A lot of times, we don't really notice it as much when we're just kind of flatlining or we're feeling a little bit down or just blah. It feels kind of numb or neutral. That emotion is really an invitation for us to take some time and figure out what thoughts are creating those emotions, and notice if that thought is actually a factual circumstance in the world and in your life that's independent of you. Because if it's an actual fact in the court of law, it's outside of you, versus a thought you believe to be true is a fact, an opinion that you hold as truth. There is a difference there.

So, the facts in the world – and this is the way I like to describe it, just so it's more tangible for people – there are specifics of a situation in which you can argue in a court of law. These are things that are going to be outside of you, like you can look at the weather today. The weather is windy. The weather is, you know, 50 degrees. Here in California right now, it's probably 50 degrees outside, but the wind is really strong. We have an atmospheric river coming in. And so, there's 25 mile an hour winds with gusts up to 40 miles an hour. This is unusual for us. It's very exciting. We're excited for the rain over here.

But those are facts. People measure the wind speed. They measure the temperature. You can go outside and you can confirm that yes, it feels this

cold, this warm, whatever, this temperature and that the wind is blowing at this rate, whatever.

Those facts are outside of you. What the wind is doing, what the weather is doing, what the clouds are doing, that's all out of your control. You have thoughts about that weather. You're excited about it. You're looking forward to the rain. Or you're unhappy because it's too windy to take a walk, or I don't know what.

But I want to show you that, in your job, there are situations and facts and then there are your thoughts about those. And there are times where our thoughts are so deeply ingrained in us that these belief systems feel like the facts.

So, the fact of the boss situation that I brought up earlier is that you have a boss. We can look at your contract, or your boss's contract, and we can probably legally defend that your boss has positional authority over your position as a school leader.

The fact you have a boss is different than your thoughts about your boss. You have a boss. Fact. The belief that you have to do what your boss tells you is a thought that you might believe is just a fact. But in reality, it's an opinion about what you believe is right in terms of working for your boss. Do you see the difference?

That's really important to differentiate and it's hard to do when you can't see the difference. And there are times when you can't know the difference because you have decided it's truth. Your brain is looking for confirmation bias to remind you and to further prove that that's true. So, every time it does that, it deepens the belief further.

Now, here's what I want to highlight. You never, ever have to change a belief if you don't want to. I think some people think that life coaching or coaching in general or even professional coaching is like mind melding, it's getting people to believe things against their will or to change their brains in a way that they don't want to change. No, that can never be true.

You do not ever have to change a belief if you don't want to. You're in control of the beliefs that you have and the beliefs you want to believe, the thoughts you're having, the beliefs you want to have. So, if you're feeling stressed out when you have the thought, "I have to do what my boss says," and there's something that you've been asked to do that's uncomfortable, you get to question that.

You can say – and you don't have to do anything else but in your own mind – is this true that I have to do what I'm being asked to do? And the answer that comes up for you might be yes. You're thinking, "Yes, I want to follow what I was told to do. I do want to believe that I do what my boss asks me to do. Even when there's things I don't want to do or feel uncomfortable, I want to do what my boss says. And therefore I'm going to be willing to be uncomfortable and do the thing because, in the end, it feels good for me to believe that I do what my boss says and then I honor what I'm asked to do. I want to keep my job. I want to do what the leader asks of me. I want to honor my commitments," all of those kinds of thoughts.

You can look at it and, even though you're feeling discomfort about having to do something you aren't sure about doing, if you go back and say, "Wait a minute, do I absolutely have to do that? Why do I feel this way?" all those thoughts that come out, that is where you'll see where the belief system lies.

And you might have conflicting ones, "I believe I should honor my boss's word and I don't agree with this." And then you get into how you kind of reconcile that and make a decision about what you're going to do.

So, just know that when you're coaching with somebody and when you're practicing mental health strategies for yourself, you're looking at how you're feeling. You're questioning what you're thinking. And then you're consciously, intentionally deciding if that thought's working for you and if you want to believe that. You get to decide. That's where the empowerment comes in.

So, you can also question a deeply rooted belief system and be mindblown at your answer, like in the opposite direction. So, when you ask yourself, "Is it true that I have to do what my boss says?" and you really think about it, you might be surprised that your brain is offering an answer you hadn't considered before.

It's like, "Whoa, boom, I never even realized I didn't have to do what my boss says. I didn't even think that it was possible to question that." I have principals in the school system now that I'm working with who, in their first year of school leadership, absolutely followed the letter of the law, everything their boss said. And their thoughts were, "I don't know what I'm doing. I'm new. I'm inexperienced. They know more than I do so I'm going to honor and do whatever my boss tells me."

That might have served that first-year leader. However, now they're into three, four, seven, 10 years into school leadership and boss tells them to do something and they ask themselves, is it absolutely true that I have to do this thing? Your brain might think differently.

It might say to you, "Wait a minute, I want to honor my boss and I respect them. But I'm also willing to question tasks that I don't understand or agree

with." You're evolving your own style and your own leadership approach. You might have different thoughts.

So, what I want to show you is that you can decide to continue believing that you should honor what your boss tells you to do, or you can look at it and say, "Actually, I am open to the discomfort of disagreeing or asking questions and not just blindly following what they're telling me to do, but to either deeply understand it and be fully on board and do the thing, or questioning it, disagreeing with it, having a conversation."

Now, you might end up doing the thing anyway, but at least you will have gone through the process in your mind and you will have to come to terms and make a decision about what you're ultimately going to do.

So, questioning the thought doesn't mean you're going to feel better necessarily because you might feel discomfort in doing what your boss says even when you don't want to do it. Or you might feel discomfort at speaking up and questioning or saying, "I disagree. Can you help me understand what's going on here?"

Questioning a thought doesn't mean, A, you get to feel better right away, B, that there won't be discomfort somehow someway, or C, that you have to just blindly agree with something or disagree with something or change anything at all. You can totally leave it the same.

But when you do question a new thought, you might come across – and you will, I promise you this. I have done this over and over again. You come to these new realizations and they feel shocking and they boggle your brain. And it's that moment when you discover something entirely new, something new that resonates with you, that feels different.

It's that moment when you're like, "What? It's possible not to do everything I'm told without question? I've never even thought to consider that. What would it look like and feel like if I were that kind of a school leader?" That moment of a-ha like eureka, it's so enlightening first of all. And it's shocking to the body at first because it feels new and it feels different. But it's also how you evolve; how you evolve yourself, how you evolve others, the whole thing.

This process of questioning and being open to exploring answers before we make a decision as to whether or not we're going to continue believing something is how we manage our emotional and our mental wellbeing. This is actually how we stop being victim of our circumstances and start choosing what we want to believe by acknowledging the decisions that we are making for ourselves.

Our own mental health thrives when we believe that we have some command over our mental state. Our emotional energy elevates when we understand what emotions are, where they come from, and that we have the capacity to handle any emotional vibration that comes our way. Is that easy? No, absolutely not. Is it comfortable? Hell no. It is awful. But you're feeling negative emotion anyway.

Acknowledging that you're going to feel terrible sometimes, acknowledging that life is 50-50, pain is part of the human process, when you acknowledge it, it actually makes it feel less. It's like, "Oh, this is just the part that sucks as a school leader. This is the part where my boss is telling me to do something, and although I don't want to do it, I see the value in it." Or, "This is the part where my boss told me to do something and I disagree and I'm going to feel nervous but have the conversation and schedule a meeting with him or her."

So, when we see how our emotions are a product of what we're choosing to believe, it still will feel terrible some of the time. But we want to own that. The pandemic is such a good example of this.

You may be feeling discouraged that you can't lead in person or that things aren't what you signed up for when you decided to become a school leader. Maybe you think you're not cut out for school leadership because it's too hard to lead during a pandemic or that it seems like it's never going to end.

We are in the midst of a long-endurance race. Our mental and emotional faculties are being challenged to the limits. We need these tools to help ourselves and to help others. So, that is why this month of the podcast, we're going to focus on mental and emotional health.

We're going to talk about what mental and emotional wellbeing is and how to maintain it, not from the perspective of people who need significant therapy and medical and psychiatric interventions. I'm talking about going from baseline upward.

So, mental and emotional wellbeing, mental and emotional stamina, endurance, resiliency, going from good to better, going from not understanding to understanding, going from disempowerment to empowerment. We're starting at baseline and moving forward.

There are people you will work with, there are families, there are teachers, there are students who will need medical interventions or they'll need therapies or they'll need additional supports. This month, we're talking about your mental and emotional wellbeing, how you take care of yourself in these capacities, and then how to help others take care of themselves and how you can hold space for taking care of your school, the community, the culture, all of that.

I'm going to be interviewing a variety of educators, specifically educators who are now Life Coach School certified coaches. We're going to discuss this topic on coaching, mental health, emotional wellbeing, how to empower you as a leader, and how to help empower your people that you lead and your school.

So that we can bring all of these issues up to the surface, we need to normalize conversations about mental and emotional wellness. We need to see that, without it, academic achievements matter less. We need to acknowledge that mental and emotional learning is equally important as academic learning. And I'm going to venture to say that it's more important.

We need to deconstruct the faulty belief systems that emotions are weak, that leaders who share openly and vulnerably aren't cut out to be leaders, and that discussing mental and emotional health is soft and fluff, that it's on the sidelines, it's secondary to academics.

We must be willing to ask ourselves, as school leaders, what we can personally believe about mental and emotional wellbeing and are the current thoughts we have absolutely true? We want to push ourselves here. We want to get uncomfortable and unveil thoughts that are blocking us from pushing this agenda into the front of the line.

How can we be sure that emotional intelligence and mental and emotional health is taboo, is less worthy, that that means something's wrong with you? If you say, like, I'm struggling mentally or emotionally, that it's wrong or that it's bad or that you inherently are broken? How can those thoughts not be true?

How is it serving us and others at the highest level to continue believing that mental and emotional learning is less valuable than academic achievement and test scores and standards and all of the things?

You guys, mental health can no longer be taboo, especially in our schools. It's what we deal with all day long every single day. We deal with our own mental and emotional wellbeing. We're dealing with others. And when we are at a low, if our gas tank is at empty, there is no way that we're going to be inspiring to others, to help them and there's no way we can just hold that kind of space for people. We just can't do it.

So, we cannot continue to offer SEL and emotional supports and mental supports to our staff and to our students as an a-la-carte item, as an extra menu, as an on the side. It can no longer be something we ignore as leaders within ourselves. The skill of understanding how our beliefs impact our emotions and the decisions we make is the missing link in education. It is what our students need more than ever. It is what our teachers need more than ever. And it's what we as leaders need more than ever.

So, this month, we're going to be talking about mental wellbeing for school leaders, the positive impact that coaching will have on education and why it's the missing link, and ways to implement this coaching practice into your personal and professional practice and with your teachers in leading your school.

I want you to deeply consider this. Imagine a school where teachers take full ownership of their own emotions, their own problems, their own thoughts, where they can love and support one another and help each other notice the, what I call obstacle thoughts, just blocks of beliefs that get in the way of themselves helping students solve problems for themselves, without coming to you, without expecting you to be the solution to everything. A school where teachers seek the answers for themselves, within themselves first before coming to you for help.

Think about this. If the culture in your school was for people to self-coach and ask some questions and actually answer them and then they came to

you with the answers, like, "Here's the problem I've been having, here's the struggle, here's what I think the solution will be, tell me what you think about the solution. Give me some coaching on that. Give me some feedback. Is it a yay, nay? Let's go. Or not." If teachers did that first before coming to you, how much more powerful would your school be? How much more progress would you make?

I imagine a school where students learn from the onset that there is no emotion that they cannot handle. They can do hard things. They can feel bad and that that emotion is acceptable and it's allowed and there is no bad emotions and that all emotions will pass through us when we allow them, a school where students and staff learn that their stress and their frustration is a product of their own mind and not the fault of their peers, a school culture who values productive self-care, not indulgent self-care but productive self-care so that when it's go time, people are ready to do the hard things and get to work, a school who balances academic growth with personal growth.

Think of how much fun it would be to be in a school where personal growth and academic growth are equal. It is all possible through life coaching. It's possible through self-coaching. Life coaching is simply giving people tools and strategies to help them navigate their minds and their emotions and see the connection in how it relates to the way they show up, the energy they have, the decisions they make, the actions they take, and ultimately the results you create and the experience that you create for yourself as a school leader and the experience that you generate as a school leader in terms of your wider school culture.

You can learn this skillset just as you learned how to create lesson plans and how to drive a car. It's a skillset. It's tangible. It's possible. The concepts are new and they're different and they feel weird and you're not

used to it because it's new and mind-blowing for you, but it's wonderfully refreshing.

Mental wellbeing allows you to break free from all the belief systems that are no longer serving you or helping you solve big problems. So, this month, we're going to dive deep into what mentally and emotionally thriving schools do differently.

As Empowered Principals, we are leading this charge. We are the pioneers of the industry change. Nothing will stop us from continually improving the lives of our students and our staff and ourselves; nothing. It starts with you taking one step forward into learning how to become more mentally and emotionally fit. The time is now. You are ready. Let's do this.

The Empowered Principal Coaching Program is opening its doors for next year. For those of you who are all in and ready to go, when you sign up for coaching now, you will receive an additional month free of coaching from me. That gives you an entire month to get a head start, a month longer to implement a mentally thriving culture at your school, and a month more to create work-life balance for yourself.

So, schedule a call. We'll put the link in the show notes today, and let's do this. Mental health is of top priority right now. Let's make it happen for you, for staff, and for students. Have an amazing week and I'll talk to you next week. Take care. Bye-bye.

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 where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.