

Ep #193: How to NOT Be a Busy Principal



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 193.

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. Welcome to the podcast. So happy to have you. Welcome to the new school year. Here we are in September. I'm recording this at the beginning of August. So I know y'all back in August were getting all fired up for your new school year, planning your staff meetings, getting ready for your themes and your vision for the year, getting your offices all set up. I have loved watching everybody's beautiful offices pulling together. Now you are in September, and it's getting real up in here.

So one of the things I'm noticing on social media is the overwhelm. All of the things to do, the fast pace, all of the information, all of the to-do lists. You are responding by overworking, under-sleeping, under-resting. We're going to talk about that today. I'm going to talk about how to not be a busy principal, okay. I've actually created a video training on this same concept, but I decided to share it on the podcast. For those of you who don't have access to the video, you can learn it on the podcast. If you want more information, reach out to me directly and I can share the video link with you.

Okay so let's dive in. Let's talk about how to not be a busy principal. New school leaders this is especially important for you. Because when you're brand new whether you were brand new last year and you were dealing with COVID, and this feels kind of like your first year because you're back on campus or you're actually brand new this year.

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What my new clients are saying to me is, “Wow, number one, the pace is so different. The pace is so fast. It’s different than I’m used to. I have much less time than I had when I was a teacher. Things are going at a faster clip. I used to have much more time than I have.”

So you're comparing kind of where you were as a teacher to where you are now as a school leader, and it feels different. It feels like a lot of things are coming at you much more quickly, and there's more information. You have lots of paperwork coming your way, lots more emails, lots of people wanting to meet with you and talk with you and communicate with you and pick your brain on things. You have a lot more coming at you.

I just want to say first of all, let’s just go with the assumption that yes, it’s true. It’s true the pace is faster. It’s true that there's more to do. That is upping your responsibility, up leveling yourself as a school leader. Now the mental and emotional work that you need to do and that you're going to do throughout the course of the school year is to build and expand and evolve your self-concept of who you are as a leader, what you're capable of handling, what pace you're capable of working, and how efficient and effective you can be as a school leader. Because there is a lot to do, and the pace goes very quickly.

So when you're thinking that things are going really fast and there’s too much to do and not enough time, what's happening inside your mind are a bunch of thoughts. There are a bunch of thoughts firing off in your brain that are telling you things like, “I’m not sure I can handle this. I’m afraid I’m going to forget something. I don’t want to miss it. I don’t want it to slip off my plate or overlook it. I’m afraid I’m going to do this wrong. I don’t want to mess up.” Right?

We are thinking about our concept of who we are. We’re looking at ourselves of now I’m the principal. Now I’m the leader. I need to be more

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responsible. It's my job to take care of fill in the blank, X, Y, Z. This needs to get done now. I'm the person that has to do it. People are relying on me as the leader. I need to do this for other people. I want to make a good first impression. I want other people to like me and the work that I'm doing. All of that.

When you're spinning out with these thoughts that it's your job to do all of the things. It's your responsibility. You have to take care of them. They've all got to get done right now or the world's going to crumble, the school's going to crumble, people are going to be mad at you. When you think all of these thoughts, you're going to have an emotional reaction to them. You're going to feel lots of overwhelm. You're going to feel very confused at things being new and fast. You're going to feel unfocused.

You're going to be bouncing around in your mind from one thing to the next, and your brain's going to loop and think about things over and over and over again. You're going to feel very inundated. You're going to feel very rushed. You feel this urgency to rush to do lots of things, to get lots of things done.

You're going to feel very defeated at times because you're not going to feel like you're getting enough done. You're going to tell yourself I should be getting more done. I need to be getting more done. I'm not getting as much done as I want to be getting done. When you're feeling this way, lots of overwhelm, lots of confusion, lots of unfocused energy, lots of rushing, lots of urgency. That emotional state is going to directly impact the decisions you make and the actions you take.

When you're feeling all of this hyper energy and you're feeling panicked and you're feeling overwhelmed, you react to that by spinning out. You kind of think about all the things. You write them down. You plan. You prepare, but you don't really do the work of getting the tasks done but you spin out in

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a lot of planning either in your brain or on the paper. You rush around. You go from one thing to the next.

You overschedule yourself so that you're running, running, running. You end up overworking. You work really long hours. You get up early. You work late. You work in the night. You work until you fall asleep. You wake up thinking about work. It consumes you. You over plan, and eventually you complain, or you blame, or you get frustrated, right. The result of all of those actions, you end up half finishing things. You get a very messy result because you're trying to rush through and do so much when you're so tired.

You're exhausted. You're burned out. You're not present for yourself. You don't put exercise into your workday plan. You don't eat healthy foods. You snack on sodas and chips or whatever's convenient and available to your hands, right? You're just like grabbing and going. Your anxiety raises. You get caught in the overwhelm cycle. You get really frustrated.

When you're frustrated, the result of feeling this way and acting this way is that you're giving control of your time to the external circumstances that are coming your way. You are not taking ownership and responsibility of your time. You're not owning your time, managing your time, budgeting your time. Your time is one of your most valuable resources. You've got your brain, you've got your money, and you've got your time.

So you budget your money, right. You plan accordingly. You budget it, you plan it, you spend it. You decide on the value of what you're going to buy. Is it valuable? Do I want to spend my money on this? Do I like my reason for spending my money? Do I want to spend my money on this? You budget so much money. "I'm only willing to spend this amount of money on a car. This amount of money on a house. This amount of money on clothing or vacations or whatever. Groceries. All of it. You budget your money. You plan. The same is true for time.

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You budget it just as you would other resources in your life. You budget and allocate certain amount of funds at school, certain amount of human resources. How many teachers do we need? How many students do we have? How many paraprofessionals do I need? It's all math. Time is the same thing.

So when you're not budgeting your time and managing it, you're creating really messy inconsistent results. So what is creating all this overwhelm? What is the problem or problems behind this kind of blurry overwhelming time management problem?

So the first problem, people believe that they're busy and they tell themselves the story. "I'm so busy. There's so much to do. There's never enough time. I can't keep up. I can't handle it all. I can't manage it." When you're telling that story over and over again, it's creating overwhelm. When we break down what's happening, here are some of the problems that I have seen with my clients.

Number one, they keep their to-do list in their brain. They have a mental to do list that's always turned on. It's always running at high capacity speed. It never has permission to shut off. It's like a computer who's got a very big program running in the background consuming all the energy and power, slowing down the computer so that other tasks are taking forever. Even though you're not using that program, you haven't shut it down. So it keeps consuming the energy.

This is what's happening inside your brain. When you have your to-do list inside of your brain, it has nowhere to turn the off switch off. You cannot turn off your brain. Because it has to keep the lights on. It has to keep the to-do list running. So when we have the mental to do list and all of this is coming at us. We go to a meeting, things to do. We're walking through campus, somebody stops us, things to do. Things to remember. The brain

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is freaked out that it's going to forget something. So it just keeps playing it over and over again.

Why do we do this? We do this because kind of ironically, we don't think we have the time to slow ourselves down, to stop for a minute, and to write it all down. We also avoid writing the to-do list because we're afraid everything is going to pour out, and it's going to be 200 pages long. You're going to be completely overwhelmed by the list.

You also avoid this mental to do list because we don't want to take the time to schedule it in. We don't want to have to sit down and schedule time in to manage our time. We think it's boring. We think we'll just juggle it in our mind. It will just be faster to remember it. No. That doesn't work. What it does is perpetuate your anxiety, your stress, and your overwhelm because it's trying so hard just to keep ahold of that list.

Why is this a problem? Why is a mental to do list a problem? The brain cannot shut off. It's always on. This is why you can't sleep at night. It's why you can't be present with your family. It's why you feel that like no matter what you're doing or where you're at, and I'm guilty of this too you guys. This is a common human response to having tasks and projects that we want to get done. We always feel that little pang of anxiety or unfocus that comes from thinking, "I've got to do this, this, and this. Oh wait. I forgot about that."

So what is the solution to all this mental chaos? It's very simple. You just write it down onto paper. You get it all out. You put down professional tasks, professional goals, professional responsibilities. All of the things you want to do for work, and all of the things you do personally. When I mean all, I mean everything. I'm talking about sleep, exercise, showering, preparing your lunch, personal calls and errands, driving to work, professional tasks, meetings, all of it.

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Everything that you spend any minute doing, you want to write it down. You want to drain your brain of this list. Give it a break from having to hold tight and remember everything. Let it all out onto the paper. If more comes up, put it down. As things come up through the day, write it down. You want to keep writing everything until your brain... You'll have this moment where you feel clear. You're like, "Okay. I think that's it. That's all I've got." Keep doing that. Something might come up later in the day. That's okay. Keep writing it down.

So step one is to not keep a mental to do list. It's to keep a pencil and paper to do list. Now when you do that, you'll notice that just the act of looking at the list will generate another wave of kind of panic because you'll physically see on your list all the things you have to do. Your brain's going to be like, "Whoa, I got to get through this. I've got to get to work and get busy." You will want to jump into action. You've got to hold the phone. Look at the list, take it all in.

A lot of people stop. A lot of people write paper to-do lists, and then they stop there. Then the list is just sitting there staring at them, and it's perpetual. You just keep adding to the list, and then you kind of skip through and do the ones you want or the ones that have to get done. Then there's things that sit on the list forever and they don't really get done. Okay? That's problem number two.

Problem number two is we might dump everything out and put it on a to do list, but then we just leave it at that. We leave it unorganized, unprioritized, and it doesn't really add much value. Because we're not looking at each item and making a conscious intentional decision about what that task is, why we want to do it, the result of having completed it, how we'll feel while we're doing it and when it's completed, and if it is the priority. So problem number two is not prioritizing our calendar.

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So after we brain drain all of the items, we don't want to prioritize. Now why do we not prioritize? We don't want to have to make decisions and choose one task over another. We want to think that everything's equally important. They all need to get done. We are the ones that have to do them because it's our list or it's our task. We were asked to do it. So we take personal responsibility for every single thing on that list. Not to mention we don't think we have the time to prioritize the list, let alone even write it down.

So our brain's going to tell you, "Oh, I don't have time to write a list. I just keep it in my mind." Well once you write it down, you're going to feel a little bit of relief. Then you're also going to panic because you're going to see there's 10 things you've got to get done. You're going to think all of them are equal and have to get done instead of getting really honest with yourself and telling yourself the truth.

So it's a problem to not prioritize because your brain then has to look through the list and decide for itself what's important, why it's important, what's urgent, what's not urgent. It's going to naturally choose the things that feel the easiest. The things that are the most rewarding or the most fun. Your brain is never going to actively choose the task that is not urgent but highly important or that's really hard that requires a lot of concentration and energy and mental grit. It's not going to pick those things.

So when you don't tell your brain what to prioritize and why to do it, it's always going to push you to do the easy things and it's going to push the hard stuff into the future. It would rather kind of do the tasks... I'm dog sitting right now and she's having a dream or something. Did you hear her? Maybe not. Anyway. So the brain is going to push the hard tasks out into the future, procrastinate basically or indefinitely put the task into the future, in order to take care of the little fire that's in front of you right now. The urgency that's here right now. Oh that email I've got to get to. Oh that phone call I have to make. Oh that person I wanted to ask a question.

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So what is the solution to not prioritizing? You've got to get really honest with yourself and tell yourself the truth. Here are the priorities. If I absolutely 100% had to prioritize, what would it be and why? You have to prioritize the list, no questions asked. Why are you prioritizing it that way? What's the result of having prioritized it this way? Do you like that reason for X, Y, and Z being at the top? How is it going to feel having those tasks completed? What outcome does it provide? Does it give you the result you want? Is it in alignment with your goals? So that's how you prioritize.

Then you come up to a third problem. So we've got the to do list. We've prioritized it. Then we go, "Okay. One, two, three, four, five." And we just kind of go off the to do list. What we don't do is actually transfer that to-do list onto our physical calendar. Whether you have a paper calendar or you have a Google calendar or some online calendar you use, whatever system you use for calendaring. Everything on the priority list has to go onto the calendar.

Why don't we calendar? Because it's boring and it's time consuming. It feels very unnecessary because we've got our list here. We've got it prioritized. Why don't we just go off the list? No, we can't do that. This is a problem because it doesn't make us acknowledge the time that it takes for every single thing we do, every routine action we take. The number of hours we sleep, how much time it takes us to get ready in the morning, how long our commute is, how much time we spend on social media, how much time we're on the phone with people, how much time we're walking our campus, how much time we're in meetings.

We need to get really honest with ourselves about how we're spending our time. Calendaring it gives us a very clear perspective. Oh, this is why I don't feel like I have a lot of time in the day. I'm spending an hour in the mornings and an hour in the evenings commuting to work. How can I best utilize that time while I'm in the car?

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When we get true with ourselves and we acknowledge what's going on, then we can see how we're spending our time. Do we like the reasons for that? The reason we avoid calendaring is because it requires us to put it on the calendar, think about how much time it's going to take, give ourselves that amount of time only, and then have to honor that.

So the solution to this is learning how to take that prioritization list, put it on the calendar, give every task a date, a time, and a duration based on the priority. So priority number one, you look at your calendar. When's the best time to do that? What's the deadline? Then before the deadline give it a date, a time, and a duration on your calendar. The shorter the time that you provide it the better because it pushes you to push out high quality work in a short amount of time.

I want you to be willing to go for the B+ work. So do the job, get it done, and move on. Don't perfect it. Don't edit. Don't rewrite, revise, run it by 10 people. Let's say you're writing your newsletter. Get it on the calendar, give yourself 30 minutes, write it, and then send it to your secretary so she can send it out.

Decide ahead of time when you're going to leave for work, when you're going to leave work, when you're going to go to work, how much time you're going to work per day, per week. How much time you're going to give to routine tasks, how much time you're going to give to your goals, dreams, visions at work, your personal time, your exercise, all of it. You've got to challenge yourself to do things that help you feel balanced, help you accomplish professional goals and personal goals. Things that help you feel like you're being present both at work and at home.

One fun thing I love to do is to challenge myself. Like how much time do I think this podcast is going to take me? Oh I used to spend an entire day writing a podcast, rerecording five or six times. Now what I do, I started

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challenging that. Like can I get it done in half a day? Can I get it done in two hours? Now I give myself 60 minutes to write, 30 minutes to record. What's happened is I've become so practiced at pushing myself to see how fast I can create amazing content. I'm now down to sometimes 30 minutes to write it, 30 minutes to record it. Boom. Done.

I want you to play with yourself. Have fun with this. Practice giving yourself less and less time to get your work done, and notice how much faster you become. You will create so much time for yourself. You won't have to work all night, all weekend. You will be done by 4 or 5 p.m. You can go home, be with your family, have fun, get your exercise, walks, yoga, play with the dog, whatever it is you need and have a life outside of school.

Now the last problem you're going to run into. You're going to write the to do list, put it on the paper. You're going to prioritize it, put it on your calendar. The next problem you're going to encounter is that you're not going to honor the calendar. What's going to happen is Tuesday at 10:00, you're supposed to be writing the school board report. You don't want to do it. You don't feel like it. Something else has popped up. Your brain's going to be very clever at telling you how not to do this task, right. It doesn't want to think. It doesn't want to work. It doesn't want to have to create and put out energy and content basically.

So your brain will be very clever at telling you all of the reasons why you shouldn't do that task, but this is a problem. Why is it a problem? Because you don't get the work done that you want to get done. Every time you allow yourself not to do what you said you were going to do, you erode your trust in yourself. You'll stop believing in yourself. You'll stop believing that what you say you're going to do is actually what you're going to do.

Your brain will not trust that you are going to honor the things that you said you're going to get done. Then you're going to be chasing your tail always

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feeling like you don't have enough time, there's more to do, you're not getting the things done that you want.

This dog is snoring. It's so cute. I can't even stand it right now. Just right before the podcast, she was totally bothering me to go on a W-A-L-K. I don't want to say it out loud or she'll hear me. Now she's napping. It's hilarious. Anyways, I digress. Let me get back to it.

It is a problem to not honor the calendar because you erode your trust in yourself. Then you'll kind of like continue to buy into the story of why you don't need to do what you're doing. Then you're going to be disappointed with yourself. You're going to be frustrated with yourself. You weaken your ability to honor your plan.

I want to also say that I've watched myself do this where I love to plan. Planning feels amazing. When you're planning out your calendar for the week, it feels fun to do it all. The hard work comes in when you get to that moment, and you have to do the task you don't want to do. That moment is where you have to execute even when you don't feel like it or you don't want to.

This is where coaching comes into play. The solution to not honoring your calendar is to study your thoughts. To notice the tasks that you're most likely to avoid and ask yourself why. What don't I like? Why am I avoiding them? What are the excuses I'm telling myself? When you don't honor something on your calendar, you want to take note of that.

You don't want to beat yourself up, give yourself a hard time, criticize, and judge yourself. You want to coach yourself. You want to understand what it is your brain is doing, the excuses that your brain is offering to you so that you can identify the obstacles that are coming up, why it's hard to honor the calendar, and then make a plan to combat those obstacles.

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That is what coaching will do. Coaching will help you tackle the obstacles. That is what I offer. This is how I help clients, school leaders like yourself, become much more effective and much more efficient in how they spend their time, how they spend their money, how they spend their energy. How they build relationships, how they create positive healthy climates and cultures with their school, how they get better test scores.

This is the work. You have to learn how to coach your brain to study your thoughts to do something even when you don't feel like it. That is not an easy thing to do, and that is how I help clients be successful. They learn how to feel like not doing something and do it anyways. They learn how to honor their calendar. They learn how to plan and prioritize their work week ahead of time. They have strategies for doing the work when they don't feel like it. They can allow themselves not to want to do something and to do it anyways.

You teach yourself that skill of resiliency that comes from the future goal, the future feeling you will feel when you get to feel accomplished, when you get to take the weekend off with no guilt. When you get to go on vacation knowing you know how to do your job in the time that you allotted, and you know how to take vacation without having to worry about work the entire time.

This has definitely been a practice for me. I have been really studying myself. I see where I fall. I see where I fail. I dust myself off. I study it. I try it again. Definitely not perfect at it, but what I will tell you is that this is the process for becoming a principal who no longer has to tell the story of how busy you are, how much you have to do. You don't have enough time. You get to drop that story, be fully present when you're at work, be fully present when you're at home, and have a fully balanced wonderfully fulfilling career and life.

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Reach out to me when you're already. I know this is one of the most important skills you can learn as a new school leader. Tackling how not to be busy for the school year is going to help you get in flow and enjoy your year so much more. So reach out. Decide to sign up for coaching. Do what it takes to make the finances work. Put this on your calendar. Let's do this. Let's do the work. Let's get you creating much more time for yourself this school year. Have an amazing week, and I will talk to you next week. Take care. Bye.

If this podcast resonates with you, you have to sign up for the Empowered Principal coaching program. It's my exclusive one to one coaching and mentorship program for school leaders who believe in possibility. This program is designed for principals who are hungry for the fastest transformation in the industry. If you want to create the best connections, impact, and legacy for yourself and your school, the Empowered Principal program was designed for you. Join me at angelakellycoaching.com/work-dash-with-me to learn more. I'd love to support you in becoming an empowered school leader.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.