

Ep #204: Culture of Resilience



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 204.

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 and happy Tuesday. How are you this fine week? It is November. We're getting close to the holiday breaks. I'm sure you are so excited. I know I am. I'm looking forward to it. I'm taking the full week of Thanksgiving off. Giving my clients the week off, giving myself the week off. My son is coming home. We're heading to Tahoe. It's going to be fabulous. We have been doing all the things. I just love it. I love living life again. It's so much fun.

I hope you are making sure that you are out having some fun. One of the things I make my clients do is schedule fun into every single week. It's a requirement. We cannot live for the school year. We have to put the fun into the year.

One of my clients goes out every Wednesday evening with her girlfriends. She loves it. It's a mid-week break for her. She looks forward to it. She knows it's there. She knows it's coming. So much fun. I have other clients who make sure they take yoga classes. They go on hikes. They walk their dogs. They get out with their kids. They're not overworking.

If overworking is a problem for you, you've got to join the Empowered Principal coaching program. What are you guys doing? We want you out having fun. I'm having fun. My clients are having fun. The Empowered Principal Facebook group is having fun. So I hope you're all out there having some fun.

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Speaking of having some fun, we're going to talk about building a culture of resilience at your school. So I want to talk about the difference between climate and culture. Because I know for me as a school leader, I used the words interchangeably, and I wanted to be very specific about the difference between the two as I talk about a culture of resilience at your school.

So I looked it up. I did some research. Here's what I found. Climate and culture are different. You guys probably know this. I'm late to the game. For the purposes of this podcast, I'm going to talk about climate and culture. They are different, but they influence one another.

So here's the way I interpret climate and culture. Culture is the way that your school does business. It tends to be impacted by the district. So it includes things like the belief systems that you have as a school and as a district, the values that drive the way you do business, the norms you have at your school, the routines, the procedures, the traditions, all of that, the way that you celebrate. All of those actions and the way that you live and breathe and do business at your school, that is your culture.

Those actions are evident throughout the whole school. So people can understand the culture of your school by observing how people do business. How they interact, how they teach, the routines that you have, the procedures, the events that you hold, what you celebrate, what you don't celebrate. All of that. What you tend to believe, how you approach the day, the week, the year. How you approach test scores, all of that. Culture is the way you do business. It's how you act.

Climate is the emotional vibe that people perceive. So it's the emotional vibe on your campus. Culture is built overtime and it's influenced by climate, and climate's influenced by culture.

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I view culture as how you establish the way that you do business in terms of the standards that you have, the expectations that you have, what you consider to be baseline and then going above that baseline. So the standards that you have, the accountability, the way that people work, live, breath, interact with your campus.

Climate on the other hand is that emotional vibe. It's what people feel when they walk on your campus. It's what people call morale. It's that emotional level of your staff, your students, your community. The pandemic has triggered a climate change in our schools. Now some schools have had an increase in climate. They've had a positive experience. They've had a bump in climate. They've had high morale.

So the pandemic for some schools has led to bonding and supporting one another. They felt more connected. It felt like we're on the same team, we're all in this together. We're going to help each other through this. Some schools have done an amazing job at improving the quality of their climate. Basically improving how they think and feel and what really matters to them. They feel great about the way that they approached the pandemic situation.

While other schools have experienced what they call low morale or toxic climate. Where people have felt worse. The morale has plummeted. Both the highs and the lows, whichever way your school went, both of those were a product, a result of the culture that's driving the climate. What people are thinking, what they believe to be true about the way that your school operates.

So I want to talk about culture and climate for a second and where I put them in the STEER cycle. So climate, the emotional vibe on your campus, is always going to expose the culture. So culture is the way that people think. It's what they believe or don't believe, what they value and what they

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don't value. How they spend their time and how they don't spend their time. Climate is the way that people and feel and act, which exposes the truth of the culture.

So for those of you who are new to the STEER cycle, I talked a little bit about this last week when I talked about data meetings. The STEER cycle for the quickest synopsis possible, it's a life changing life coaching tool that I talk about all the time. It's from the Life Coach School, from my master coach Brooke Castillo. I created the STEER cycle, which is a version of it.

Basically the premise, the theory behind it is that what you believe to be true, what thoughts you think will always create the results in your life. What's more cool about this is that the results you usher in your life are a direct reflection of what you're thinking. So when you say to yourself, "No, I really believe X, Y, Z" but you don't have X, Y, Z result, that tells you that you're not quite believing that exactly.

So whatever result you're creating. So for example if you say I fully believe 100% of kids are fully capable of passing the state exam at 80% proficiency, but you are at 70% proficiency. There's a 10% gap. So we have some work to do to bridge that gap between the 70% and the 80%, and that comes with belief. Believing that we can get ourselves to 80%.

Okay so I think of climate as the feelings and actions in the STEER cycle. I think of culture as the thoughts and the results. This model, or as I call it the STEER cycle, it's always in motion and it's always true. I've never found a situation where it doesn't ring true.

So for more detail on the STEER cycle, if you're new to this podcast or you're new to this line of work or you're new to life coaching, you'll want to go back to episodes three through six of the podcast where I teach the components of the STEER cycle. So I will talk about them often in many of

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the episodes I talk about them, but at the very beginning of the podcast I break them down for you. So you can go back and listen to that.

All right. So what you experience as the school leader on a daily basis is the climate of your school. It's that vibe. There are times when the climate feels healthy and positive and other times when we talk about the climate as being toxic or we say that staff morale is low. Right now many principals are reporting to me that they are worried about their teachers. They feel morale is low or they feel like there are certain teachers who are being toxic. They're being very negative and they're bringing the rest of the staff down.

Here's the problem. Your staff is tired. Their resilience is low. They're tired of feeling tired. They are fatigued from having to learn new things, having to change, having to go in and out of hybrid or in and out of quarantine or however your school is handling the pandemic. They're tired of trying to keep their morale up and trying to stay positive. There's an effort involved with that because they have to manage their thoughts and their emotions.

They're kind of just tired of being resilient. They're tired of waiting to teach like they used to. They want to just get to it. They want to get to teaching. They don't want to have to deal with all the emotions. They don't want to have to deal with misbehavior. They don't want to have to deal with pandemics.

In response to all of their feelings of impatience and fatigue and annoyance and frustration, what they're doing in reaction to those feelings is that they're lashing out. They're snapping at each other. They're snapping at you. They're whining, complaining. They're blaming. Blaming the kids, blaming whatever.

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They're asking you. They're coming to you and saying, "Hey, fix us. Fix all the things. This isn't working. I don't have time. This is too much. I can't do this." Which PS, they were saying that before the pandemic. But it's a product of their thinking. It's not an inherent issue of your teachers. They're humans. Their brain is just offering them the thought that they don't have time and that this is too much and that they're tired.

So what's happening is your teachers are feeling the burn and they're seeking out others who also feel the burn. Then they're feeding off of that negativity. They're joining forces and they're coming to you as grade levels or whatever, departments. They're coming to you saying, "We have all these problems and we're too tired to fix them. So we would like you as my school leader to fix them for us."

Now as a fellow human, you feel that negative emotion. You pick up on that energy and you feel for your staff. Your mind is either going to respond to that emotion that they are expressing to you with some compassion and understanding because hey, you can relate to their experience. You're tired too.

Sometimes they come to you and you feel annoyed and frustrated that they're being needy and whiny. And oh my gosh, why can't they just stop? Your brain depends on how you're feeling and how you receive that information from them, that whining, complaining, blaming, asking you to fix all the problems.

You can sometimes feel this kind of juxtaposition where you feel the compassion but you also feel like suck it up buttercup. Let's get going. Just get busy and do the work, right. So you're feeling both of those emotions. Of course you are. You're feeling both of them. Everybody is, right. That's just part of being human.

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Hey, you feel for them because you're tired too, but you're also fatigued of the complaining and the blaming and the people coming to you and wanting you to do their work and solve their problems. Then when you do offer solutions, they don't accept them. They have excuses as to why they won't work, which just increases your frustration.

So in the world of one of my clients, she told me, "I feel like a punching bag, and I am not sure that I can take much more of this." It feels like the job is the problem, school leadership is the problem, teaching is the problem. The people around us are the problem. That's what our brain tells us. These teachers are the problem. The parents are the problem. The student behavior is the problem or the student test scores are the problem.

I get it. People are losing their cool out there. They do not have the emotional resilience. They are fatigued. Teachers want you to fix things. Parents are losing their cool. Students are so dysregulated that you're spending your day with first graders who have never been in school and you're trying to teach them how to be in school. They were four year olds or five year olds when this pandemic hit. Now they're six and they've never been in school.

You're having to spend time training first graders as if they were incoming kinders. Your brain's like, "I don't want to be doing this. This is taking too much time. They should know how to behave." You know what? They don't.

So what are you supposed to do as a school leader? How do you influence the climate of your school and build up a culture of resilience? So in the short term, you want to influence the climate of your school, the emotional vibe. Overtime you want to build up a culture of resilience at your school. You want resiliency to be a standard for your teachers.

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As a leader, you want every member of your staff to have the ability to process and manage their own emotions. You want to cultivate a culture within your school that believes in and values resiliency. Emotional and mental resiliency. You want to ensure that your teachers and your staff members have the tools to help themselves express emotion appropriately, get themselves through challenging times. You want this to be a part of how you do business at your school. You want it to be a part of the culture.

So to build this culture of resilience, you start very simply. You start by studying your own emotional resilience. As leaders, we don't want to ask of our staff members anything we're not willing to do ourselves. That's definitely a rule in the Empowered Principal program. We cannot expect other humans to do things we're not willing to do.

So we can't expect teachers to be able to manage their thoughts and emotions and stay resilient all the time unless we are willing to expect it of ourselves. Because this work is really easy to project onto others and expect them to do it. When we have to sit on the hot seat, it gets much harder when we're implementing this process for ourselves.

So ask yourself when do you feel the resistance creeping up? When that resistance or you feel those emotions coming up and you're thinking to yourself, "Who is going to complain today? What am I going to have to deal with today? How am I going to deal with the same student behaviors for another day?" You want to catch this.

Emotions are a little flag from the body to the brain. Your body can't speak in language. It can't talk to you. So it has to use emotion to communicate to your mind to say, "Hey, pay attention over here." So when you're feeling strong emotion, you're feeling resistance, you're feeling like I don't want to go to work. I'm resisting going to work. I'm annoyed. I'm frustrated. I'm aggravated.

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Whatever the emotion it is that you're feeling, you want to sit with that for a moment and pay attention. Let it get your attention. Sit in that resistance and watch the thoughts that are running through your mind. The thoughts are going to feel completely true for you. You're going to believe that everyone's being toxic and that you have to deal with them and that you don't want to deal with them.

Your brain's going to offer you all kinds of thoughts. Just notice how it's already decided, "Today's going to be a hard day. Everyone's going to complain. I'm going to have to deal. I don't want to deal. I don't want to go into work." Then it's going to get to work looking for all of the ways in which your day is going to be miserable. It's deciding ahead of time the experience you're going to have before you even step foot into the office.

I want to highlight this is also happening inside your teacher's brains and inside your student's brains. We're all projecting what we think the day is going to look like, how it's going to feel. We're already deciding it's going to be hard. It's going to be tough. I don't want to have to deal. I don't want to go into work. This is not going to be fun. When we go in, we look for all the ways the day is not fun, the day is hard, and the day is miserable.

Allowing ourselves to get into that spin cycle, that overwhelm cycle is why we believe that staff morale is so low. If our morale is low as principal, of course our brain is going to look for the ways that morale is low around us. It's seeking misery, right. It wants to commiserate. It doesn't want to feel alone in this.

So your work as a leader is not to go out there and fix everybody else or to tell them to buck up. Your work is to notice the ways that you are resilient and the ways that you aren't as resilient. What ways are you able to hold space for your emotions and for other people's emotions? What situations do you find yourself being very triggered by? Where do you lose the ability

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to remain neutral and calm? Do certain things trigger you more than others? You want to study yourself. You want to notice when you're exercising resiliency and when you're struggling.

Look, you're not expected to always be resilient. That's what coaches are for. We're here to help you. You can come to us and not be resilient. Get all those feelings out, process them with somebody who's neutral and loving and compassionate and understands and has been in your shoes. You don't have to be the perfect resilient leader. You want to give into those emotions at times. You want to let yourself feel them. You want to step out of resiliency. That's healthy.

You want to be able to practice those feelings of those emotions that come up for you when you're not resistant. That's how you learned to understand and appreciate when other people are going through the same thing. Emotions are the driving force of a school's climate. Your leadership values are based on how you feel and how you want to feel. That's what shapes the culture of your school.

Emotions are the driving force of your climate and your culture. So you want to spend a great deal of time understanding what drives emotions, what triggers them, how you process them, what makes it hard to process them, the obstacles that get in your way, when you notice that you're buffering or deflecting or avoiding.

You want to understand emotion because it is the core of your school climate, and it's the core of your school culture. Understanding this at an intimate level is going to help you identify what's needed when morale drops or when you feel things are shifting into toxic energy.

I think as school leaders and as educators in general, we vastly underestimate the power of emotion. We've been taught that showing

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emotion is weak. That discussing emotion is a soft skill. That it's not a hard skill that we're supposed to be teaching in academia. Emotion is what drives every action on your campus. You want to study it. You want it to be the most important tool that you study and that you have available to you. Who better to study it from than yourself?

As a coach, I'm a life coach for school leaders. I offer dozens of tools to help you understand and study and process emotion. This is what we do. We use our emotions to guide us, to understand ourselves, to deepen our understanding of leadership and the impact we're trying to create and how we're trying to change the lives of students and staff. I help you see how your emotions drive your school's success, drive individual accomplishments.

As part of the Empowered Principal coaching program, I teach my clients how to build their leadership capacity through the leadership triad, which focuses on emotion. The leadership triad helps leaders positively influence their climate and take their school culture to the next level.

If you want to improve your staff climate and the school culture in just a few simple steps, please consider signing up for the coaching program and let's get started right away. Waiting until you have more time always 100% of the time just delays your progress and frustrates you. There's no better time to start than now. I know you say that to students. I'm telling you believe in yourself. You've got this. You can do this.

Life coaching is just getting started in the field of education, you guys, and I am one of the only coaches who offers these skills and tools. Be on the cutting edge of this educational practice. It's not going away. It's just getting started. I'm thrilled to be able to share this with you and offer this to you. Sign up for a consult today. Claim your spot. Let's go.

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