

Ep #206: Staff Meetings



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 206.

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. I am so happy you are here, and I am so happy to be here with you today. I love you guys. I love this podcast so much. I want to welcome you. If you're new to the podcast, welcome to the show where we're talking about school leadership in real time about real topics and we're getting real coaching. So I love this theme so much. Today we're going to talk about productive staff meetings, but before I do that, I want to share a quick little story with you.

For those of you who have been following the podcast for a long time, you've probably just recently listened to episode 200 which aired at the beginning of November or maybe the last part of October. I'm recording this very episode on November 1st. So you're probably hearing this at the end of November, but I have to tell you.

I was so excited about the 200th episode of the podcast. I was trying to decide what's the right way to celebrate this. I had anticipated having her on the show, and she wasn't able to make it. I decided to highlight the Empowered Principal Mastermind students, and I'm so glad I did that. I am so happy with that podcast. The energy, the information, the insight that these students provided and offered on that podcast was golden. They were dropping nuggets left and right.

So I'm really happy and proud of the 200th episode. I am so proud and honored to work with my mastermind students. They come with so much energy and love and passion. What I love about what they're doing is they

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have shifted their self-concept of who they are as a school leader from being new and indecisive and insecure and just putting out fires day to day. They went from surviving the day or the minute or the hour into thinking about the week and the year and their future.

So they're not just thinking about this day or this week or this problem. They're thinking of their careers and of their impact and in their leadership legacy, which is something we talk about in the mastermind. They're thinking about themselves and the impact they want to create and the influence they want to have and the legacy they want to leave in the field of education for years to come.

They are anchored in their leadership values. They have a vision that they want to create and they want to use to lead their teams and their students and their families. They're doing such amazing work out in the world.

I really do hope you will consider becoming an empowered principal through the coaching program that I offer. This is just the beginning. This work is so powerful and it's not going away. What I love about it is that we are just tapping the surface of how we impact student lives because we are here to evolve the trajectory of these students lives forever.

The way we do that is by empowering our teachers, building up their belief in who they are and how capable they are as a teacher so that they can then do the same for students. We don't want students believing that they just have to live the way that they were raised. Or that they can't break through financial barriers and socioeconomic standards and what society tells us is possible or racial inequities or injustice in the world.

We can overcome things. We can improve the qualities of our lives. We do it by modeling who we are as principals, by helping our teachers build up their belief and self-concept in themselves, and build up that belief and self-concept in our students.

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We want students believing that they have what it takes and that they can create a lifestyle of their choice. Not our choice. We're not imposing a lifestyle on them. We're helping them to determine the lifestyle they want to live for themselves. It's so powerful. It's so good.

So anyway, I want to say one more thing about the 200th episode. I need to shoutout my amazing wonderful, glorious podcast producers are Digital Freedoms Production. Pavel, Angela, Devon, the entire team over at Digital Freedom Productions. They are my people. They have been with me since the very beginning of this journey. I am so honored to have them as my production team. Pavel especially. He started out with me. He coached me. He guided me. He gave me feedback.

I feel now that this podcast is the number one venue in which I communicate with my audience, with all of the principals out there. This is how I get the information to you. This is how people decide to coach with me. I couldn't love this podcast more, and I couldn't love my production company more. They sent me, surprised me with this beautiful bouquet of flowers. Massive bouquet. It was gorgeous. It was absolutely stunning.

So thank you. Thank you, thank you Pavel. Thank you, Angela. Thank you, Devon and the entire team, for all of your work that you do every single week to make sure this podcast is a five star caliber. I love you guys and I appreciate it. So thank you so much for that.

All right. We're going to shift gears and we're going to talk about productive staff meetings. So I was coaching with one of my clients recently, and she said to me, "I know this isn't probably something we should be coaching on at this point." We're almost done with our coaching package for this round.

She said, "We shouldn't be coaching on this, but I just want to be honest. I hate staff meetings. They're not productive. I feel like they're a waste of time. I don't enjoy them. The teachers don't enjoy them. All they want to do

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is talk about nuts and bolts. I don't want to answer nuts and bolts. I send out a bulletin, and they don't read the bulletin.”

I thought oh my gosh. If I had a nickel for every time a principal told me their teachers don't read emails. Their teachers don't read bulletins. They don't read the newsletter. They want to come to the staff meeting and they want to hash out all of the nuts and bolts that you sent out in the bulletin. Then when you do go over nuts and bolts, they complain that all you do is go over nuts and bolts and they're not getting to the nitty gritty of collaboration and learning and growth, right. So we're in the quandary.

So the problem is unproductive staff meetings and that feeling where you want to get to business, and actually your teachers do want to get to business too. But it doesn't feel like you can ever do that because there are so many nuts and bolts for you to cover or people don't read and they need you to answer questions that they have. Or even if they did read it, they still are confused or have questions, right.

So I started thinking about this. What is the problem behind this problem? So I think it's common that people including you and teachers do not feel that staff meetings are a productive use of time or an efficient use of time or an effective use of time. What you mean by that is that you don't believe that the time investment—You don't get a return on investment for the time. That you go to the meeting and it's kind of meh and you don't walk out with an outcome or a problem solved or a decision. You don't have a tangible outcome when you walk away from that staff meeting.

One of the things I talked about is that what you think the problem is isn't always what the teachers think the problem is, right. There's some other things going on here, right. There's the problem of you wanting to balance out your agenda with their need for their agenda.

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So first of all, let me just tell you. Principals and teachers don't have the same purpose or goals at a staff meeting. What you want to accomplish and get done and what they want to accomplish and get done are often not aligned, which is step one of the solution.

So there's this balance of wanting to get to your agenda and your outcomes and your purpose and what you want to accomplish at the staff meeting versus balancing out the teachers needs. You want to be able to answer their questions and give them time and space to speak and be heard and feel like they were also contributing to the staff meeting. It wasn't just you leading the show.

That desire to balance all of that typically ends up in either you pushing your agenda and them not really receiving it or you give into the nuts and bolts conversation and you don't feel like you walked away with anything productive. Because you're trying to balance their needs and your needs, what ends up happening is no needs really get met. Nothing really gets done, which is why you believe the staff meetings are unproductive.

Here's a little secret. When you say you're not going to cover nuts and bolts at the staff meeting but then you do, you're training your teachers to not read your nuts and bolts because they know you're going to cover it at the staff meeting. They're very busy people. They've got a lot to do. So if they don't have to take the time to read the nuts and bolts because they know they'll just ask you about it at the staff meeting and you will end up going over it, then they don't have to read it.

So one idea, one suggestion, is to not cover nuts and bolts. Is to train them that they do need to read the bulletin, newsletter, whatever it is you send out to them ahead of time. Now there will be times when even then, maybe everybody ready every word and they don't understand something. Yeah, you can answer a question or they can email you the question.

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You want to set up a protocol for nuts and bolts. If this is something that's taking a lot of time at your staff meeting and you feel like what you want to get done and accomplished is not happening because of nuts and bolts, you want to think about that first.

Now with that said, I want to talk purpose of the staff meeting. Oftentimes as school leaders, we don't slow ourselves down enough to ask ourselves, What is the purpose of this staff meeting? What do I want to accomplish personally as the leader? Not only that, what is the purpose to the teachers? Because they're typically not aligned. You have your agenda and they have their agenda, and they don't always match. For the most part, they don't match.

So as the leader, you want to think about this. What's in the staff meeting for teachers? Why should they invest their time and their energy after a long day of work into the staff meeting?

So the solution to creating a more purposeful and productive staff meeting is to first plan out what you think the purpose is for you, what you think the purpose is for teachers. You might want to ask them. Because I guarantee you that they're coming into the meeting thinking that you're doing the meeting to them. That they aren't really getting anything out of it. Or they're coming saying, "Hey I've got to get these nuts and bolts cleared up, and then I'm out."

If you want to have a collaborative and open communication. You know I asked my client what do you envision for this staff meeting? What's the ideal staff meeting? What does it look like? What does it sound like? What are you the outcomes? What's the long term vision for the staff meetings? What is it that teachers want out of the staff meetings? When you start planning your staff meetings in terms of outcomes and purpose and aligning the purpose for you and the teachers.

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So consider what outcomes you want to have versus planning your agenda with just a list of topics that you need to cover. You want to think about what do we want to walk away with? What do teachers want to walk away with?

Here's what you'll find out. You guys actually are on the same team. You do want the same things. Because what do you want? You want teachers to be invigorated and excited and ready to implement something new in their classrooms or make something better about their classrooms, and they want that too.

They want to come into the staff meeting knowing more information, having a problem solved, feeling like they're ready for the next day, knowing what the expectations are and what they need to do in order to meet those expectations. You want them to know that to. So you do have a mutual agenda. You have a mutual purpose. But we have to align our thinking so that we both see the mutual value in it. That comes from understanding what the outcome of the meeting is in terms of planning that meeting agenda.

So for example if there are some nuts and bolts that you just want to send out in a bulletin, you need to let people know ahead of time. These are the nuts and bolts. If you have questions, email me your questions. If I get a ton of emails, then I'll know I wasn't clear enough and I can speak to it at the meeting. Otherwise here's the outcome. By the end of the staff meeting, we will have accomplished XYZ. Or we will have held this conversation. We will have made this decision.

You want them to know that that outcome is a value to them. They benefit from achieving that outcome. So you have to think in terms of not just how you want to feel about the meeting but how you want them to feel. What you want them walking in thinking when they come in, and what they need to be thinking and feeling when they leave.

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So the process is step one, define the purpose. The purpose for yourself, the purpose for your teachers. You've got to get in your teacher's brains, and you want to question with curiosity. What are they thinking? What do they want out of the staff meeting? What would make the staff meeting amazing for them?

They're basically your clients. They are your customers. You want to be in their head. You want to know what it is they need to go back to their classrooms and do an amazing job. Or to solve a problem they've been facing and struggling with. To help them feel that they are ready and prepared for next day or teaching or the next week or the next trimester. You want to be able to achieve both.

The reason you don't feel they're productive is you're not clear. If you're not sold on the value of the staff meeting, they are certainly not sold on the value. If you don't like staff meetings and you don't think they're productive, teachers are thinking the same thing you are because they are mirroring back to you what you are thinking in the staff meeting.

So if you are clear on the purpose, if you understand the outcomes you're creating. If you know what they want and you can sell them on that value, they are going to be much more intrigued and interested in being a part of that staff meeting, being active in that staff meeting.

So what's in this work for them? What do they walk away with? How can you sell them on the value by giving them the value they need? Some of your staff meetings are just going to be nuts and bolts because that is what you have to do to clear up the air to get everybody back to functioning.

I figure when you have to have a nuts and bolts meeting, it's getting you from under functioning back up to baseline. Then when your school is functioning really well, nuts and bolts are just a part of who you are, and that part's going smoothly. So then you can rise to the next level, and you

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can take that staff meeting up to the top performing levels that you want them to be at.

The result of this work—Now I'm going to sell you very quickly on why you need to slow your brain down and plan your staff meeting in a way that's focused on the outcomes that teachers want, the outcomes that you want for them, and how it's the same so that you will take the time required to plan effective staff meetings.

When you do this work, the hour or hour and a half—whatever your staff meeting is—the use of that time, the value of it goes up exponentially. It's a high value use of your time, and a high value use of your teachers time. Everybody complains there's not enough time. There's too much to do and not enough time, but we don't look at how we're spending our time and if it's being effective. The way we know whether or not it's being effective is the outcome that it creates at the end of that time.

So for example, these 20 minutes that I'm standing here recording this podcast for you is a high value use of my 20 minutes. How do I know? Because it helps thousands of principals every single week go in with an improved mindset to do a better job than they did the week before. I know with certainty the value of this podcast, the value of this content. I know that this use of my time is the best use of my time hands down. I love doing this because of the value it provides and the benefit that it creates in the world. The impact that I'm creating by spending this 20 minutes.

You want to think in the same way with that hour staff meeting. You might have to spend an hour thinking about the outcomes that you want and how you can get to those outcomes. This is back to predetermining your outcome. You're going to do that to your staff meeting, and you want to spend the time planning it so that the hour you are together is a high value use of that time.

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When you do that and you come to a common understanding of the value of that meeting, what happens is the real work, which is the collaboration and the book studies. My client, she's working on Responsive Classroom right now. When they dig into Responsive Classroom and they see the value of that and they see how it's going to help them and they are interested in the tools and the process that they're using, they will figure out their nuts and bolts. The nuts and bolts will feel less interesting than getting to the meat of solving problems in the classroom.

So the big secret to all of this is every staff meeting should be about solving a problem that teachers are facing right now. How do you help teachers solve a problem they are facing? Sometimes it's a nuts and bolts problem, and that's okay. You want to be able to talk about nuts and bolts without being upset about it and judging teachers for not reading if it's a true problem that they are struggling to solve.

When you are very clear with your nuts and bolts and you're able to effectively communicate through emails or newsletters the nuts and bolts so clearly, so concisely, so consistently that they don't need to ask you questions or they have a process for getting those answers without doing it at a staff meeting. Then you get to that high value work at your staff meeting.

One little secret tip that I gave my client. This is what I did at my staff meetings. I finally figured this out around year three. We used to do nuts and bolts at the beginning and then it would eat up half the staff meeting if not the whole thing.

What I did was sent out the nuts and bolts. I tried to be as explicit, clear, and simple as possible and told them to ask their questions. Either ask a peer or ask me in an email. But if I did get lots of questions, I would spend 10 minutes at the end of the staff meeting answering questions. Guess what? Because teachers wanted to get out on time, there were far fewer

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questions about nuts and bolts at the end of the staff meeting than they had at the beginning.

So that's my secret super power tip of the week. If you have to cover nuts and bolts, do it at the end and not the beginning. Get to the outcomes of what it is you both really want, which is to solve a problem your teachers are facing.

Have a beautiful week. I love you guys. I'll see you next week. Take care. Bye.

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