

Ep #164: Cultivating Positivity for Students and Teachers with Joey Mascio



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 164.

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.

Angela: Hello and Happy Tuesday. And if you're new, welcome to the podcast. This month, as you know, we have been focusing our discussions on mental and emotional wellness for educators. Primarily for all of you as the school leader and how focusing on your mental wellbeing and your emotional wellbeing, how that impacts the entire wellbeing of your staff and school community.

And my goal this month is to really sell you on the value of spending time and getting to know yourself mentally and emotionally and how the practice of emotional wellness has a ripple effect far beyond you. It impacts your teachers and your staff, your students, your parents, the school community, and not to mention your lifestyle and your family.

So, this work really does matter. It really does make a difference. And today, I have a special guest lined up to discuss how he is implementing coaching tools as a teacher and as a life coach through the Life Coach School to help us all feel a little more grounded in the process of transitioning from childhood into adulthood. So, today with me, I have the energizing Joey Mascio.

Joey is a middle school teacher in the discipline office no less, and he's a certified life coach through the Life Coach School. He's the founder of

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Firmly Founded Coaching and offers life coaching for teens and young adults. Welcome to the podcast, Joey.

Joey: Well thank you very much for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

Angela: Yes, I know. I'm excited to have you as I stand here in my closet recording this podcast on a Saturday.

Joey: Saturday morning, yeah.

Angela: That's right. That's how we roll up in here.

Joey: I love working Saturdays. That was my first year of teaching. I only worked Saturdays. Every Saturday I was working on lessons.

Angela: That is when you got stuff done, right? Saturday morning, absolutely. So, let's just get started. Tell the listeners about your story. I find you so intriguing, so fascinating. So, tell everybody how you landed in education, your background, and how you've grown your business in the life coaching field in addition to being a middle school teacher and disciplinarian.

Joey: You got it. So, I always want to start my story when I'm talking to teachers about this kind of stuff is, when I was in third grade – I still have this essay that I wrote on what you want to be. And I said, I want to be a teacher, right, from the third grade. And then, somewhere in high school, I got bitten by the acting bug. I'm like, no, I'm going to be an actor. So, I went straight to Chapman University for Theatre and started studying that...

Angela: My son is a senior at Chapman University right now.

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Joey: No way.

Angela: He's a screenwriter. He's in film.

Joey: No way. When I started back in... they hadn't even built the film school yet. And they had just started connecting those two. And it was super-exciting. It was fun. It was a theatre degree, right. And then, after the first year, somebody pointed out, you realize you're going to be \$120,000 in debt and not have a job when you're done? And I'm like, sorry, what now?

Anyway, so then I promptly left and then I eventually got my degree in creative writing. I worked in Hollywood for a bit. I've been on hundreds of stages across California performing. I worked at Disneyland, the only actor at Disneyland to have played both Darth Maul and The Mad Hatter. I'm diverse.

Angela: That's quite a resume.

Joey: And it's funny because I always lead every year telling my students that. I say, "Guys, I can be the villain or I can be the funniest guy you know, but it all depends on you."

Angela: Which one are you going to get? I love it.

Joey: Yeah. So, through all that, I'm thinking, I want more something more solid. I met my wife and I was like, "I want to do something more solid. So, I'm going to go back to being a teacher." So, I went and got my Master's, my certification, became a teacher. That was seven years ago now. I started teaching, I absolutely love it. Currently at a middle school where I volunteered three years ago to be the teacher in the discipline office.

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Angela: What was that? You volunteered?

Joey: Yes, I volunteered. And my principal was like, “You want to do what?” And I was like yeah just let me hold onto my two theatre classes that I teach, because I kind of created that for my middle school. But the rest of the day, I would love to be in the discipline office. It’s the on-campus suspension room. It goes by many names. I tried to change the name to Student Success Center, but some teachers still called it OCS, on-campus suspension. I was like, whatever.

So, when the students come in, I just love changing the dynamics of that room. I’ll be like, hey I’m so glad you’re here. And they’ll be like, “I just got busted with weed. What do you mean you’re so glad I’m here?” We talk about it, you know. And that’s when I started life coaching teens and young adults.

And I was just like, I absolutely love just connecting with them in a way where their walls would come down, they’d be able to own up to the mistakes that they made and the choices and figure out why are they doing these choices, why are they not taking their hood off in class. Sometimes, that’s all they did to get sent to the discipline office. The teacher is like, “Not taking their hood off, get out,” you know.

And so, talking with them about that, I absolutely loved it. Working with admin hand in hand about how to increase school positivity and culture among the students and the teachers. And I created this incentive program where my principal is like, “I’m creating a position for you. You are now the student incentive coordinator. I just made that up, but that’s your official title now.” I’m like alright, let’s do it. And just creating a culture of positivity, mental resilience, and everything. It’s been absolutely amazing and I’m really sad to leave this year because it’s my last year in teaching.

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Angela: Oh, why is that?

Joey: Because I'm becoming a fulltime life coach.

Angela: Yes, I know. It is a phenomenon, people. We educators are transitioning our teaching experience and really teaching people about what matters most, which is life. And people tease me all the time, they're like, "Why would anybody need a life coach? I can figure life out for myself." And I'm like, absolutely you can do that, but why would you want to? It's way more fun to have a life coach. Come on now.

Joey: Seriously. And it's funny, I just heard this, this morning I met with a teen and their parent this morning for a consult call and all that. And the mom is getting coached in the Life Coach School, the Self Coaching Scholar program. And she goes, "You know, someone explained it to me like this. A therapist is like an archeologist and a life coach is like an architect."

And I was like, "Oh my goodness that's brilliant." And she was like, "If you want to discover things from your past and look back and find hidden things, therapist. But if you want to help build your future and actually construct it and decide what you want it to look like, life coach."

Angela: Oh my gosh, that's so beautiful. I'm going to steal that.

Joey: That's what I told her.

Angela: Yes, but that's what we do. We are architects of life. That needs to be her tagline, honestly.

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Joey: Yeah, architects of life.

Angela: So good. So, are you sold yet, listeners? Come on. Life coaching is the bomb.

Joey: It's actually the best and it was funny because years ago, probably a decade ago, a friend of mine was like, "I'm moving to the East Coast, I'm quitting my job. I'm going to be a life coach." And I'm like, "Sure buddy, alright, sure. Go do that. I didn't know you were a hippy." And here I am less than a decade later, running a very successful life coaching business for teens and young adults.

Angela: Yeah, so let's talk about life coaching and let's demystify it first of all and then take away all the tabooess, I think, that comes with the life coaching field. So, tell the listeners how you implement and utilize coaching both as a teacher and then as a coach for teens.

Joey: Yeah, so as a teacher, when I started learning all these skills and principles, I told my principal. I was like, "Hey, can I start training new teachers please when they come in." And she's like, "Yes." Because I've been my principal's life coach from time to time. She's like, "Joey, I need you, come here," pulled me into her office, like, "You're canceling your meetings for the next hour," and then I would just coach her. And she's like, yes I want you to do that.

So, I started bringing in new teachers to just teach some of these principles. And they found it very, very helpful. And it just helps you as a teacher manage your own mind so you can show up the way you want to. That is literally what it is, "I'm going to manage my own mind, choose my thoughts so I can choose my results in my classroom." Doing that, and then

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it was just something that I realized was kind of a missing component, at least for me.

Some teachers have got it figured out and it's fine, rocking on all four cylinders, that's good. But for me especially when I started out as a new teacher, like, oh my goodness this is so stressful. I'm in a lower-income inner city school where it was just, I had kids hanging from the door frame doing pullups and I'm like, "Sit down, I need to teach you." And just freaking out. That was back when I was an English teacher, I taught all the EL classes, because that's where they put new teachers for some reason.

And I was there and I was like, "Oh my goodness." I was just going nuts. I remember that first year telling my wife, I was like, I don't think I can do this anymore. I need to think of something else.

But through discovering all the life coaching stuff, I was able to give labels and define the tools that me as a happy-go-lucky guy who generally knows how to succeed and lead a room, now all those things that I used had labels and tools and definitions. And I just 10Xd my productivity, my ability to do things. And now, I run like four or five things at my school and my colleagues are like, "How do you do this without going crazy?"

I remember somebody telling me two years ago, "Joey, you're going to get burnt out, man. You've got to be careful. I know you're trying to do things. You're still a new teacher, year three or four," and they're like old lady teachers and she's like – and two of them talked to me and said, "You're going to burn out, you need to stop doing this." And I haven't burnt out to this day. And it's because of these principles.

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Angela: And because you understand what fuels you and drives you and you love the work. I work just as long hours as I did as a principal, but I love the work. I wake up excited. Look, I'm working on a Saturday, people, and I want to be. I love the work.

And one of the things you said that really struck me as teachers – so, principals out there, you have to apply this for yourself, just to see the benefit and effect of it. But then, what's really cool for teachers is they can reframe how they view students. And I think especially in a middle school, understanding those kids have their own models going on in their head. It just helps you reframe behaviors and understanding why kids are behaving the way they do. That was one of the first a-ha's for me as a principal when I went through the Life Coach School and I came back. I started teaching the model to the kids, first and foremost, and they picked it up like that. It was amazing.

Joey: Yeah, that was one of the things I did in the discipline office. In the discipline office, there was a big thing where circumstance, thoughts, feelings, actions, results, boom, it put it up there. And I come in and I always just refer to it. Sit down right in front of that whiteboard and then just start doing it with them. And they get it. It makes sense.

Angela: Yes, and I would teach the kids and eventually parents are like, "What are you teaching our kids?" So I would have parent coffees and I would teach them. And then it was like the teachers were like, "What are you talking about to the..." So, it grew organically through the kids. But the kids, they grab onto it so much faster because adults, we have some unlearning to do and some belief breaking down to do.

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But the beautiful outcome of understanding these tools is that I feel like a door is opened and it just sets you free in a way you didn't even know was possible.

Joey: 100%

Angela: Yeah, so let's talk about challenges. Life coaching tools, they sound beautiful. They sound airy fairy and rainbows and daisies. But there are challenges and it's not easy to feel your emotions. That's kind of the secret of the universe. It's really hard to feel all the feels. So, what do you, Joey, think is a challenge in schools right now and especially as it relates to emotional and mental wellness, what are some of the challenges people are facing and do you have any recommendations or suggestions on how they can get started on approaching those challenges?

Joey: Yeah, the main thing that I see, which is also the main thing I work on with my teens, is separating out facts from stories and stories from facts. Because the biggest issue – and this is rampant in adults' minds as well – the biggest issue is that we have a ton of stories in our head that we put in the fact category. And when you do that, you get stuck.

And that's the number one thing I work on with teens when they come in. and sometimes, the stories that you have are things like, life is supposed to be 100% positive. That is a story that if you have in the fact category, you're going to start thinking something is wrong with you when things aren't, when life is actually 50-50; 50% positive, 50% negative. But you have this story that you think is a fact, that life should be 100% positive or that my students should be obedient. "I have my rules on the board, why in the world are they standing up and getting out of their seat when I have there, do not get out of your seat?"

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Angela: Right, what's happening?

Joey: Yeah, what's going on here...

Angela: I'm a teacher and I put the rules on the whiteboard. Come on now.

Joey: Yeah, and so, whether the story you have about your life – and the way I define stories are just a string of thoughts that we have strung together to create the story that we have about another person, about a circumstance, about ourself. Whether your story is accurate or not isn't even the point. That's irrelevant. But is it helping you?

Angela: Exactly, that's the question. Does this serve you? Does this story serve you? I've been working with clients, and you are welcome to look at the belief system that you have, the facts, and you get to decide if you want to believe them and they're working for you, that's wonderful. But if they're not, just allowing yourself to question what else might be true is a great way to get started.

So, for school leaders out there, one of the stories that we love to tell, it's like our favorite chapter in the book, is there's too much to do and not enough time. And the solution to that problem is working longer, harder, faster, more.

Joey: That gave me the shivers...

Angela: That's a terrible ending to the story, by the way. But as Joey was saying, looking at the things we think are true – and it's hard to see them. And this is where the life coach, that neutral brain comes into your brain and looks around and shows you things that you just think are facts and we

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help you notice them. And then, you can question them and make your own decision. The life coach doesn't tell you what to decide or what to think. The life coach just shows you a mirror into those belief systems. And those belief systems got built way back in the day. You don't even realize that they're there. So, we just provide that mirror into those belief systems and say, is it really true that working hard and longer and faster is solving the problems in education? Could it also be true that I could be much more efficient with my time and do what I love and do it well and let go of some of the other things I believe I need to be getting done?

Joey: Yeah, they always say it's hard to read the label from inside the bottle. And that's what a life coach does, is it's somebody outside the bottle looking at it. And I love what you said, I always tell my teens, "Guys, it's not my job to tell you what to think. It's my job to tell you what to think about what you're thinking. And get you to question what you're thinking about what you're thinking." Super-meta. They love it.

But yeah, it's crazy. And especially in the world of admin and just education, in a world of education, we all know principals view teachers in a certain way and teachers and teachers view principals in a certain way and whenever I'm in a room and it's a PLC or whatever, it's just teachers, and they'll say something along the lines of this, "The principals do not care about the kids." I'm like, whoa, time out. Hold on a second. That is a story you have as a fact. And it's making you very bitter. And it's making you not want to do this program. It's making you not want to do what they say, whatever it is.

But let's just look at that. And of course, I don't use that language. But I just go I don't believe that for a second. They're here for hours. They're doing this. If they don't care about kids, why are they doing what they're doing?

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And somewhere deep down, the teacher who says that doesn't truly believe it. But they've said it so often and they're maybe around other teachers who are collaborating with them, colluding with them in this way where it all of a sudden becomes a thing, and then you start looking at your principal in a certain way and it's like – and now anything they say, whether it's gold or whether it's dross, it doesn't matter because you're like, "They don't even care. They're doing this for numbers. They're doing this for that. They're doing this for numbers and they shouldn't be."

That's something that I like to question with teachers. They're like, "Oh you know the district is just pressuring them for numbers and this and that, blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, hold on, why shouldn't they? They have to be accountable to their boss. Why shouldn't they be doing things for numbers? Whether I agree or not with number-driven education is irrelevant. But what it's doing to you is making you sour the pot.

Angela: Yeah, I like to tell educators, there's a difference between collaboration and commiseration. And sometimes, we intertwine the two. We call it collaboration when we're really just commiserating. And especially – this is such a great topic. Principals will – you were once a teacher, principals, and you had thoughts about your bosses, your principal and the district administration. And then you get into the position and it's like, "Whoa, tides have turned a little bit here and now people are thinking those thoughts about you."

Number one, what you want to do because you're in an opposition of authority is you want to go and change the minds of your teachers instead of changing your thoughts about your teachers and looking inward. So, it's kind of a play. It happened to me too. I'm not going to lie. You get into the position and you're like, "Oh, I've made it. I've arrived." And then the misery starts. And I really was absolutely miserable for the first two years until I

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went through Martha Beck's life coach training program, purely not to get certified as a coach at that time, but just to pull myself out of this spiral I was in because I could not see outside of myself at all and I thought I'd gotten into something horrible, which was educational leadership. And I thought I wasn't good enough; I wasn't cut out for leadership. I'd only been an elementary teacher. What did I know about leadership? Like all these stories, I had to unravel those.

But it's interesting to notice that our emotions are really that signal. I feel like emotions are the way the body speaks to the brain. Because it can't. It doesn't have language, so it's got to tell you somehow. And emotions are that signal. It's a little flag to say, "Hello, there's a thought happening upstairs that we need to talk about," right?

Joey: Which is hilarious because emotions are a way to speak to the brain and our emotions actually come from the brain. And so, it's like it's this system that we have built into us to kind of check in with ourselves. And too often, we don't know where the signal is coming from. We're like, "Oh my goodness, you are just frustrating. This circumstance is just annoying or impossible." And all those are feelings that you're feeling and all those are coming from thoughts in your head, not from anywhere outside of you.

Angela: Right. It's such a fascinating – when you know the model, which I call – for the listeners who've listened to me for a long time, I've called this the STEAR Cycle in the past because when I was working with Brooke way back in 2015, she had us reframe the model in different ways just to be able to explain it in different ways.

So, for those of you who are my long-term listeners, the STEAR Cycle and the model, same exact thing, okay. So, anyway, I lost my train of thought

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because I was all about the STEAR Cycle. We're acronym people in education, right?

Joey: So many acronyms.

Angela: Anyway, this whole concept that your thoughts create your emotions and those emotions are actually that signal to go back up into the brain. I love that we're designed that way as humans, to feel our emotions and then the emotions are like, "Wait a minute. It's a signal. If you're feeling great, what are you thinking? If you're not feeling great, what are you thinking?" And knowing that it never comes from the things outside of you.

And I think that's the hardest retraining of the brain to do, is to be like, "Oh yeah, it's not my principal, or it's not my teachers that are making me frustrated, or my students."

Joey: Exactly. And so, I want to share this story. It was one I shared with you before. This is the application part of it, is what I kind of discovered. Because I know, it seems like we're talking about it where it's up in the air and the head. So, here's a story from my experience.

This past six months, we're in the pandemic, January 2021. And we're in this pandemic and my district is in full distance learning and has been for nearly a year now. And the district was like, "Hey, we're doing a professional development day, and it's all going to be virtual, of course. And we're looking for people to help, teachers who want to run them or whatever." And one of the guys at the district said, "Yeah, yeah, we're doing this thing on how teachers can stop being overwhelmed."

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And I'm like, "Oh that's great. As a life coach, that seems right up my alley." And I look at the description of it and it was like, "Join and it's just going to be an open forum for people to share what they do that makes them not overwhelmed. And in my head, I'm like, that's going to be a disaster. Either nobody's going to talk or two people are going to talk and everybody who's listening is going to be like, "Yeah, I've tried that and it doesn't work. I'm not just going to check my emails in the first 30 minutes of the day and not be overwhelmed by my 800 emails."

So, I reached out to him and I said, "Hey, you know what, I would help with this professional development. Would you mind if I changed it a little bit?" And he's like, "Oh yes, please, thank you because I didn't know where to go with this but teachers are asking for help to stop the overwhelm." And I said, "Yeah, what if we did this? What if I just taught them this principle that I learned, the model, what if I just taught that and then at the end we can have people volunteer actions that have worked for them." And he says, "That sounds great. Can you just run this for me?" And I'm like, sure, I'll just run this, that's 100% fine.

I did two sessions of this. The sessions started and each session was about 100 people. And the sessions started and I explained this, "Guys, you're overwhelmed, there's two sources to help you. One are your thoughts, and one is your actions. But you can't change your actions unless you change your thoughts first. Which is why I thought the original way of doing it, people just offering up actions wasn't going to be a good idea..."

Angela: And actually – I just have to say this – it's funny to me because offering a bunch of actions is going to create even more overwhelm right? People are going to think, "Oh my gosh, these 20 things I have to do on top of the 200 things already on my to-do list." So, that's so funny to me that

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they were going to offer suggestions to reduce overwhelm. It was funny. I just had to point that out.

Joey: Yeah, giant list of things to do to feel better about the giant list of things you have to do. It's great. So, I did half an hour, 40 minutes teaching the model. I was giving some examples or whatever. And the last ones, people came on and volunteered some actions. And one person even got coached. It was kind of impromptu because nobody, like I predicted, nobody came on for the second session to volunteer anything. Because I'm a teacher, I get it, when I show up to professional development, I just want to sit back and relax. This is a time for me not to teach and talk. So, I just want to sit back and fill my brain as I'm grading papers, especially in a virtual setting. All of them were doing it probably.

So, somebody said, "Hey, I'd love to come on and be coached," because nobody was volunteering to talk, I was like, does anybody want to be coached? Who needs help? And I spent 20 minutes coaching her. So, that happened, I was like cool, done. So, he sends me the feedback, because everyone was given a feedback form. And I'm like, "Oh boy..." because I work with teachers, I know how humans are. But 85%-90% gave it a four or five stars. They were like, "Oh my goodness, this was great. This was wonderful. This helped me so much. This cleared out my mind." And then, like, what, numbers are hard, 4% or whatever were like three stars. And then you had the 1% that gave it one to two stars, "This was pointless. A whole bunch of hippy foo-foo la-la stuff. I didn't want this. I wanted something else. I wanted that list of things to do." And I'm like, "If you wanted it, why didn't you volunteer to offer it when I asked the group to offer it?"

Anyway, of course, me as the presenter – and as admin we tend to do this too. You – I'm not admin. I sometimes pretend like I am. Where we go, oh

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there's that one or two teachers that are going to talk bad on this, so let's create it for them. Don't do that because here's what came out of it.

So, that happened, I was like it's in the past and now I'm done. A couple weeks later, we had one of our teachers in our district commit suicide. Apparently, they'd been struggling with things for a long, long time, committed suicide. It's a tragedy.

They had a meeting. It was a PLC. And the PLC though, in that math department, was just talking about that teacher, honoring their life, talking about things everybody was sharing. And the guy who ran the professional development who told me, "Hey, can you just take this over for me?" from the district, he was there. and he sends me an email and says, "Joey, I just thought you should know, we had this PLC where we were honoring the life of this teacher who committed suicide, and another teacher offered this up. They said, I was thinking about doing the same thing, I was thinking about taking my life. And then I went to that PD that that life coach teacher did and that stopped me from doing it. Just thought you should know." And I had all the feels...

Angela: I have all the feels right now; the goosebumps.

Joey: Right, and I was like, oh my goodness I'm so glad I did it. What if I had messed it up? What if I had focused on those two teachers who I knew were out there who were going to poo-poo on this whole setup? What if I did that and didn't do it? And all that went in my head... all the feels. I had to coach myself through it. But I was just like, man, this work is powerful and necessary for mental and emotional health and resilience for everybody.

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Angela: Absolutely, that is a powerful story and it was meant to be. Your big call to do that professional development saved that person's life and that is something we don't take lightly in this work, is emotions can drive incredibly powerful impactful actions, and they can also generate profoundly impactful negative actions, unfortunately. And this work really is that important. It really can be a life-or-death matter. And thank you for sharing that. That's a pretty vulnerable story.

Joey: And the main takeaway for all you administrators is this; all I did was teach the model. That was it. I didn't put on a dog and pony show. I didn't do anything other than just teach the model, here are some examples, bada-bing, right? So, if you're thinking about taking this to your teachers, it doesn't need to be that as a program, it doesn't need to be something where you're like, "Guys, we're going to start focusing on SEL and social emotional stuff." You don't need to do that because teachers are like, "Oh, another program, whatever... Let's wait for this principal to be moved and I can go back to..." that's all they do, right? Or sometimes that's what they do. But literally, it's just maintaining or starting to create a culture of, "Hey guys, this exists and let's just start using this. If you want to. This is available. Here it is. I learned this and it blew my mind. I thought you guys would benefit from it. and by the way, if anyone wants to talk more about this, let's form an optional committee for teachers to come together and talk about it.

Angela: Yeah, just come and hang and let's talk. One thing I want to point out that you mentioned in this story that's kind of a sidenote that I think is important for school leaders to hear, especially my new school leaders out there. Joey was mentioning, you get feedback as a principal, whether it's formal feedback, like a survey, or it's just the informal day to day feedback that you pick up on, on your campus.

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One thing I suggest to my clients is to always, before you put anything out to your staff, always think about your best top people; the people who love you, the people who are happy, your ideal teachers, and speak to them. When you're writing a newsletter or preparing for a staff meeting or a professional development, thinking about those top players and the people that you love the most and who love you the most, speak to them because when you're speaking to them, you're speaking out of love and energy and excitement and enthusiasm. And that message, it will read very differently than when you're trying to talk to the one or two people and convince them that they should be hip-hip-hurray when they're poo-pooing everything.

I mean, there's just going to be those people on your staff. And instead of trying to convince them otherwise, focus on your top players. And the message will be the same all the way through to every single individual on your staff.

Joey: That is great. And yeah, you won't stifle your creativity or your passion by doing that either. Because here's the thing, you have a story in your head. Did your brain fight that, what Angela just said right there? Did your brain fight that and go, "No, but I need to be able to reach everybody. I need to get everybody onboard." Do you? That's a story you might have in the fact category, "I need to get everybody onboard."

And I've seen that. I've seen principals try to strong-arm everybody in the room to jump on this, like, "We all need to do it." And it just pushes people further away. So, question even that story.

Angela: Exactly, that has really changed the way that I show up in the world and the way I show up for my teachers. When I was a principal and I applied these, I was like, "Oh, wait a minute. I don't have to be focusing on how to get Negative Nelly to get onto my train. I can just bring the people

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who want to be on the train and we're going to get going here." And that changed everything.

Joey: Yeah, and my favorite way to look at that is I'm on the train with all the people who want to be on there. And for me, all the Negative Nellies out there are watching the party train pass by. And they're watching and they're like, "Man, that does look like fun. Maybe I should get on there the next time it stops." Or maybe not, but I choose to think that they're like, "I wish I could be on that train but I need to be a Negative Nelly." And I'm like, hey, get on it or not, it won't affect our party whatsoever.

Angela: Exactly, and it's a good party going on up in here.

Joey: It's the best.

Angela: So, I have to ask you this. So, you volunteered to be in the disciplinary room. And so, in that room, I'm guessing a lot of school leaders out there are feeling like, "That doesn't sound like the most optimistic room on campus." It's the challenging students or the difficult behavior. So, how have you been able to reframe your mind around working with these students and impacting the way that others see them on campus?

Joey: So, for me, it comes in two words. The words "of course." When kids come in, we tend to be very parental with our thinking and go, "What were you thinking bringing alcohol to school? What were you thinking? What's wrong with you?" And that is the absolute worst way to think because then it's going to make you show up very disappointed. And the teens, they know what they did is what they shouldn't have done. And if they don't know, then you being disappointed in them isn't going to help them.

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I've had many girls – and some guys, but mostly girls get into fights for some reason, at middle school – come in and be like, “Yea, no, I deserved to pop her in the face. She'll think twice about talking about me now or taking my man,” or whatever.

So, for me, the two words “of course” have just helped out a bunch. They come in and it's like, “Of course be brought weed to school. He doesn't like school. His parents smoke weed and the weed was available for him to take from his parents' drawer. Of course he's going to make this decision.” And that just frees me up from being the discipline teacher to being someone who's there to help.

And it's like, yeah, of course, let's sit down of course you're going to make this decision. Let's figure out why you did. And just to talk with them. And I was always able to say, “I don't know what them...” pointing to the principals out there,” I don't know what they're going to do with you or what they're thinking about doing as a consequence, but you know there's going to be consequences to this.” And they're like, “Yeah, I know. It was just this,” or, “I just got mad,” or, “I'm just so bored,” or whatever.

And I go, of course you're going to be bored. What are you thinking about school anyways? What are you thinking about that math class that you ditched out on? “It's just the worst. I don't understand it. None of my parents...” and this is a literal conversation I had, “None of my parents went to college, why would I go to college? I don't understand math. Math is tough.”

So, in that situation, of course, he doesn't think he's going to college, his parents never did. He has this belief. He's stuck in a fixed mindset. And of course he's going to grab some weed and ditch math and go smoke in the

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bathroom with his friends. That is so much better in his mind. It's so much better to go do...

Angela: Yeah, way more fun...

Joey: Of course. And now, just because I'm going, "Of course he's going to do it," doesn't mean I'm going to tell him, "Of course, go do that." But I just, for me, it helps me to show up in a different way. And then, when I present options – this is something I coach parents on all the time, but it's totally even more applicable in education. When I give the student options, I go, "Hey, look man, you can continue to bring weed to school. It's an option." Whether I tell him not to, it's still an option for them to do it.

So, I draw it out on my whiteboards. I have so many handheld whiteboards that I write on. And I just kind of plot out their future, like let's say you do it, what's going to happen? "Well, I'm going to smarter..." the smart-aleck students are like, "Well, I'm going to be smarter about it and not get caught." Let's do that. Let's consider that. Let's say you bring weed and you get smarter and you never get caught again. What's going to happen? "Well, I'm probably not going to pass math." No, definitely not going to pass math. So what's going to happen?

Yeah, you might end up exactly like your parents. That's an option. It could happen. Or you get caught. What's going to happen then? "Well, they say if I get caught again I'm going to get expelled." Okay, then where you going to go? "I'm going to go to that continuation school down the street, which I won't go..." Okay cool, then you won't even go, and then where you going to go?

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And they get to talk about it. Some kids have said, “Well, my cousin is in a gang so I could go join that.” And they know they shouldn’t or it’s not the best option. Yeah, you could, and then what’s going to happen? “Well, I’d probably end up in jail.” They always know and they’ve always said, “I’m going to probably end up in jail.” Cool, that’s an option. All along this, I’m not judging. I’m just going, yeah you totally could.

But what else? What’s another option? What if you just stopped? And then I just lay it all out for them. And I let them come up with their option. I don’t say, “Or you could start studying, learn math and go to college and get a degree.” Because maybe they don’t want to do that, you know. And then one option – and I’ve had one say this, “I want to be a mechanic.” Awesome, do you need to know math to be a mechanic? “Well, a little bit.” Cool, so you probably have to pass middle school math, right?

Cool, do you need to do all the smart high school math classes? “No, probably not.” Do you need to go to college for this? “No, I don’t need to.” Cool, you don’t need to go to college. And then we just map out their future. And then I go, look, these are your options, you pick whatever you want to pick. And then, here’s the key thing. When you give them freedom, the walls come down and they go, “Well, I want to do that. I want to become a mechanic. I don’t want the other ones.” Because they’re smart. They can see it. But they don’t believe they can. And then they go, “If you want that, I will gladly help you get that because you have some stories in your fact category that’s making you pick these other options, which from what you’re telling me you don’t want.”

So, it all came from those two words. Of course you’re going to do that. And here’s the big one. After you do that, he’s going to smoke weed again. Of course. And he’s going to get expelled. And for me, I’m like, “That’s a

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bummer.” But of course he was going to do that. That was always an option to him. So, did any of that make sense?

Angela: That’s a beautiful tangible story of how we apply this work to the everyday school situation. And the model is such a beautiful visual representation of how our thoughts impact our results in the moment and over the course of time, as you’re showing the students. And like you said, at the deepest level, students do know what they want. And what I know they don’t want is us telling them what they want, right?

And this is what I would love to kind of end on, is that this is what you now do. You help students see that path and just see the options and invite them to see that there are options that perhaps they hadn’t thought of before that could lead to a very different life, or a life that they want but they didn’t think they could have. So, could you tell us a little bit more exactly about what you do and how you do it and where people can find you to learn more?

Joey: Yeah, definitely. So, what I do is I work with several other coaches in Firmly Founded Coaching. All of us certified. One is a former high school principal, who is a guy, two girls, one passed her degree in social work. So, we’ve developed a monthly membership program called the Firmly Founded Teen. And twice a month, we have these live group coaching calls where we make it so fun, it’s more like a YouTube channel. And we’re laughing and we’re telling jokes and all this, and then we’re teaching these powerful principles and then we’re letting teens come on to get coaching in front of other teens. And they do it.

They volunteer to do it or they send questions and we talk about it and it’s phenomenal and it’s great and then we also have a bunch of videos that we’ve made that they can watch and have access to and all that. And then,

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we have a monthly party, a virtual party. Last night was our virtual party for January and we had an Among Us battle.

And it was the coaches and the teens playing Among Us. Because for me, it's super-important to create that bond and connection, to spend time with them that has nothing to do with anything, of us trying to teach them or get something from them, right?

In fact, we gave something to them. The person who won the most got a \$25 gift card to Amazon. We gamified the whole thing. I'm the student incentive coordinator, so I build that into it. Every month, they get experience points for participating, watching videos, and all that. And then they use those experience points to win gift cards.

So, we have the Firmly Founded Teen, which is like the number one entry level way of getting a teen involved. It's low-threat for them, low-risk. They just show up and listen and watch videos on their own. So, we do that. I also do one on one coaching for teens. So, I do that. I'm booked right now for the next month.

And then, I also – because I'm booked, I'm like, I need to find a way to get to more teens. And so, I'm creating a teen leadership class that's launching at the beginning of February. It's a small group class where I'm going to be teaching teens how to lead their life.

Angela: I love that. It's so empowering. And that's what Empowered Principalship is all about. It's about empowering ourselves so that we have the ability to empower others. And I love what you're doing for families.

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I have a question. If my listeners are interested, like they have somebody in mind that they would like to refer, what's the process for an educator who thinks of a student that this might be a benefit for? How would they go about referring somebody?

Joey: Great question. So, what you do is contact mom or dad. And so, tell mom or dad, "Hey, look, I think this would be great." And include the teen too. Tell the teen about it. But then, it's got to be mom or dad. And say, "Hey, I think they would really benefit from enrolling in this or signing up with this guy. He's really great." And throw them over to my website, firmlyfounded.com/joey. And that will get them to all the resources that I have, everything that I'm doing, and that will help and put it in their hands.

You might want to make them sign up. And you can't, unfortunately. You can't make people do things. So, that's the way to do it because right now we only have something for the home. But I want to mention it because I'm excited about it.

Coming down the pipeline, me and the other coaches realized, you know what, we need to do something for the schools; something that schools could do, a virtual day-long event. And Angela might not know it yet, but she's going to be involved.

Angela: Yes, I'm all in. Let's do this.

Joey: We want you and we are in the middle of creating and putting together the landing page and we're going to need some pilot schools. But essentially, it's like it's all virtual, really good for districts that are distance learning.

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And it's going to start off with a kickoff assembly. Then there's going to be several breakout rooms with fun titles that are teaching the teens all these things and they're going to cover an array of your students; the ones who are struggling, the ones who are goofing off, the ones who are excelling and don't know what to do next. It's going to cover all that stuff. And then, there's going to be training for admin, training for teachers. This is where we want Angela to come in.

Angela: Oh, I'm in. I'm on this party train.

Joey: Yes right, it's going to be so much fun. And then, there's going to be a community event in the evening for the parents and family members where there's also multiple breakout rooms. So, we're super-excited and we can't get this going fast enough. Of course, we're going to gamify everything and I'm going to get my hands on a PlayStation5 or something to get rid of. Because for me, extrinsic motivation inspires intrinsic motivation. And it's just – Simon Sinek said it best, “The behaviors you reward are the behaviors you get.” And so, do all that and we're super-duper excited. So, just keep looking at firmlyfounded.com.

Angela: Absolutely. We'll drop it in the show notes.

Joey: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And if you don't see it, right now there's one for teens, young adults, and a button for parents. But coming in the next couple of weeks, there's going to be a button for schools.

Angela: That is so, so fun. I can't wait to be a part of it. We're going to have a good time, that's for sure. Well, Joey, thank you so much for being on the show today and for entertaining our audience here. Principals, it doesn't

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have to be so serious all the time. I know our work feels serious, but we've got to have some fun while we're doing it.

Joey: 100%, I love that.

Angela: Yeah, and one more thing I want to add is Joey got me hooked on Club House, and we're going to be doing some shows on Club House. So, if you're new to Club House, haven't heard of it, look it up. It's an app. It's a platform where it's kind of like Zoom but audio...

Joey: It's like a podcast that you're going to listen to live and you can raise your hand and participate in.

Angela: It's so much fun. I am a little bit addicted. I was talking to Ben the other day and we were like, "We're going to have to set some boundaries around Club House."

Joey: Oh my goodness, but there is going to be a place for educators. I haven't seen it yet...

Angela: It will pop up.

Joey: Well, me and you are going to create it. Let's do that.

Angela: Yes, that's what's happening right now, this month, boom, done.
Joey, I know I've got to let you go because you've got another consult coming up. Thank you again so much for your time and your energy. I love you so much, I can't wait to collaborate and get to work. It's going to be fun.

Joey: Likewise. Thank you very much for having me on.

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Angela: You're welcome. Take care. Bye.

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