

## Ep #185: A Year of Coaching with Dustin



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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## Ep #185: A Year of Coaching with Dustin

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 185.

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 my empowered leaders. Welcome to today's podcast. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. We have a very, very special treat for you today. With me I have one of my clients. His name is Dustin. Dustin started with me actually over a year ago now. Dustin started in I think it was April of 2020. So shortly after the pandemic had taken its toll on all of us. He signed up for coaching, and we went through the year together.

What I love about Dustin is that he was so willing, so courageous to jump on the podcast right at the beginning of his coaching journey with me and talking about where he was, how he made the decision to join into coaching. He promised that at the end of the year he would share with you his journey and his experience as a first year school leader.

So Dustin is the lead principal of a middle school. He, prior to that, was an AP for an elementary school I think for two years. Right Dustin? Okay so for two years he was an AP. So he had some AP experience, but being a first year school leader leading a middle school through a pandemic was no joke. So Dustin is here to talk about his experience with you all today. So Dustin, welcome to the podcast.

Dustin: Thank you Angela. It's great to be back.

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Angela: I'm so happy that you're here, and I cannot wait to share your story because it's so empowering. It's so inspiring to people because we can all remember back. So I can't remember what number that episode was, but back to your very first few weeks as a school leader and just all the trepidation and the fears and the doubt that you were experiencing. To think about where you're at now, it's truly miraculous. I think it's so amazing. So I can't wait for you to share all of the juicy tidbits with the listeners.

So let's just go back to the beginning. Let's start, if you can remember back to 12/14 months ago when we started coaching together. Think back to that time. Where were you? What were your thoughts? What were your feelings? What were your expectations for the first year?

Dustin: Yeah. That's really exciting for me to reflect on that whole beginning now that we're 14 months down the road. You kind of mentioned it in your intro. I had been an assistant principal for two years at an elementary school at one district that I had been in for my entire career, about a decade at that point. Then I decided to take a risk and go for this lead principal position in a district that's totally different. Never really been at the middle school level very much. So it's a lot of new things.

I interviewed right before the shutdown. We didn't know what COVID was going to be like at that point. So interviewed, got the call that I'd been accepted as principal, then all of a sudden everything shut down. So I was just so nervous, Angela, about what I was getting myself into. Like you said, a lot of trepidation, a lot of self-doubt, feeling the weight of the responsibility of taking this new job on.

So I just knew that I wanted to seek out help and do everything I could to set myself up for success. Because I don't think you should after something this big and important all by yourself. There's people out there who can

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help you. I was familiar with your podcast. So I decided to give you a call, and I'm really happy I did.

Angela: I'm so happy you did too. It's been so much fun this year. It really has been fun. I want listeners to hear that coaching isn't all about getting negative feedback and having to process really hard emotions. There are times when that happens. But I do want to highlight also that we have a lot of fun, we have a lot of laughs, and we find ways to bring levity into some of these situations. To kind of step out for a second and take a deep breath and look at the craziness of this job.

When you step back, you gain a perspective that kind of reminds you like, "Okay. This isn't a forever thing. This is kind of a moment in time." Sometimes it's actually kind of funny even though it doesn't feel like it when you're in it at the time. You can reflect on it with some humor. Have you found that to be true at all?

Dustin: Yes, absolutely. I mean this job can feel so serious and heavy if you don't try and find those moments of joy, or just take a step back and say, "This is ridiculous." Last summer when I was onboarding, just like everybody else we had to plan for hybrid and remote and in person. It was so crazy to try and make all these plans with a new staff that I had never met and never having really been at a middle school. It was almost comical. I just don't know what I'm doing right now. That thought was something that we had to coach on. Like it's okay.

Angela: You had like three plans going. I remember like you had three different plans going, and we were like, "Just throw it together because whatever plan you make is going to be thrown out the window anyways." Which it was.

Dustin: Yes.

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Angela: Like how many times was it thrown out the window? Many.

Dustin: Oh many times.

Angela: Right?

Dustin: You have to just not take it so seriously. Having you to kind of laugh with me and put it in perspective really helps. Because I'm already kind of a serious guy. I'll get a little too serious, and that doesn't help the school. It doesn't help the kids. For me to be my best self, to have some joy and not take things so seriously is important.

Angela: Yes. I think that when you're in it, it feels very serious, and your brain can't really see past what's going on when you're in it and you're feeling that burn of having a decision to make. Or you know the staff's going to be in an uproar because the schedule changed once again. Or you're contact tracing on the weekends.

Like there's so many things that do feel heavy, but having somebody to talk through those situations, we do get a moment to kind of poke at it and be like, "This is ridiculous. Let's just laugh about it for a minute." Then we get back to business, right? Because yes, this job is very serious. But if we go through life leading our school with such heaviness and such seriousness, I think we kind of lose sight of why we're in this job in the first place, right? Which is to evolve kids, evolve our staff, and to kind of have fun along the way.

Dustin: Absolutely. Kind of when I think back to our progression of coaching, the first semester basically when I hired you in April 2020 pretty much through December it was a lot of coaching on those things that felt really heavy. A lot of stuff around COVID. Then kind of as we got the hang of it and I started to feel better about making those decisions and feel more

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confident, the second semester I was able to talk to you about fun stuff like planning my future and legacy and my core values.

So I just found myself feeling better as the year went on. Not all the time. I would say 80% of our calls are me, “Oh my gosh. Here's the situation at work. It's very stressful.” Then as the semester went on, we started to talk about some really cool stuff that I think is going to...It's been already so helpful for me to think about this job and make me enjoy it a lot more.

Angela: Yeah. That's a great point. I want to dig into that a little bit. This is probably going off, but I love this concept so much. Our first, yes, two or three or four months maybe we were really digging into different coaching tools. So you would bring a situation to me. I would listen and hear kind of what was going on, read between the lines what was happening. Then I would say like, “Let's try this tool. Let's implement this and see if this helps and can adjust a little bit.”

So in the beginning it was almost like I was teaching you the tools. Then there was a shift where you were taking the tools. You were able to decipher what tool you needed for what and were able to apply that. Can you talk about that transition where we went from like my teaching you how to use the tools to you actually integrating them into who you are as a leader? Then you were able to kind of start self-coaching is what really happened, right. Would you say?

Dustin: Yeah. I think one of the first things we coached on was my first hire that I had to make. It was a new teacher hire. There was three candidates, and I wanted the more experienced teacher. There was a first year teacher who the committee wanted. I had this block about hiring first year teachers. So we coached on that.

Because of the coaching, it kind of came out that that's because of my experience as a first year teacher. It was the hardest year of my life. I was

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kind of projecting almost that experience, which I wouldn't have come to that conclusion without that support. So we used a tool. I think it was maybe flip the thought or there's so many of them. That tool just kind of allowed me to see and help me process. Then I ended up hiring the first year teacher, and it was great.

Then I remember my first staff meeting. I was so worried about that. I had to plan out every little piece of it because we were going to talk about COVID. I wanted to make a good first impression and all of these things. So our initial coaching lessons were really using tools and strategies like flip the thought, like runs of belief.

Then, like you said, around December I kind of was...Well, I did the work. I'll be honest. I think that's really important to do the work that you give me and do our calls every week. I'm really vulnerable about what's going on and we talk. It's really great because I'm willing to have those conversations with you, and I get a lot out of that.

So by the time December rolled around, I was able to start doing some of those things on my own during the week. I'm not perfect by any means now. I've just found as time has gone on, I've become more decisive, I think. Just more assured in my decisions instead of just questioning them so much like I did at the very beginning.

Angela: Right. Decision making was a huge part of our conversation. I've been thinking a lot about how new school leaders, of course it feels uncomfortable to make decisions in a job you've never done before. It's almost like you can't earn the right to feel comfortable and be decisive until you've gone through that river of misery of like feeling the burn of indecisiveness or like the trepidation of having to make a decision that you really don't know it's outcome, right? You have to go through that and experience kind of some of those fallouts in order to understand what it means to be assured, what it means to be decisive.

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I know for you, there was a lot of thought work that went into decision making, and there was a weight that came with decision making. So tell me now. Like what are your thoughts now about decision making? Are they different?

Dustin: I mean yeah. I was a little bit worried about what other people thought about my decisions, honestly, if I'm being totally frank, and letting that almost drive my decision making gross. Or it would make me really spin in indecision. Like if I decide this, then here's how these people are going perceive it and these people are going to perceive it.

I think there's some value to thinking through that, but at the end of the day I think I need to know who I am as a leader and what I believe in. That's a lot of the work we've done is what are my values? When I make a decision, is it in line with my values and what I think is going to be best for the school and the kids and the staff?

So that's just taken, like you said, a lot of trial and error. As the year went on, I made some big decisions that are really important for school along with teachers and stakeholders about our master schedule for next year, which was a big decision to make a change about an SEL program that we adopted, which was a big decision that's going to really impact students.

So I'm really proud of myself for being able to work through that indecisiveness at the beginning of the year and kind of learn from it so that I can make...It's our job as principals to make those big decisions. The more we can have coaching and be aligned with our values, I think, the better for everybody.

Angela: What you just said is so golden. I want to highlight it so that people hear it for a second time. What Dustin was saying is that the way to feel certain and assured in your decision making, it's not to the exclusion of thinking about the impact that the decision will have on its stakeholders and



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other people, the greater impact. You want to make decisions based on the collective We, the collective group, and what's best as a whole. The way that you feel more certainty with that is to first ask yourself what is your opinion? What is your thought about this decision? What do you believe to be true? What do you think is best? And answer the question.

The only way to get to know yourself in terms of how you make decisions is to practice the art of, "What do I think? What do I value? What do I believe." Not to say you are going to simply go to what feels good to you so that the decision is easy. It's not that. It's answering the question with the most honesty and integrity that you can, and then know what you want to do and include your stakeholders. Then from there make the decision. Is that what I'm hearing you say?

I feel like that shift going into you're in your head making a decision thinking about what are other people going to think or say or do in response to this decision versus, "Here's what I think. Let me share that out and get some feedback, and then we come to a conclusion."

Dustin: Yeah. I think that's a huge theme from this year for me. I would say one of my strengths is listening and kind of gathering input from everybody who's going to be impacted. Where my strength wasn't what do I think is best? What can I say about the situation and give myself credit for my experience on the other end of the table.

So I think for years I've been the type of leader, and I think this is a good quality, that listens and really tries to work on it as a team, but I wouldn't always bring for my ideas. Maybe because I wasn't sure what they were or wasn't confident in them.

So this year we've done a lot of work around, "Like what do you think Dustin? What is your opinion? What do you think should be done and why?" Knowing that has really been helpful for me because I still will go

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through the process of gathering input and feedback and hearing voices and making it a shared decision making process. But it's really good to know what I think at the outset just for myself to have that knowledge and confidence.

Angela: Yes. That is what one of the things that we worked on from the very beginning. Dustin's referring to a tool that I call flip the thought. Which is the thought he was believing is that, "I'm not sure what to say, or I'm not sure that this is going to add value. I don't know what I'm doing as a leader." There were all these thoughts in his mind that created a sense of self-doubt and kind of a fear. The response to that fear was, "I'm not going to speak up, or I'm not going to really offer my opinion."

Flipping that thought was, "Even though I'm new, I still have value to offer." And looking for all the ways in which he had value to offer even though he was new. If you think about flipping that on his backside, really what happens is you're like, "Wait a minute. I'm new. I have a new perspective. I have a fresh perspective. I have different ideas. Because I am new, I add value." I think that that was a big shift for you, right Dustin?

Dustin: That was a huge shift. I think probably all of the newer school leaders out there can relate to that feeling of inexperience. I never felt ready to be an assistant principal. I certainly didn't feel ready to be a lead principal. So that thought was I'm not experienced. I don't know what I'm doing. I think that was one of the thoughts that was really driving me at the beginning.

So we flipped that and looked at my inexperience as a principal actually to add some value bringing fresh perspectives. Just a new way of thinking and leading. That really was like a relief for me almost to kind of think about that differently.

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Angela: Exactly. Well, it eases up the pressure to think that you have to wait until some future moment when you are experienced, or you do have the knowledge, or you can roll off the tongue what you want to say. When you decide from the very first day that because I'm new, I bring a certain kind of value. It's a different kind of value than an experienced leader, right? But there is a value associated to being new and to being fresh and to not knowing the answers and having to ask a lot of questions. There's value in that.

So generating evidence and energy around, "Even though I'm new and I don't know what I'm doing, I'm going to come in here and be the best brand new principal I can be." Right? Yeah.

Dustin: I kind of came to realize that people appreciated that. They didn't care that I was new. Teachers, they just wanted somebody who was going to listen and lead the school and be organized and be a partner. It doesn't matter how many years of experience or how old you are. I'm 34 years old. That was a thing for me for some reason.

Angela: Yes.

Dustin: I have teachers in their 60s. What are they going to think of this little young 30 year old coming in?

Angela: Right.

Dustin: Those thoughts don't help me. They don't matter to staff. So that was a transformation, a really positive one that happened at some point during the year.

Angela: Yeah, it was fun to watch that shift for you. You know when you mentioned the whole age thing, I have a couple of other clients who also

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are really young. They too struggled with that thought. I think that what's happening is in society we have this idea of this picture of the perfect principal or the empowered principal who is skilled and knowledgeable and knows all the things and comes in with this all knowingness.

The reality is people know that you're new, you guys. It doesn't matter how old or young you are. If you're new, you're new. You can't hide being new. So trying to fake it until you make and pretending you're not new when you're new, it just turns people off. They don't want that.

What they want out of a leader isn't somebody who's old or young or skilled or now. They want somebody who's going to get them the results that they want. In principal's eyes, what that is is supporting your teachers to be able to do what they need to do, right? That's our job. We help them do their job. And in return, them doing their job well helps us do our job well.

Dustin: Exactly.

Angela: So let's dive into some of the realities of the year. Can you share some objections that came up along the way? Some struggles, some challenges, and just the truth of how you worked through them? And how coaching either helped you or how it helped you expedite? Because I think we can all kind of figure stuff out. We can all hold our breath and wait until the end of the year, but I'm curious to know if you felt coaching helped you feel better sooner and come up with solutions faster.

Dustin: You know, this was a really hard year for school leaders and for anybody in education. When I hired you, I just came to this point where I think it had been two weeks since I got the call that you're the lead principal. After about 20 minutes of celebration and yay and being excited with my wife and my son, it kind of hit me. Like this is happening. Then it didn't go away. Like that stress. It was such a stressful time. I think even without the pandemic, I think I would have just been really anxious about

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starting something new. Like I said, I felt like it was such a big responsibility.

So I think when I called you, immediately I just like this is going to work for me when we were talking. This is what I want. I mean you and I had a really good connection. The piece about the finances came up, and I immediately talked to my wife about it. She said, “Yep, we’re going to make this work. This is going to be really important for you to be happy, your best self this year.”

Honestly for her, my wife, it’s been really good because you and I can process some really tough situations before I come home. Then that way I can still communicate with my wife certainly. She’s actually an educator as well. We like to talk to each other about stuff. We met when we were fifth grade teachers on the same team. But I don’t have to bring that heaviness into the conversation because we’d processed it already.

But yeah, just thinking back to some of the challenges of the school year. A lot of just insecurities and self-doubt as a new leader, but we coached on different situations that we kind of talked about with staff, with students, with decisions around COVID and quarantines. Just a lot of it with stress management and thinking about just how to manage that stress and how to kind of manage my time. I know we worked a lot on that so that I'm not coming home and working at home, and I can be present with my family.

I will say I became a dad of a little girl in March. So that was a huge thing that we worked through, which was so many emotions tied to that as well. So now I have two little ones at home. So there was just a lot this year Angela. I'm so thankful that we were able to work together. Because I think without the coaching, I just don't think I would have been as effective as a leader. I don't think I would have been as present as a dad or a husband. So it really impacts a lot of different areas of my life.

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Angela: Yeah, that's where it really gets me in the heart. I get emotional when I hear that because coaching is so much more than leadership mentorship. Like that is definitely what we're coaching on, but we're coaching on something deeper than that. We're coaching on stress management, self-care, rest and respite, relationships at home, our relationships with our own children, the lifestyle that we want to lead. Not just our leadership legacy, but kind of a lifestyle legacy. Like who do we want to be as parents? Who do we want to be as spouses? How do we want to show up for them?

I know you and I have talked a lot about self-care. Like Dustin's a runner for those of you who don't know. He's a runner. I'm a former runner. I don't run as much anymore. As avid runners, we've had conversations about the value of self-care, the value of running. Can you just speak to how that has shifted for you? I know there's another topic I want to bring up too which is we talked recently about things being hard. So I want to talk about those two topics. So first let's talk about self-care and running.

Dustin: Yeah. Well, I'll just be honest. I was not running basically from March 2020 on through the pandemic. The fall was a really stressful time. I wasn't sleeping well. I wasn't exercising. So you didn't know I was a runner until it came up in a conversation. We really talked about how I can prioritize that. I'm the type of person that if I don't have like a big goal or like a big race or I want to run 10 miles every week or something like that then I just find myself not doing it.

So you kind of helped me realize that maybe I was setting goals that were unrealistic, and I just needed to get out the door once a week to start. So that's been really helpful to have almost an accountability partner in some ways. Just somebody to remind me the benefits of it, and how running is connected to this job actually. How I show up differently for this job when I'm sleeping better and running and kind of taking care of myself.

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Which I think we all understand that at a cognitive level, but if you don't have a coach really telling you, "Hey, are you running? How's it going?" Just helping me come up with a plan. I think I wouldn't be running right now, and I'm getting back in the swing of that. That's been really exciting, and I'm feeling a lot better about that.

Angela: Good, so you are running.

Dustin: I am running just twice a week. Just a little bit at a time.

Angela: Good.

Dustin: So it's exciting.

Angela: Let me ask you this question. Does running two days a week feel better than not running at all and beating yourself up because you're not running five days a week?

Dustin: Running two days a week feels great.

Angela: Awesome.

Dustin: The reason I wasn't running more is because I was like if I'm not running this much then what's the point? I know that sounds silly, but for some reason that was like a block for me.

Angela: I think that's a common block. That's why I wanted to bring it up because before we start the exercise program in this case, right, we're saying to ourselves, "Well, if I don't get up five days a week and work out then what's the point?" All brains do that, and I'm bringing this up on purpose so people can hear this.

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Your brain's going to want to talk you out of getting into the momentum of working out because it's going to say it's not enough. But the goal is one, to get started; and two, when you're running, you feel that benefit in the moment of like, "Oh, this is why I'm running. It feels good. I'm outside. I'm getting fresh air. I'm not at work." When you come back and you have the pride and joy of having accomplished that run, that's what it's about, right? That given moment. It's not five boxes checked but one or two. That's how you build momentum. It feels way better to run twice a week than not at all thinking you need to run five days a week.

Dustin: Yeah. I believe it all connects back to how I show up as a leader and how I show up as a husband and a dad. We talk about coaching. We talk about time management a lot. You've kind of helped me develop an end of day office shut down routine, which has been really helpful to put closure on my day. Then I can go home.

One of the things I struggle with though is shutting work off when I get home in my mind. I won't get on my laptop generally and do work at home, but I have two little kids and my wife. I want to be a really great dad and husband for them. When I'm home and thinking about work, that's something that we coach on quite a bit is how can I process that stuff when I'm here and schedule things so I know that I can take care of them at work and not have to think about them when I go home. So I'm making girth in that area, but it's just something that I think probably a lot of leaders struggle with.

Angela: Yeah. You know what? Just this morning I recorded a podcast called 'Why You Can't Sleep' because so many leaders are saying, "Here it is summer break." The kids aren't in school or school's not in session for most people at this point, but they're still thinking, dreaming, waking up, worrying about work. So I really have been diving into my own brain because my brain does the same thing. When I wake up, I'm thinking about what's happening.



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So it's really interesting to study our brain and notice all of those thoughts that are coming up. The thought that, "Five days a week isn't enough, or I don't have time for self-care. I just had a new baby. I don't want to take time out for myself. My wife needs me. My school needs me. My students, teachers, whatever." Really noticing what is the thought that's creating the worry, and the flip of that thought.

So the thought creates self-doubt and kind of worry, generalized anxiety, but the flip of that is trust. That's what I've come to realize. When you trust yourself, you trust the process, you trust other people, you trust that you will take care of business and get it done, and then you trust you have a process for handling all of it. Your anxiety starts to lower, right? So it's really about building trust in ourselves, in other people, and in the process.

I would call it a trust in something bigger than you whether you believe in God or the universe or higher power, however you describe that. That being that exists and it's bigger than us. When you can trust at that level, the worry starts to go down.

Dustin: Mm-hmm. I think that kind of ties into the other concept that we've been unpacking for me is this thought of this job being hard. It's a hard job. I guess I was always thinking that someday maybe this will be easy. Once I get this many years of experience and I've had to make this decision so many times that it will feel easier.

So we did some unpacking for me and kind of realized that throughout my career, going back to even college I've done experiences thinking that maybe this will feel easy for me. So, for example, when I was in college I studied abroad in a country in Chile in South America. It was really hard. I was homesick. It wasn't what I thought it would be. So came home, and then I decided I'm going to go to another country, Peru. Then I did a semester in Peru, and that was hard. Then graduated college and went to

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Spain and taught in Spain for a year, and that was hard. My first year teaching was hard. My first year as an AP was hard.

So just this idea of accepting that life is hard and school leadership and being an educator is hard, but that's okay. Almost thinking about the struggle as how can I learn from this instead of this is so hard? So that's been really helping me, and really helping me think about this in a sustainable way as a long term thing that I can be a principal and really thrive and help a lot of people along the way. Just that mindset of I'm learning from these difficult challenges. Not just okay this is hard and it's no fun.

Angela: Right. Yeah, like you've accepted that it's supposed to be hard. I think that's been the big shift. It's not the thought like this is so hard. When it creates the feeling of kind of self-pity a little bit, right, like, "Poor me. This is so hard." That doesn't generate actions that perpetuate things getting any easier, right? Because the brain is always looking for what parts of the job are so hard.

If we say, like you said, "This is hard and that's okay." I'm going to venture to even push and say, "We want to do hard things." Like when you think about life at the end of it, people don't want to go out and run marathons or build buildings or create Apple computers or lead schools. That's all really hard stuff, and only a percentage of the people do what you do. Like it's a very small percentage of the people who lead schools because it's hard. What we receive out of doing hard things is the pride and the accomplishment and the experience of learning how to do hard things.

So when Dustin and I were noticing like, "Oh, he has a pattern of saying this is so hard." We started looking back and it's like no, he's choosing to do hard things. He wants to do hard things. Being in a hard thing is how you evolve and how you grow, and that's how you become like the best version of yourself as a leader. Would you say that, Dustin?

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Dustin: Yeah, definitely. It was just like an ah-ha moment that you kind of helped me realize. Like I'm choosing to put myself in these "hard" positions and opportunities and experiences because that's how I find meaning and that's how I grow. So let's accept that it's hard and see how that mindset shift helps me show up as a leader. When I know that there's going to be hard stuff every day, and that's okay, like you said. That will just help my approach be different, and I think it will help me evolve more quickly and just have more fun too.

Angela: Yeah.

Dustin: Like I'm showing up, and it's going to be hard. We're going to get through it.

Angela: Right.

Dustin: Stuff comes up and that's part of the job of being a school leader. It's tough.

Angela: Yeah.

Dustin: But it's okay.

Angela: Yeah. And it's okay. I think that's the best way to say it. Let it be hard, right. Let it be hard because every time something feels hard, that's where the growth is. It's like building muscle, right? When we're lifting weights or we're running and we're trying to push ourselves to run longer or run faster, there is physical pain involved. Like there really is growth in that pain.

I think about you as a new dad, right. You and Mary having your second child. Parenting is hard. For all the parents out there listening, I think we

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can all put our thumbs up. Parenting is not an easy task, but we love it. So it's hard, and we love it. That's the same concept that I want school leaders to embrace. This is hard and I love it. I love it not because it always feels good to me, but because I'm growing. In return for that growth, you then contribute more to your school, to your teachers, to your kids at school.

Dustin: I just think that that's kind of a hard thing to process on your own without a coach or somebody who can really kind of guide you to that thinking. One of the things we did last week actually when we were talking about this concept is you were asking me questions about what would you do if you weren't a principal? I had a really hard time answering that question.

I was like, "Well, I really liked being a camp counselor. Maybe I'd like to be a camp director if I wasn't a principal." You know just answering that question. I was like well I don't know. A lot of the stuff about being a principal I really like. I really like the teamwork. I like working with kids and staff. So it was just like okay. Like even though this is hard, this is what I should be doing. This is where my skill set is. I could have a really fulfilled life doing this hard thing.

Angela: Yes.

Dustin: So to me like that's the exciting next level of work for me and for us, Angela, is just thinking about my lifestyle that I want to have as a leader. Not just talking through the situations that come up every week that are hard, but really thinking about my future and my leadership and just getting excited about those things. You helped me plan that and kind of see where I'm headed, and that that's the right decision for me. That's been so helpful.

Angela: Okay. That brings me to my last question, or one of my last questions. What do you, Dustin, really see as the long term benefit of applying this coaching work? Of applying these tools and strategies. What

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do you envision will be the end result for your life because you have these tools?

Dustin: Yeah, I think well in the short-term it's just helped me immensely to get through this really challenging year and grow so much in my leadership in just such a short amount of time. Honestly, in 14 months, I can see the growth that I've made as a leader and as a person as a result of the coaching. So if I project that five years down the line, I'm just excited for the transformation that I will continue to have, especially now that I have the tools and I'm learning how to apply them myself.

At some point when we're not coaching in five, ten years, or whenever it may be, I'll still be able to use these tools to help other people. To help staff, to help students identify their thinking. So I think there's just so many possibilities, and I think coaching allows me to dream big about my future and whether that be in the role of principal or something else. It just gives me the confidence to know like I can go for it, and I can be successful and really enjoy whatever I choose to do down the line.

Angela: Exactly. This is where I really want to drive home this concept of this ripple effect. Because you know when you think the thought, "This is hard," and you carry that thought with you for life, life will be hard. It will feel hard. You will drag your feet. You're going to procrastinate. You're going to avoid because you have the thought, "This is hard," and the little tagline behind that sentence is, "And it shouldn't be." Versus, "This is hard and it's okay. Or I'm willing to do hard things."

When you believe that sometimes life is hard, and it's supposed to be and that you're good with it and you're okay with and you're willing to do it. When you think about the way you show up and the things you're willing to experience in your life, meaning a career, parenting, travel, whatever it may be that you want in your life.

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Or let's look at it this way. People will tell me, "It's too hard to include self-care into my day. The job's too big. There's no time. I have kids at home. I have a million other things I have to do. I can't do self-care. It's too hard." They'll say that. But if you shift that into, "I'll find a way. I'll figure it out. Yes, it's hard, and I'm going to prioritize it." The entire experience of your life changes, right?

It's not just the school leadership position. It's who you become in the process and how you think and what you believe you are capable of receiving and contributing. And how that impacts your relationships with people, your relationships with time, your relationships with money, your relationships with yourself, your body, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. All of that transforms, and it evolves you into an entirely different person than you would be if you didn't have the tools.

Even that one belief like, "This is hard, and it's okay," is going to change what you say yes to in your life, right. Because so many principals will say, "I'm never going to be a superintendent." I said that's what I said about being a school leader. I was never going to be a principal, right. Like that looked too hard until I had the thought that maybe I can do it. If she can do it, I can do it. I can figure it out too. That changed everything, right? So imagine who you're going to become, Dustin, in the next—what, you're 34? Who you're going to become in the next 10/20/30 years of your life.

Dustin: Yeah, it's really exciting. Right now I just want to be the best principal, dad, and husband that I can be. So that's my mission and my goal right now. To any teacher leaders who are aspiring assistant principals or to any assistant principals who are aspiring principals, I hope that just hearing this conversation maybe inspired you or gave you some confidence to go for whatever your dreams are. Because for me that's been really helpful, Angela, is to hear some of the other clients, and just know that there are other folks going through the same thing. There are people out there who will help you, like Angela, and you can do hard things.

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Angela: Absolutely. That's such a great way to end. I want to just say one more thing about Dustin. Dustin is one of my A plus players. Yes, he did make the decision to invest in himself in time and money, but he showed up every single week on that call ready to go having done the work and was open to being vulnerable. It pays off. Like this work is hard. I would add coaching can be hard, and it's okay, and it works. It works 100% of the time.

The beauty of our relationship and our coaching relationship together is that that ebb and flow throughout the course of the year allows for times to be hard when we have to step back and maybe do a little less of the work. Then times when we really dive in, and times when we don't just do like the processing the emotion, but the times that we jump into the possibility and the vision and the leadership legacy that we're creating.

I'm going to share with the listeners out there. Dustin is one of a few elite members who are going to have the Empowered Principal Mastermind that I am launching this school year. It's only for those people who have been with me for at least one year's coaching time. We're going to start a mastermind for the Empowered Principal clients of mine so that we can take leadership to the 2.0 level. Really level up our empowerment, level up our conversations, level up the types of questions, and I'm going to say level up some fun. We're going to have a lot of fun.

So if you're interested in joining the Empowered Principal Mastermind, you first have to become an Empowered Principal one on one client so that you have access to the mastermind. So Dustin's going to be a part of that next year along with Wendy. You've heard from Wendy. And several other of the clients that you've heard from throughout the course of this year. So Dustin, are there any last words of wisdom or any last tips, strategies, just ah-ha moments that you would like to share with the listeners before we sign off?

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Dustin: I would just say for any leader, it's so important just to ask for help and to receive help. That's such a strength to be able to do that because you can't do it all on your own, I don't believe. It's so great to have that support. With Angela being my coach, it's just really accelerated my development. So thank you Angela. Good luck to all the school leaders out there.

Angela: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much. Thank you for your time and thank you for your willingness to coach and your commitment to coaching, and really your commitment not just to coaching but to your craft, to the art and science of school leadership. It's been such a pleasure to work with you. We have so much fun, and I can't wait for the mastermind to start. I look forward to that. We will talk very, very soon. Have a good one Dustin.

Dustin: Thanks Angela. Bye.

Angela: Bye.

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learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.