

Ep #177: Authentic Positivity



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 177.

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 my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. How are you doing today my friends? It's May. It's the middle of May. It's glorious, glorious May. You're almost done. I love May so much. I have been getting up early every morning and walking just to hear the birds sing, to feel the sunshine on my face, and to remember that glorious feeling of May as a school leader.

You guys are in the thick of it. You are wrapping up the year. You are finishing out observations and all the paperwork that comes with this year. Yes, I know. You're tired. You're dealing with behaviors. You're dealing with teacher behaviors, parent behaviors, student behaviors, your own behavior. I just want to send you so much love, so much strength, and so much positivity. That's what we're going to talk about today is authentic positivity.

So in the world of education, and actually in the world at large, I feel like there has been this big trend on mindfulness and positivity, positive thinking, positive mantras. Really trying to be mindful and present. I love this trend. I think it's fabulous.

I think it's something in education we need to talk about. I think we really need to embrace it for the long haul. The thought of mindfulness in education is really what we're all about. We are in the business of evolving our minds. I love this trend, and I hope that it sticks in education. I hope that it lasts. I hope that it changes and impacts the way that we teach and lead from here and into the future.

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So today I want to talk with you about authentic genuine positivity, and the difference between playing and pretending to be positive and actually working to be positive. Now, the first thing I'm going to say about positivity is that you don't want to have the goal of being positive all of the time. Part of the human experience includes negative moments, includes intense emotions, includes bad days, includes failures.

So we're not here on the podcast to say, "Don't worry, be happy. Just smile and fake it 'til you make it." What we're saying is how can you train your brain to focus on the authentic positivity that already exists in your life, in your career, at your school, all around us?

So truly being authentic with your positivity starts with yourself, of course, right. You knew that was coming. I have been through this stage or phase of what I call inauthentic positivity, which was trying to force myself into believing that I was happy. Into pretending that I was happy. Into believing and trying to present myself and exhibit positivity even when I wasn't really feeling positive.

So I know that some suggestions out there in the world include saying positive mantras or listening to positive thoughts on audio or seeing them visually. None of those is bad for you, right. None of them hurt you. Surrounding yourself with positive thinking isn't a terrible thing. However, that can only take you so far. Especially when you look or you read or you hear positive affirmations, positive mantras, but you don't believe them.

Positive thoughts won't work to help you feel more positive if you don't actually believe them. Because what we believe to be true is what triggers the way that we feel. If we want to feel positive, we have to believe the thoughts or the mantras or the affirmations that we're repeating or that we're hearing or that we're saying to ourselves, right.

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So if you say to yourself, "I'm a positive person. I'm a positive person." You repeat that, but you don't really believe that. Like there's a part of you that's like, "Eh not really. You're kind of negative actually." You won't feel positive. So there's a difference between thinking it, believing it, and actually feeling it inside of your body in your bones so that you can generate an energy around you. Like a forcefield of energy that is positive. Okay?

So with yourself, what you want to work towards is building your belief in yourself. Focusing on what you are capable of doing as a leader, what you are capable of achieving, and what you're capable of having. That art of receiving.

I know this is something I've really been working on is being receptive to things that are going well, receptive to things being easy, receptive to abundance. Receptive to believing that I have tons of time, plenty of money, lots of energy, lots of resources available to me, lots of people to connect with. Really leaning into the belief that all of what I want is available to me.

Because when I lean into believing that about myself that I'm capable, that others want me in their lives and others want to connect with me and want to be my friend and want to coach with me and want to hear the thoughts that I'm sharing. When I believe in the world, when I believe that the world wants to receive what I have to offer. That you as school leaders, that the school and the community and the staff want to receive you as their leader and follow your lead. The more you lean into that belief, the better you feel about yourself. Then you feel authentically positive.

So creating a culture of positivity starts with you. It starts with you believing that a positive culture, a positive climate at your school is achievable, is doable. That's not to say it's perfect. It's not to say 100% of the time it's going to be all roses and daisies and butterflies and unicorns. Of course not. That's why I'm talking about authentic positivity. It's the belief in

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yourself, the belief in other people, the belief in what's possible in education, the belief in your career, the belief of what you're capable of. All of that is what generates authentic positivity.

So when you want to increase the amount of time that you feel positive, actually feel positive, the focus isn't on mantras and positive thinking only. The work is in what do I believe about those positive affirmations? How deeply do I believe that true? What percentage of that thought do I believe is true? On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do I believe that positive affirmation? How much do I believe that I am an amazing leader? How much do I believe my teachers are A plus, five-star service kinds of teachers, right?

We want to look for evidence and collect evidence that we are positive beings, that other people are positive beings, that what we're doing in education for kids is positive. The more you spend time seeking out and building up evidence that things are good in the world, things are good at school, things are going well in your career, things are going well at your school with your teachers. All of that.

I call this intentional belief building. It's a concept that I learned from my master coach Stacey Boehman. She teaches us intentional thought creation. I just dubbed it intentional belief building, IBB, for my clients out there. So when you want to believe something that you don't yet believe, you have to collect evidence as to why that belief could even be true for you.

So starting with yourself, building up your positivity vibe will help you then direct your mind to what's going well outside of you. So first start with what's going well inside of you, then look to what's outside of you. Once you can do that, then you start to look and see, "Hey what's going well in life? What's going well in my career? What's going well in the day-to-day grind of my job, right? What's going well with my teachers?"

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Then it starts to get easier to see all of the positive things happening for you and around you and on your campus and with the people you work with and with the people you live with and with the world at large. It really does start to rewire the way that you view the world.

When you think about authentic positivity and you understand that feeling more positive about your life and about your career and about your leadership skills is really about the level to which you believe in yourself and believe in others and believe what's possible. You have to tell your mind exactly what to look for. It sounds a little silly, right?

It's really as simple as telling yourself, "This is what we're looking for today. This is what I want to think and feel about myself, my school, and my team. This is what I want to see, this is what I want to hear, this is how I want to feel, this is the result I want to create."

This is called confirmation bias, right? When you tell your brain exactly what to look for, then it starts to actually see it. It's like when you are looking to buy a new car. I know I used this experience before. But when you're looking to buy a new car and you have a car that you really desire, you really want it. All of a sudden, you start seeing that car all over town, all over the roads, on the freeway. You see it everywhere. Like oh my gosh. There's another one. There's another one. There's another one.

Or if you're like into handbags or a special jacket or clothing or whatever it is that you love. You will start to see that handbag on somebody's shoulder. You'll start to see it at the store. Your brain will be actively like a sensor looking for it, scanning for it. It'll be like beep, beep, beep, beep. It will find it right there, right? That's called confirmation bias. Your brain is just looking for the things it wants to see.

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You get to tell your brain what to look for. So you can confirm and reiterate all of the negative things going on or you can confirm and reiterate all of the positive things that are going on that you want to be thinking about.

Now for those of you who believe your brain is wired to be negative. You're like, "This is really hard for me. My brain just defaults to the negative." Not to worry. I have been like this before. I used to think that my brain was just negative and that everything happened to me. That it was always bad luck. I knew this wouldn't work. Of course this wouldn't happen.

Or if your brain is just really judgmental about other people in a negative way, it's like every time you're thinking about something else, you're looking at the problems. You're looking at what's not good about them, right. Sometimes our brain does that. You're not alone. Brains are wired to judge. It's that protective mechanism at play.

What you want to do is you want to be very intentional with your mind. It's like a toddler. You have to teach it, directly teach it. Explicit direct instruction with your mind. You have to teach it to think differently. You are the teacher of your mind. You have to directly instruct it how you want to think and where you want it to focus.

If your thoughts tend to default to the negative, it's only because your brain has had years of experience practicing that default way. It's not a problem. It's just muscle memory. What you want to do is gently guide it back, gently redirect, gently model for it, gently reteach it. You have to help it move back to what is working? What is positive? What is available to me right now?

You have to do this mental workout. It's like going to the gym and training your muscles that they're stronger than they used to be. That they can lift more than they thought they could, right? You're doing the same thing with your mind. You have to do that mental workout and train it to what to look

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for versus what not to look at. The goal is to see the positivity in all of you, in other people, and in the world around us.

Now, let's talk about flattery versus genuine compliments. So as leaders, we know. The first thing we're taught. When you land a job in school leadership, what's the first thing people say? Build relationships. What's the first thing I should do? Build relationships.

So we think that we've got to get out there and shake hands and smile and kiss babies so that people will be like, "Oh, there's the new leader. She's amazing. Or he's wonderful. I can't wait to follow their lead." They're not thinking that, right? They're looking at how genuine you are. How positive you are. What your energy is. Do they want to follow you? You want to create an energy that's attractive and desirable to follow. You want to be the person that when you walk onto the campus, people feel connected to you and they feel genuine.

The way that they feel genuine is for you to actively seek out compliments and connections with other people that are genuine versus flattering them. Versus kind of this false surface kind of praise that we give people. Oh nice sweater. Oh cute shoes. Oh I like the way you welcome students into the classroom. Now, that might be an authentic compliment, but it's the energy in which you deliver that compliment, right.

So once you're training your brain to start looking for the positive, you're going to have this urge. You want to start complimenting people. The reason you want to do that is you're going to be feeling good about yourself. When you feel good, you want others to feel good. You want to spit those compliments out, right?

Now, I just want you to be aware that you can be very genuine in your compliments, but it's also easy to slip into flattery. So in order to build a culture at your school of authentic positivity, the feedback, and the

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compliments you give to each person on that campus has to be honest and true for you. In order for you to be truly honest with people, you have to direct your thoughts to look for those genuine strengths in your teachers. What you think is genuinely true about them.

You can do this by focusing on one grade level per week and actively looking for things that people in that grade level are doing well. The key is to really notice something that you actually like or admire about that person. It can be anything, but it has to ring true for you.

When you tell somebody feedback or you just give them a compliment but it's coming from a place of, "I should do this. This is what team building looks like. Or this is what relationship building looks like." People are aware of the difference. They can tell when you're faking building relationships and when you're authentically building relationships. One of the ways that we do that is to authentically compliment people, and give them feedback that tells them, "I really like this about you. This is a cool way you're doing this. I think that's really neat the way you did that."

So it will be overwhelming. If you're a new leader and people are telling you build relationships, the reason I say focus on one grade level per week is that it helps your brain break it down into smaller chunks. So you can just go into kindergarten for the whole week and just be looking around and noticing something amazing about each teacher that rings true for you.

You can take notes if you want, but I always like to keep track of those because it builds up in my head. So even if I have a teacher who somebody has told me is tough or I've had an experience that they're difficult or they're hard to work with or they tend to be super negative. I make my brain find something about them. Every human on the planet has something positive about them. We as leaders want to train our brain to seek out that positive.

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Now, I'm not saying you never give criticism or constructive feedback. What I'm saying is when you're building relationships, the goal is to find the connection and the positivity in that human. Every human has a positive side. We want to train our brains as leaders to find that. People will thrive under your lead when they feel you will notice their efforts. They will work hard for you when you focus on what they're contributing versus what they haven't yet achieved. So what's going well? What are your next steps?

So my husband and I have been talking on our little morning walks about his work experience. So he works in corporate. He works for a company that is really pushing hard to try and expand their services, expand their business. Nothing wrong with that.

One of the things my husband is noticing though is the faster they're trying to go, the less patient the administration, the managers are being with the people who are boots on the ground working, right. So management's coming in. "What's the update? What did you accomplish? That's not good enough. That's not fast enough. We've got to do better. We've got to do better."

They think they're being motivating by saying this, but what's happening is they're focusing the entire meeting on what isn't working well? What's broken, what's delayed? What's taking too long? People aren't working hard enough, fast enough, long enough. Over time, the morale has gone significantly down. That's because their brains, the managers, are trying to solve the problems. They're focusing on the problem instead of the solution. So they're thinking about where are the problems. Let's fix them. Versus what have you solved this week? Now what are your next steps?

Leaders when you go into a meeting, you can simply ask those two questions. What went well? What's working? What did we accomplish this week? What are the next steps? Those two questions will lead you to

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knowing what is working, what is not working, and where people's mindset is.

You don't even have to ask what's broken or what failed or what didn't work. You will know by the answer to the question of what is working and what their plan is for the next steps. You will know what's not working when you ask it in the positive fashion.

You can also generate authentic positivity in the way that you look at your systems within your school and with the institution of education. You can look at specific routines or areas on your campus. What's working in the lunchroom? What's working with yard duty? What's working at dismissal?

Look for things that are working all around you. Doing that will help you change the way you think about your school, the way you talk about your school, the way you approach problems and solutions at your school. When you focus on what is working? What did go well? What don't we have to change, right?

It's a different way of looking at it because we've been so focused on all of the problems and try to figure out solutions. Our brain cannot have access to solutions when all we're thinking about is what's not working, and who's not good, and what we need, and what we don't have, and all of the lack of solutions and resources.

So when you plan your meetings and you plan your committee work for next year, spend the bulk of time talking about what is working versus what isn't working. It's not that you're not going to spend time discussing next steps or the goals that you're striving for or any problems that are coming up. When you focus the meeting and the conversation around what is working, the energy in which you problem solve will be focused on seeing solutions much more quickly.

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So finally, spend some time thinking about what works in education. What are we doing right? What can we build on? What positive things has COVID taught us? We've been focused on all of the stress around COVID and not being in person and trying to remote learn and all the technology and being Zoom fatigued. All of that. But there are some amazing positive things that have come out of COVID that can positively impact our instruction from this day forward.

The more authentically positive you are, the more inviting and attractive you will be to work with. People will want to follow your lead. They're going to want to work hard with you and for you. They're going to look for the positive things in you. When you look for the positive things in yourself, that energy will translate to them looking for the positive things in you. When you look for the positive things in them, they are going to see the positive things in them.

That is really the beauty of authentic positivity. Because you can let people know, "Hey here are the amazing things about you. I hope you see that in yourself." You can build their trust in themselves, their belief in their capability. That is how you empower your teachers to become the best versions of themselves. Have an incredibly authentic positive week. I will talk with you guys all next week. Take care. Bye, bye.

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