

Ep #183: The Value of Constraint



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Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 183.

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, and welcome to the podcast. Welcome to the end of June as well. Happy summer for all of you. I hope you are all on break and having a fabulous time in the month of June. I was just telling my husband the other night how fast it seems like the summer months start to go. The days seem longer and faster, and then you roll into fall. I just love all of the scents and activities of fall. Then you get into the holidays. I feel like June through December is really, really fast. Then January through May feels a little slower.

So I don't know why that is other than I think I tend to be really in tune with the rhythm of the seasons. I feel really connected with the schedule of the seasons and the sun. When it's daylight and early out, it feels so amazing. I love early morning sun. Then in the winter, of course, you know the days are so short. It gets dark longer. So you guys probably feel that sense of rhythm as well. So enjoy these long summer days. I hope you are winding down and feeling relaxed and leaning into those longer restful days.

Be sure to check out the Empowered Principal Facebook group if you're not a member yet because we are still doing activities of fun. We're posting our fun. We're having a great time. People are going to the lake. They're walking their dogs. They're going to the pool. They're doing all the self-care appointments. They're having a blast. So we're putting out prizes. We're just enjoying ourselves, and we're really getting this momentum of what it feels like to lean into summer without the thought, "I should be working. Or there's something more to be done."

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As you listen to last week's podcast, you listen to Dena, one of my clients, talk about her transition from feeling like she never had enough time into this summer feeling like she has an abundance of time to spend her days the way she wants. She feels this sufficiency with having done enough to close out last year. And that she's got this space between last year and this year to just be present and be with herself and take good care of herself and get the respite she needs in order to be ready and to be excited for next year.

One of the things I've been telling my clients about this work is don't do tomorrow's work today. Do today's work today, tomorrow's work tomorrow. There will always be time. Time is fully abundant. One of the things that's your job right now, one of your tasks over the summer is to be present, and to really lean into giving yourself that space between last year and this year. Give yourself the break. Your brain needs it. Your heart needs it. Your mind, body, and soul needs it. All right. Hope you're having fun.

Now, the abundance of time is an amazing thing. Being really busy, I know for me the summer tends to get busy. We schedule a lot of things. Lots of activities, which is part of the reason why I feel like summer goes so fast. We're outside more. We're more active. We're going more places. We're gathering more friends, especially this year. Trying to get to all the people and see everybody we haven't seen. The fall we do that as well, and then the holidays we do that as well. Then we kind of wind down and take a breath and take a break in the winter and early spring months, right?

So there is an abundance of time all year round. It's just a matter of the way we're thinking about it, right? But today this may not be the best introduction to today's topic, but that's totally fine. I don't care. Because what I'm talking about today is the value of constraint. Now, I want to address the word constraint.

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Constraint technically means limitation or constriction. So when we hear the word, we think about being limited, being restricted, having to hold back, being deprived. I think a word that comes up. I know I don't like the word deprived. I don't like to feel deprived. So I actually practice feeling deprived on purpose, which is kind of crazy, but I want to be able to handle any emotion.

So if there is an emotion out there that really is annoying to you. I know for me in COVID it was boredom and loneliness. Those two drove me crazy. I didn't like being alone. I didn't like sitting still. I liked being on the go. I had to learn how to feel bored. Which then when I learned how to feel bored, I just decided not to be bored anymore and just make fun times with myself, right? Enjoy my own company. Loneliness too. I felt lonely, and I just let myself sit in that loneliness because it was sad for me. It was really hard.

So another feeling I don't like to feel is deprived. I don't want to not have what I don't have. So the best way to allow that is to let myself not have something that I want. So we're going to talk about this today, but we're going to talk about it in a way. I want to reframe this idea of constraint in a way that feels more appealing to you, and that it sells your mind on the value of constraint in a way that inspires you to want to desire constraint.

I have practiced this over the last 18 to 24 months. One to two years. I've really gone from resisting constraint to seeing it's value to actually truly appreciating having some limitations as it comes to certain aspects of my life. I'm going to share those with you in a minute. I know that our brains want to think of constraint as the opposite of freedom and choice and liberty and flexibility and having many options. We think that the more options available to us, the better.

I want to offer the opposite. I have learned that the art and science of constraint is really what creates more freedom and choice, and so much more control over your time, your resources, your money, the outcomes

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you want to create for yourself, your career, your school, your staff, students, and your entire life. When you learn how to implement constraint as a positive energy, as a way to advance yourself as a school leader, you're going to feel so much more abundant with your time. Because you're going to make decisions with much more clarity and simplicity. There won't be so many factors to take in when you practice constraint.

The same is true, I've learned, with my money, my personal money, and my business money. How I spend in my business, how I spend my personal money. I've played around with this to decide what are the things I truly want to spend my money on. What are the things I'm buying just because it feels good in the moment or because I have FOMO? I'm afraid if I don't have it, something bad is going to happen or I'm not going to be in the in-crowd, right? Or whatever it is. This idea of what is it I truly want to spend on? Why do I want to spend it? How do I want to utilize my resources?

What I mean by that are the physical resources you have. So at school, I think about as a principal you have a certain amount of resources available to you. Then you have to decide how you're going to implement or utilize or spend those resources. Whether it's actual money in a budget or whether it's human resources, your people power, or whether it's tangible items you've already purchased and how are you going to implement them to get the most bang out of your buck for those resources, right?

So the more you learn to constrain the amount of things that you have like physical things and the amount of choices you have and the amount of information you need to make decisions, it actually makes life feel so much more simple and clear and easy to be honest with you. It just feels like there's so much more ease when it comes to deciding how to spend our money, deciding how to spend our time, deciding what to eat, deciding what to wear, deciding what to purchase, deciding where we're going to go on vacation or all of these things.

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So I'm going to give you lots of examples today so that you can kind of wrap your head around what this looks like when I'm talking about constraint.

So the value of constraint as it relates to time looks like this. First of all, we have to be willing to look at how we spend our time. There's so much resistance to this in the beginning because people don't want to see the truth of how they're spending their time. It feels easier to just say, "I'm so busy. I'm overwhelmed. There's too much to do. I don't have enough time."

When you really look at the ways you're spending your time, most of the time you're going to find out that there is wiggle room. There are things you are choosing to spend your time on that you aren't getting a return on that investment, that time investment. For example, you might be finding that you're actually spending several hours watching movies or Netflix. While you get some enjoyment out of that, you don't feel like it's worth it.

Let's say you're watching three hours a night watching TV. You're like, "You know? I'm good for like one to two hours at max, but not three. I'm going to adjust that a little bit. Maybe I'm going to watch a movie from seven to nine. Then from nine to ten instead of just blanking out and just watching something random, I'm going to go and read a book. Or I'm going to go and do some stretching before bed. Or I'm going to just relax and do a night routine, give myself a little facial or pedicure, something like that."

Or for you men out there, maybe you're going to... Well, you could do the same thing. You can do a pedicure. Who's to say, right? I shouldn't be judging. No. We can all do what feels good to us.

What I'm saying is that we want to look at our time before we decide what to constrain. Because we want to slow ourselves down and ask ourselves, "Is this time that I'm spending on X giving me the return that I want? If not, I want to constrain the amount of time I'm spending on that." You can do this

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over the course of your calendar, and start looking at how much time am I spending in the morning on getting ready? How much time am I spending at work? How much time am I spending getting groceries or running errands or spending time with my kids or spending time in meetings at night?

Look at how you're spending your time, and then notice what you're saying yes to and what you're saying no to. Because what you're saying yes to means there's things you're saying no to. What you're saying no to means you're saying yes to other things. Because the time is being spent no matter what. It's ticking along. You can't save the time, right? It's not like money where you can put it into an account and hold on to it for a later purchase date, right? The time is revolving.

Actually, I'm going to say money is doing that too. The more that you hold onto it and hoard it and think that you can't let go and that tighter restriction that you have on it, it actually ends up flowing out on its own. Because money needs to flow like time flows.

So looking at your time, you want to decide with intention what you're saying yes to and what you're saying no to. And being honest with yourself about what those things are. When you notice like these are the things I don't want to say yes to, I'm going to constrain and not do those things. They're not really serving me. They don't feel good to me, or they're not producing a result I want in my life.

Then the work comes in having to honor those decisions, right? It's hard to say no sometimes to things we don't want to do. It's hard to honor the things we do want to do sometimes because they might be hard in the moment, but we know it's a net gain benefit. It's a longer term benefit.

So when we play with that a little bit, we come to see that it's easier to prioritize our life and to let little things pop up and sneak away from us. Like

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let it sneak time away from us when we are conscious and aware and intentional about the value of our time and why it's so valuable and making those intentional decisions to constrain things that aren't really valuable to us and to spend time on things that we do feel are valuable.

So when you start to do this, what you'll notice is that you'll have more time for the things you need to complete and the things that you value. So, for example, at work one of the things that I love to do with my clients is to play this game of, "Okay. You've got to get the board review done or the site plan done or some project that you have to do. I want you to see if you can do that. How much time are you currently doing it? Let's take stock there. Then let's cut 30 minutes off of that. Can you do it from two hours down to 90 minutes? Try it."

I did this with another client who she was taking forever to do her teacher observations. She was paining over them. She was resisting them. She was procrastinating them. I said, "What if you just set a timer? And you've got 20 minutes to write one review per person. That's three people per hour. Take that times the number of people you have."

She wrote me back and said, "I set the timer for 20 minutes. I got the first one done in 15 minutes. I got the second one done in nine minutes. I got the third one done in seven minutes. Thank you so much." I was like boom, that's what we're talking about, right?

When you know you have to get something done, especially when it's something that you kind of dread or procrastinate. Give it a time limit. Give it a duration. Put it on your calendar, and boom. Get to work. Notice. Notice when you're resisting this. Notice when you're letting things bleed into hours and hours because you're fussing with yourself inside your brain.

Okay. Think about all the ways where you can find ways to constrain your time. Do less things and then take less time to do them. When you practice

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this, you will have so much more abundance in your thoughts around your time because you will have created more time for yourself, literally. It's so cool.

Number two, constraining our resources and our money. I tapped into this a little bit, but, again, be willing to look at how you spend your money and your resources. This can be a sticky subject because we have very deeply rooted belief systems around money. We have a lot of shame around money. We have a lot of guilt or pressure around money. We have other people's opinions in our head about money.

Just do it. Look at it just by yourself, nobody has to know. Ask yourself, "Am I a person who follows a strict budget and I never spend outside of it? Do I save for the things I want and then I buy them?" Do you have a lot of fear in spending or are you the person that kind of spends willy-nilly, but you're afraid to look at your finances? Like either way there's some fear driving the spending or the not spending. Just notice, right?

Are you the person who kind of like clicks buy purchase with one eye hoping, "Oh, I hope I have enough." But you haven't looked at your statements in six months. Like look at the way you're spending your resources and time. If this is too scary to do it on your personal finances, start with your budget at school. It feels a little more detached. You can look at like how am I spending the money and the resources I have at school? Why am I making the decisions I'm making? Am I making them out of fear, scarcity, FOMO, or am I making these decisions out of certainty?

You know when you buy something and you feel 100% certain like, "I absolutely want this, and it's worth the money. Like hands down I would pay for this again in a heartbeat." Think about the things you have in your personal life or at school. You are a, "Heck yes. I would buy that thing in a heartbeat. It's worth its weight in gold. I would spend the money all over again. Or no, I wouldn't do that."

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Start to play with yourself around that and see. Like where would you constrain your spending, “I wouldn’t really buy that again or I would rather spend my money and my resources over here.” So just notice and play with this idea so that you can start to learn to constrain where you want to constrain, and to have the resources available to you where you feel you most need them. The value of what you think is going to be the best for your students, the best for your staff, and the best for yourself.

Some other fun areas to consider. These are just kind of like personal things that I have been playing with, and I've noticed how valuable it has been because it has given me so much more time, so much less mind drama, and actually so much more money because I'm constraining the amount of items I feel the need to have in my life. If you've ever read *Minimalism* by Greg Keown or something like that. Look up *Minimalism*. It's a great book.

There's so many good books out there about constraint and minimalism, but I've really applied them in a really positive way. Like I want the constraint. I want less clothing. I'd rather have less clothing I love than a bunch of cheaper clothing that doesn't quite fit right or I don't like it anymore or it's got a little stain on it. So think about constraint when it comes to the amount of clothing you have, the amount of shoes you have, the amount of sporting gear that you buy.

For me, a big one was the number of professional development books. I used to buy a lot of books because I thought that if I had them, it meant that the information went straight to my brain and then I knew them. Did I always take the time to read them? No. They were sitting on my desk, or they were in my closet. But I was consuming the purchase of books believing that I would one day read them, and then I would know all the things and then I would be this amazing leader.

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I invite you to consider one book, one coach, one podcast, and dive deep into the content of that instructor, of that teacher. Or maybe you pick one per quarter or one per semester or one a month even. Like really give your brain the gift of constraint so that it's only thinking about one thing.

When you focus and prioritize and have one thing to think about, decisions are so much easier. Your time management and your schedule become so much easier. The focus of your week, your day, your week, and your month become so much easier. Really hone down what you're trying to accomplish to just one thing, and then see how that one thing can kind of tentacle out into the other areas. Because the way you do one thing is the way you do everything. If you fix that one thing or you adjust it or you hone that skill so deeply, it's going to impact every aspect of your professional and your personal life. I promise you. I've been doing this. It's so good.

I've also done this with eating. Eating lunch used to be one of the highlights of my school day, right? Especially if a colleague would call and say, "Hey, you want to go grab a quick lunch?" I was like yes, absolutely. It was so fun to see another peer of mine and talk really quickly and then get back to campus. Or even if we just ran and got a sandwich together and went back to campus and got to work.

I started realizing like just planning out the clothing I was going to wear for the week and the food I was going to eat for the week, it just took all of that mental energy out of what am I going to eat? What I'm going to have for lunch. Or it's that last minute, "Oh gosh, I haven't eaten all day. I've got to run and get something. I don't have anything in my fridge. Or I've got to eat this old yucky bagel." Like really planning. Giving yourself a few minutes on the weekend to plan it out and have it be something consistent.

Now what I do, I make a pot of soup, and I just eat the soup all week long. I don't fuss about it. I don't complain that it's boring. I just know I've got soup and I've got either a little side salad or if I'm still hungry maybe a sandwich

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or some cheese slices. But I just don't even have drama about what I'm going to eat. I just eat it and it's done. It just gives your brain so much more space and freedom and energy and focus to think about the other things you'd rather be thinking about.

So notice how you're spending your mental energy, right, from everything from just the little things you're thinking about dinner and lunch. I know as a mom I think a lot about like, "Oh, I've got to do this errand. We've got to schedule that for Alex. Or we've got to get the car into maintenance."

All of those things the more you can constrain and just simplify them and say, "I'm going to think about the cars once a month and plan it all out. I'm going to think about the home errands once a month, and we're going to map those out. I'm going to think about the menu and get that out of the way. I'm going to consume one book this month and really dive deep into it versus a ton of content when you're spread super wide, and you don't really implement anything." Okay?

So play with this idea of constraint. I'm really curious to know what your thoughts are about constraint. So join the Facebook group. Post your ideas on constraint except don't constrain having fun. I'm just kidding. If you're having too much fun, yes, you can constrain. I don't think many school leaders are having too much fun. I promise you that. It's kind of hard to have too much fun when you're a school leader, right? School is fun, home is fun, it's all fun.

So practice constraint. Let me know how it goes. Drop it in the Facebook group. If you have any questions or concerns, I'm going to be doing a webinar training on this actually coming up pretty soon. If I've already done it, I will send out the link. I have to remember what the date is on that. So there is some work to be done there. Anyways, have an amazing, amazing week. I love you guys. Happy June. I'll see you in July. Talk to you later. Bye.

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