

## Ep #195: How to Be New



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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## Ep #195: How to Be New

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 195.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well hello my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. How are you? How are you doing? How are you feeling? I want to know. You have to reach out and let me know. I'm thinking about you. All right. I'm going to dive right in today. I am recording this on a Friday afternoon. The only reason I'm working on a Friday afternoon, typically I do not, but I am preparing to head back to my home state of Iowa where I am going to spend two full weeks with my family. I am so excited.

So I am batching all of my podcast work, all of my marketing and copy work, all of my work for my clients. I am going to be taking their calls, but I will be working at a minimum for the first two weeks of September so I can enjoy my family. I hope that the weather is wonderful. I can't wait to hug them. It's been almost two years since I've seen my family, and I'm really looking forward to it. So here I am Friday afternoon. Let's dive in.

Okay. The topic of today's podcast is how to be new. How to be new as a school leader specifically. I just recorded a webinar on this concept, and I've been thinking a lot about adult resistance to being new. Adults do not like to be new. We don't like it. It's uncomfortable, right? We don't like to be new. We don't like to be the new person at the party. We don't like to be the new employee at the school. We don't like to be the new kid in class. We don't like to be the new driver on the street. We don't like to be the new person at the dance or the party.

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We don't like to be new. It's not comfortable. It feels awkward. It feels clumsy. We feel embarrassed. We have lots of feelings that don't feel good that we associate with being new. So when we think about being new at something—Whether we're new at running for the first time or new at going to the gym. Something physical we're trying to learn how to do. Or we're trying to learn a new language, or we're trying to learn a new computer program or software platform. We're trying to learn how to do Zoom or learn how to remote teach, right.

We have a lot of things that we are new at doing, and we don't like it because learning is cumbersome. It feels sticky and hard. It feels like it's going to take forever. So the brain resists being new or putting you into new situations or learning new things because it doesn't like the way that being new feels. We don't like the thoughts that people are looking at us and judging us or criticizing us because we're new. Because we don't know what we're doing. We don't have the answers, right?

We want people to think that we're capable, that we fit in. That we know what we're doing. That we have answers. That we're smart. That we're prepared to lead our schools. Because of this, we don't like to admit that we don't know things. We want to be comfortable and knowledgeable and informed so that we can feel the emotions of confidence and powerful and in control.

When we're new as a school leader, it feels very hard to know what to do. To know how to prioritize, to know how to manage our time, to know how to implement and use our resources. It feels like everything is of equal importance. Everything matters. Everything needs equal time and attention, and it all needs to get done right now. Everything feels like a priority.

So as a new leader, we're sitting here trying to make a good impression. We're running around our campuses. We're saying yes and trying to solve

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every problem and put out every fire. By the end of the day, you get into your office and you're like, "What just happened with my time? What just happened with this day? What did I actually accomplish?"

Then when you walk into the office and you see the piles of paper and the 200 emails and all of the things that you haven't addressed yet that you had planned on, but you were putting out fires, then you start to think things like I'm not doing this right. I can't get a handle on things. I need to be on top of things. I need to work faster. I need to be more efficient. I need to figure out systems. Then you feel bad about that.

So we compound the being new effect by adding layers of "we should". Like we should know what to do. We should have this under control. We should be on top of things. We should know what we're doing. We should have the answers. All of that should-ing on yourself, that just compounds the distaste that the brain has for being new.

So why this is a problem is that we're not taught how to be new. We don't have the skillset. We don't have the experience of being new. Well, we have the experience of being new, but we don't capitalize on it. We don't notice all the times we've been new, and then learned from that experience because we're resisting it. Every time we're new at something, we don't like being new and we want to rush through the process. So we don't have to feel new anymore.

So this is a problem because we resist being new. We're not taught how to be new. We don't have a process for being new, and we don't feel like we have permission to be new. Permission from ourselves to be new. Permission from others to be new. We need to get it right the first time. We need to hurry up and learn. We need to hurry up and figure it out.

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So when we haven't done something before and we're clumsily and cumbersomely trying to figure it all out, we think something's wrong with us because we don't have permission to be new, to fail, to get it wrong, to make mistakes, to not have the answers, to have no idea what somebody else is talking about.

So what happens is we judge ourselves. We doubt. We question ourselves. We question our decisions. We question our answers. We triple read our emails. We ask people outside of us to give us feedback and answers. We work in fear all day long wondering if we're doing it wrong or we're doing the right thing or we're making the right decision. We worry about the mistakes we're making. We worry about getting fired. We think it's going to result in us having this traumatic event where if we're new and we don't figure it out as fast as possible, something terrible is going to happen.

So how we try to solve this is that we're new and we're avoiding feeling embarrassed or unclear or overwhelmed, we pretend we know more than we do. We kind of act like, "Oh I know that. I knew that. I've got that figured out." It's called fake it until you make it. Worst advice ever. I've been saying this on the podcast for years. I can't tell you enough how fake it until you make it does not make you feel better.

Now think about this. When you are out on your campus and you are pretending to feel confident, to know what you're doing, to be the boss, right, but you don't really feel that inside, there's that incongruence. You know the truth of what you're thinking and feeling. Even if on the outside you feel like you look pulled together and that other people are doing it all right, on the inside you know. You're thinking to yourself, "I really don't know what I'm doing. I'm barely above water. I don't know how I'm going to keep this up. This is a façade." You feel the fakeness, right, within you, which makes you feel like a fraud. That's when we get into feeling constantly in doubt and self-deprecation.

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Another way we try to solve this problem by being new is we overwork. We think that the solution to not being new anymore is overworking. Let's just work super hard until we don't feel new anymore, until we've got things under control. Until I've got it figured out and I have the answers, and I got my email in control and I have my paperwork all figured out and I'm able to put out all the fires. We just keep overworking.

What happens is, you know what happens with overworking. Burnout. So we know that's not the solution, even though we still keep doing it. We also shift our focus and priorities. So when things feel hard and they're new, and our brain is struggling to feel like a sense of control, feel a sense of empowerment, we shift gears. So when something starts to get hard, we go work on something else.

When we feel overwhelmed when we walk into our office and there's a ton of paperwork we haven't organized or there's 200 emails sitting in your inbox. You're like, "Ugh that feels terrible. I'm going to go back out to the playground and connect with kids. I'm building relationships." You're going to talk yourself into shifting your priorities and your focus based on what feels good and what doesn't. You're going to delay decisions.

When you think you should know but you don't know, you're going to procrastinate decisions or you're going to change your mind every time somebody has feedback about a decision. You'll second guess yourself. And you'll put your staff into a spin cycle because you're constantly either delaying decisions that they need to know about, or you make those decisions. Then somebody says something and you're like, "Oh, I'll change it."

Finally we look outside of ourselves for all of the answers and the solutions. We think that we don't know and we're new and we should know. So we're going to go ask somebody else their opinion, their thoughts, their ideas.

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Then integrate it into ourselves so that we can feel like we aren't new. We hide in our office. We play it safe. We do all of these little tricks to try and not feel the discomfort of being new, but this doesn't work. You guys know this. Think about this.

What's kind of ironic is we end up creating more new. Here's how. The more we avoid the process of being new, the longer we feel new because we're not owning that newness. We're not taking steps to become familiar and more comfortable as a leader in a systematic patient kind of way, right. So what we do is we try to rush through the process of being new by either overworking or reaching out and asking all the people or hiding and avoiding completely all together.

In that approach, we're actually extending the amount of time that we feel new and that we don't know what we're doing. Because we believe that other people know what they're doing, but not me. Other people have the solutions, but not you. You feel like other people know how to make decisions, but not you.

You go outside of yourself instead of building up your capacity to be a leader, to step into those shoes, to up level your self-concept of who you and who you're becoming as a leader, and letting yourself get in the new and have it be messy and get it wrong and do it with some enthusiasm and fun. I feel like you're kind of in the background, right. You're treading water and trying to stay as lowkey as possible, kind of off the grid, right. Under the radar.

Here's the truth. People know that you're new. It's no secret. If you're a brand new school leader or this is your first year on a certain campus, people know that you're new. It's like the new student hiding back in the corner. Everybody knows that kid is new. There's no secret. Or if he comes

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in and pretends that he's been there his whole life, people know that's not true.

So what happens is with your staff when you're faking it 'til you make it or you're pretending to know more than you do or you are spinning out on the fact that you're new, it comes across as ingenuine and untrustworthy. People don't want you to tell them you know when you don't. They don't want that. They want you to say, "Hey, I actually don't know. I've been on the campus for five days. Let me figure that out. That's a great question."

Another reason why this doesn't work is that we actually end up procrastinating our decisions longer and longer and longer because we're spending so much time looking for the answers. We train ourselves to believe that the answer is outside of us. In that scary and that search in the solutions outside of us, we burn ourselves out and we're exhausted. We definitely are not having any fun in the process.

So what I see a lot of new school leaders doing is they're just holding their breath and running like mad to the finish like to get to the end of that school year so they can go into the new school year thinking, "Now I'm not new. Now I get it. Now I have a year under my belt." Those thoughts are what help second year leaders feel better than they did the first year.

What I want to suggest is we shift the thinking about being new. We normalize being new. We embrace being new. Because what happens when we resist it and we don't want to be new and we try not to be new, or we try to rush the process of being new, we create some unintended results.

These are just results that we didn't mean to create but that didn't happen. We lose trust with staff. We lack trust with ourselves. We don't own the truth of what we know and what we don't. So we actually confuse ourselves



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in what we do know and what we don't. We don't feel open to learning because we try to hide the fact that we don't know. So you're actually learning less quickly.

You stay in the space of being new for a much longer time. You tend to overwork, and then you resent the position. You think it's the work that's the problem, the position that's the problem. You blame school leadership as the reason why you're so miserable. In the meantime, we feel completely miserable and overwhelmed. The whole year is just one big sob story. It's miserable to be new and not want to be new and hate being new. It feels 10 times worse to not want to be new when you're new than to be new and let yourself be new.

The saddest result that I see this create is that people get so discouraged because they're new and they don't want to be new, and they don't like the way that they feel when they're new. They don't think they should be new, or they don't feel they have permission to be new from their bosses or whomever, themselves, they think to themselves they're not cut out to be a school leader. So they quit.

This is so prevalent in our industry. One in three school leaders leave the position they're in within the first three years. 50% of school leaders quit the job, they go to do other jobs They go back into teaching, or they go to the district level, or they leave education altogether within five years. We have a huge turnover problem as school leaders. I believe part of the problem is that we're not embracing being new. So let's talk about how to change that. Let's fix this.

Here's the solution I offer. It's simple. Three simple steps. You can do this. Number one, allow yourself to be new. Pretty easy, right. Sounds easy. It is easy. I'm going to show you how. You just allow yourself to be new. Today

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right now give yourself permission to be new. Everybody is new at something.

Everybody who's ever been on the planet has been new at something. Whether you're new at losing weight, you're new at learning a sport, you're new at learning how to drive, you're new at your first job. You're new as a married couple or in a relationship. Everything you've always been new. There's some things we don't think anything about that being new. Other things we put so much pressure on ourselves to not be new. So we know how to do new. We just have to give ourselves permission and allow ourselves the time and space and patience to be new.

Step two, embrace. Don't make being new a problem. It is not a problem to be new. It's not something to hide or mask or fake that you're not. We want to shift our thinking around why being new is a benefit, how it is important, why it is better than being a veteran.

There are some benefits that outweigh knowing everything. When you come in with fresh ideas and you're young or you're inexperienced. A lot of my clients will say, "I'm so new. I'm so inexperienced. I don't really have any value to add, or I don't know any solutions." No, you're the perfect person. The person who's had eyes on the problem for years and years and years. They can't see outside the box. Their brain tends to go back to the same ways of thinking and solving problems that they've been doing all along. They think they just know. This is just how it's always done. We've always done it this way. This is the standard. This is the pattern.

You can come in, and you can be like, "Wait a minute." You have so much value to offer. So don't make being new a problem. It's actually a gift, and it's an opportunity that you only get once every time you try something new. You get one shot at being new every time you try something new. So you embrace it, right.

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Then step three you're going to evolve your self-concept. What I mean by that is you have made a huge leap going from a teaching position into a leader position. You're going to have to spend some time deciding and thinking about who you're becoming in the process. So let's go back really quickly. I want to tell you a little bit more about each of these.

So step one, allow yourself to be new. The key to that is really processing emotion. Allowing yourself to process the emotion of feeling awkward or feeling clumsy or feeling out of place or feeling like nobody knows you. That feeling where you're at the party and you don't know anybody, and you feel like you're standing out like a sore thumb. You've got to let yourself feel that.

Sometimes you're going to feel rejected. Sometimes you're going to feel incompetent. Those feelings are only temporary. They're there because your brain is learning and growing, and it doesn't like that. So just learn how to process the emotion. Allow yourself. Just say like, "Okay, yeah. I'm feeling it."

Number two, you want to embrace it by not making being new a problem. Here's how you do that. You simply look for all the ways you've been new before. Here's what I did. This is one of my favorite stories about myself. I'm so proud about the fact that I approach being new this way. I didn't realize I was doing it at the time. I got the feedback from my superintendent and my peers throughout the first couple of years.

So when I became a school leader, I was almost so shocked that I got the position and so excited to be in the room with these other amazing principals. I was so enamored by them. I had so much admiration for my fellow principals and district leaders that I couldn't believe that I had leveled up into being one of them, into being in that room.

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So when I went into a district leadership meeting, I was so enthusiastic. I was so full of energy and excitement. I was just like, "I'm totally new. I have no idea what I'm doing. Tell me everything. I want to learn. I'm so excited." It felt like a firehose, right. All this new information. I'm like whoa. I would have to slow down on purpose and process what all of that meant. Then I would figure some of it out. I would not figure some of it out. I had no idea what some of it meant. Then I would go back again. Tell me more about this. I don't understand that. I'm asking a million questions. Yes, I know.

They would eat that up. They ate up my enthusiasm. They called me Miss. Sunshine. Little Miss. Sunshine's coming in because I just was explosive in my embracing being new. I loved being new. I wanted to ask all the questions. I wasn't embarrassed about it. I thought to myself like I've done hard things before. I've been new many, many times. I know how to do this. So I embraced it.

Yeah, sometimes I felt embarrassed. Sometimes I could feel the flush in my face when I'm like I have no idea what they're talking about. I didn't want to raise my hand, or I didn't want to speak out. I was like, "No, ask the question. It's better to know now than later." I remember being a few years in. We got a new CBO, chief business officer, and he was working with each of the principals on budgets.

I think I was like in my third year, fourth year, something crazy. I sat down. I said, "Robert, I have no idea how to do this budget. I've been kind of letting my secretary do it because I just didn't understand it. No one has sat me down to explain it. Will you please walk me through?" He was so grateful that I was willing to admit that I didn't know. He was awesome. He showed me everything and explained it so simple and easy for me. Made the spreadsheets, color coded them for me, so it was a no brainer. I was so grateful, and he was so grateful that I wanted to know.

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So every time you let yourself be new, you are becoming the principal who's no longer new because you're asking the question. You're diving right in. You're what I call HOW. Honest, open, and willing to learn all the new things. You just embrace yourself being new.

You give yourself so much grace for when you mess up. You're like, "Oopsies. Messed up. Let me try that again." Or if it's a serious issue, you take it seriously. You're like, "I'm really sorry. I'm learning as I go. I will take note of this and make sure that I adjust my approach." You can be serious on these heavier topics, and you can have some levity on the lighter stuff. You can play around with that a little bit.

The results of embracing being new, letting yourself be new, having fun with it is that you learn faster. The faster you learn, the sooner you don't feel the awkwardness of being new. All of a sudden you're like, "Hey, I kind of know what's going on here. I get this part. I've done this before. I remember hearing this before again. Let me clarify that one thing." Right? You start to not feel new. Then you feel more courageous to get out there and do more new things. People begin to trust you. They see the authenticity. They see the vulnerability that you're exposing by being new, and they love that. They relate to you. Your staff will relate to you.

One of the teachers in my staff who was most critical of me. She was a skeptic I would call her. She didn't not like me. She just was skeptical of my abilities or whatever. I remember telling this very authentic story about a parent interaction I had, and how upset I was. I felt new, and I didn't handle it the way I would have in hindsight. I was sharing that in real time with them. My vulnerability and authenticity in that moment led this teacher to come up to me and say like, "I really respect that you shared that with us. Most leaders wouldn't do that."

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When you share your newness, you embrace it, you let people see you being new, people are actually more willing to connect with you. Everyone's been new, like I said. They know how it feels. When you let people see you being new, they respect that, and they feel it for you.

So finally what's the lifetime value of being new? I love this question so much. So I call it LTV. Whenever I'm doing something in my business or with my clients, before we jump into action, we want to understand the benefit of what we're doing. The reason behind it, but not just that, the lifetime value of the work.

So what is the lifetime value of allowing yourself to be new, to embrace being new, to building up your self-concept of who you are and who you're becoming? You have stronger relationships with the people you lead. When you have stronger relationships, your leadership influence and impact is much higher. This results in a more enriched leadership legacy over the course of your career and lifetime. You're able to implement your vision with precision because you are always being new. You're always trying to figure things out. You're always willing to be wrong, to mess it up, to try again.

When you're in this process of being new, you evolve who you are as a leader and as a human. You can apply being new to anything, personal or professional. You transform yourself and you transform your belief and what you can accomplish. This results, over the lifetime of your career, more success for students, more success for teachers, and more success for your school community, and the greater impact you have on education at large.

So the ripple effect, the lifetime value of being new has endless bounds. Higher quality professional experience and impact on your part. Think about the difference between letting yourself be new and having some fun

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with it versus resisting it every time. You're not going to advance yourself. You're not going to want to be in a new job. You're not going to want to try new things if you hate being new.

The more you're willing to be new, the higher quality of experience that you have in life, that you have in your career. That creates more impact. You become much more effective and efficient in your time. You learn to trust yourself and value your own opinion, and ultimately it helps you feel more safe and confident and assured and proud of who you are. Even when you're new and you're learning because you know you've got your own back. You know how to be new. You're embracing it. You're loving it. You're living it. You're letting yourself feel the burn of being new. It's a beautiful thing.

Being new is one of the most advantageous positions you can be in. You get to ask the questions. You get to say, "Hey, I don't know. I'm new around here." Use being new as a leverage, as an advantage. Think of all the reasons why being new is better. How it's going to help you. Why it's innovative and refreshing. How you can use it to connect with other people who are new, your new teachers. People who've changed grade levels. Kids who are coming in who are new, families who are coming in who are new. You can use this tool of being new in so many beautiful ways.

Have a wonderful new school year. Keep me posted on how it's going. I love you guys so much. Have an amazing week. Talk to you next week. Take care. Bye.

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