

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 215.

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. I'm so happy to be here with you. Today I'm having a lovely day. I love, love, love this podcast. I can't tell you how much fun I have recording this. Although today's topic will not feel fun for all of us.

I'm going to talk about something that's real, something that feels very serious, something that feels very scary as a school leader or a teacher even. It's something that we need to talk about in education and we need to band together in support, in love, in collaboration, in connection. That is the topic of haters and the cancel culture throughout education, throughout social media, throughout the media, throughout the world. As school leaders, we're going to talk about it in the field of education.

I'm going to share with you a very real, very uncomfortable experience that I had when I was a school leader. I'm going to break down my thoughts and perceptions of the situation in order to help you if you are experiencing a situation where you feel a hater is after you or cancel culture is attacking you.

So this podcast is really for any school leader who's ever been a victim of a hater or a group of a people targeted to hate you. Whether you're going through it now or you've been traumatized from your past or you're buckled up in fear that it could happen to you. Maybe you're a new school leader and you're afraid of the hater that will come your way. You're afraid of the

[The Empowered Principal Podcast](#) with Angela Kelly

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

mob mentality that can happen at a school very quickly. We see it all over the media, all over the news.

I want to talk about it very frankly and very open with you because it is through coaching that I was able to reconcile that trauma, able to process it, and able to become stronger because of it. So we're going to talk very openly today.

Now I'm just going to jump into my story. I'm going to tell you the story, and then I'm going to break down my takeaways, my learnings from this situation. Back when I was an elementary school principal, I was probably in my fifth year. I was a school leader for six years and I was a district leader for one before I resigned to start this company. So it was in my fifth year.

I had a parent of a fourth grade student. Student was really bright. This kiddo was gifted, smart, and had a lot of academic advancements in his brain. So at the beginning of the year, the family had moved in. We had a conversation about how to challenge the student in math as this was an area that the student excelled in.

So we worked on a plan with the teachers. We had several grade levels involved. We had parents. The student was involved. Everyone was super pleased with our plan. We were all proud of the plan. Everybody loved it. It worked really well. Students were happy. Kids were happy. Everybody was happy, and the parents were thrilled. They sang my praises and they kept telling me they loved me. They were so happy with the school. Things were fabulous.

Later in the year, the family decided to take an extended vacation for some reason. I'm guessing it was around two weeks. I think that was...It was a long time. It was over a week or two. I can't quite remember the exact

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

number of days. The family came to me ahead of time and told me they were going to be out and what did they need to do. So I explained the process of extended absences. In my district, I think it was anything over 10 days you could apply for an outside of school learning packet or program that they could take. Like extended absence packet or something like that.

I also wanted to explain to them that yes, you're going to go through the process. You're going to get approved for this absence. You're going to get the homework. You have to do all this homework and turn it in in order to get credit for it. Eventually the district receives credit for the child having been in class. That was the long winded process of it.

My district in particular was really focused on attendance. They were just hammering attendance. They were really calling out parents whose kids had unexcused absences and in this case even excused absences. So they were sending out messages and phone calls. They were doing all of this work to get people to really have their kids in class live in person, buns in seat.

So I mentioned to the family. "You're going to receive a letter from the district. It's going to be stern about attendance. I just want you to know this ahead of time. I don't want you to worry. I want to reassure you. You're going to be fine. Kids are going to be fine. Everyone's going to be okay. This is a district letter." I had heard about the letter. They told us the letter was going to be going out. I knew it was going to be this kind of stern thing, but I hadn't really seen the final version of the letter. Note to self, the letter was what I call a nastygram. Basically it was shaming parents into having kids attend school at all times.

So I warned them. They were like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." They went through the process. They went on vacation. When they got back, I'm sure in their

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

pile of mail upon return they had the letter from the district. The letter had my name as the signature as if I were the author of the letter. It had my name, "Sincerely, my name."

What happened was, later on I found out the district had typed up the—it was a form letter. Then just put down each principals name. So when a student from your school was out, the letter with your name was sent to that family.

So when the family received the letter, whoa. I just have to tell you. Let me side note here for a second and say my thoughts and feelings about that letter are an entirely separate commentary. It's probably one that we should discuss at a later point, how to manage your thoughts and emotion around it. Let's just say for now that I was personally very much in disagreement with the practice my district decided upon.

When I inquired about it, I was told that it's my job as the school leader to be the face of the district and to deal with whatever heat basically came my way. It's a good thing I had coaching at that point. So I had to process my own thoughts and feelings about the letter. Then decide how I was going to show up as the face of my district in deciding prioritizing my employers and myself as the employee of this district, and how I was going to handle this parent without saying this letter didn't come from me. It went to the district. Go to them. Kind of throwing my district under the bus.

So I had to go through a process myself of figuring out what I wanted to think, how I wanted to feel, and how I was going to show up and handle and approach this whole situation. Let me tell you, that took time for me to have to reconcile that within myself before I could really think about it from a clean space.

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

Meanwhile the father of this student who had taken his family on vacation got the letter and was absolutely furious. I'm telling you spitting mad. I've never seen somebody so mad. I thought he was going to physically injure me. That's how mad he was. I was actually fearful of physical altercation.

He came into the front office. He was screaming, demanding a meeting. Of course like I went out there, pulled him into my office. I met with him. I had to end the meeting because he just wasn't able to calm down. He was swearing at me, calling me names, and was definitely not in an emotional space to have an adult conversation.

From that moment on, I could see. I was watching him. In hindsight, I really see this now. How his brain had locked into that belief that I was a terrible principal, an evil person, mean, whatever he thought. It became his sole purpose to look for all the ways in which I was doing it wrong, in which he felt I was doing it wrong.

So I want to step back and point out this is where confirmation bias is at its worst and where it works against us. When we are deadbolted into a thought, a belief, that we refuse to question or we refuse to think it might not be true, our confirmation bias runs wild to our own detriment. It's when it's at its worst.

Here's what I mean. I'm going to put this in a STEER cycle quickly. So the situation is parent receives letter. The thought he had when received the letter wasn't, "Oh she warned me about this. She reassured me. I'm not going to worry about it. "Which most likely would have been very undramatic and wouldn't have had a lot of emotional energy around it. But nope, that's not what his brain offered him.

What his brain offered him was the thought, something to the effect of, "She knew I was leaving and she wrote this. She sent this. How

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

inconsiderate. How rude. How nasty. She's terrible. I hate her. I'm mad at her. I'll get revenge." All the things. His brain was flooded with thoughts that ignited his emotions. He was all fired up. Those intense angry hateful emotions influenced his decision to come in kicking and screaming. It was definitely not a moment of emotional adulthood, let's just say.

In that moment, I decided for myself that I was going to stay calm. When he was in my office that initial time, I did my best. I tried to deescalate him. You know what I realized? His brain didn't want to deescalate. It didn't come in looking for resolution. It came in looking for the fight, for the kill, for the win. It wasn't backing down until he felt justified and achieved that win. He was looking for some justification, some sense of winningness and being right. It was very ego driven.

When I saw this, I realized this isn't going anywhere. What I have to say is not relevant to his mind right now. I ended the conversation. I told him you're not ready to talk. That's fine. I understand you're upset, but I'm not willing to have a conversation when you're this upset. I wanted to disrupt and kind of mitigate the amount of emotional fuel that he was looking for.

From that day on, his brain looked for every possible confirmation bias, every possible situation where his brain could say, "Yep, more evidence. Yep more proof." He looked at every nook and cranny of my life, my personal life, professional life, around the campus to confirm that his thoughts and his feelings and his actions were right and justified and appropriate.

Even if he did at some point in all of this feel a subtle sense of remorse or embarrassment about how he behaved, one, he never showed that. What I think happened was even if his wife had said to him like, "Calm down. This is too much. You're being unreasonable." That would fuel the fire again.

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

Even if he felt it at a deep level, his need to be right was more important than the desire for resolve.

So in search of that confirmation, the brain filters out any evidence that's contrary to what it wants to believe. So for the rest of the year, this parent was talking crap about me to anyone who would listen. He talked to teachers, to parents, to the district office. He tried calling the newspaper and getting me fired through the local newspaper.

He blew steam on social media. And that is where I actually learned that there was a group of parent haters who had a private Facebook page who talked BS about your school and our district and our teachers. I was like yikes. I had no idea this was even out in the world, this even existed.

I'm going to tell you something. Y'all haters love a tribe. If they can't create a tribe out of love and friendship and collaboration and connection, they will create it from hate and gossip and judgement and division. So this guy would come in each morning on the playground. I saw a small group gather around him. I would be out on duty watching the kids come in, welcoming everybody. As I walked through the campus each morning, I could see them kind of peering over and looking at me.

I'll be honest, it was highly uncomfortable. I felt the burn. I felt the burn of them talking about me. My brain was flooded with thoughts about what are they saying? They're so mean. I don't like this. This is not a good situation. I also was kind of beating up myself. Like where did I go wrong? How did the culture get like this? What should I have done differently?

It felt terrible. I saw people in that group that I adored and trusted. My beloved PTA mom was standing in that group every morning. It was terrible. Of course she said to me on the side, "I'm just trying to stay there



## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

to mitigate some of the negativity.” Maybe that was her true intention, but it felt terrible knowing she was in there and listening to what was being said.

It went on for the rest of the school year and into the next year. I am telling you, you've got to give this guy credit for commitment. He was absolutely relentless, and it did wear on me. I'm not sugarcoating any of this. It was awful. I hated coming to school. I was miserable. I was crying. I didn't know how to handle it. Even though I'd been a school leader for several years, I'd never encountered something like this in my life.

So into that next school year, one of my monthly principal coffees happened to land on Halloween. So our school at the time, at the very beginning of the Halloween day we had this school wide Monster Bash we called it with the kids. We danced. The kids did choreographed dancing. PTA did all these fun treats and activities. We had a fall festival. It was a really, really special event for those who were allowed to celebrate. Those who weren't, we had other activities planned.

That morning we did our big festival. After that even because all the parents were on campus, I announced, “Everybody come to the MUR for coffee with me. I've got a principal's coffee scheduled today.” Because so many parents were on campus for Halloween, there was a huge crowd. Perfect scenario for somebody who wants to create a lot of hate, right?

Of course I'd seen the father at the other events taking place, the festivities on campus. So I knew he was there and was probably going to come. This was an ideal event for him. So there had been rumblings that he was going to confront me publicly. So I was mentally preparing for what I might say. I kept deep breathing to kind of keep my physical nervous system calm.

Sure enough a few minutes into the coffee when I was covering the agenda, he screams out, “When are you going to cover X, Y, Z?” Whatever

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

he wanted to articulate at that moment. I felt my body react physically. I felt myself go flush, my face. I felt the rush of adrenaline. Like your stomach churns. You get the knot in your stomach and your throat. I felt myself a little shaky, a little rattly. Even when my body was physically reacting to that, mentally I felt calm and clear. I kept breathing deeply to keep my body in check. I kept thinking to myself, “I can handle this. I can handle this.”

So I let him vent for a minute or two. Then I took a deep breath and I said, “This is not an appropriate place to discuss this issue. If you’d like to schedule an appointment with me, I’m happy to meet with you privately to discuss your concern. I will not, however, entertain this conversation or your current behavior at this principal coffee. So you can either calm down or you can leave.” Kind of like a toddler, right? This is emotional childhood, by the way. This person was stuck in not being able to manage his emotions at an adult level.

He did. He continued rating. He just kept going for a bit longer. I’d give him a little time to vent and then I would say, “You need to stop. This is not appropriate. You will need to leave.” I was getting to the point where I was about ready to call in help or support to have him removed. Because there's hundreds of people in the multipurpose room.

The crowd was silent. He was in the back of the room screaming, and they were all facing forward with their heads down. Staring kind of either at me like “what is she going to do” or looking down like they're so uncomfortable they just couldn't tolerate even looking at another person.

I eventually made eye contact with his wife. She caught my eye and then she looked down at the floor. Then she nudged him in his arm and motioned for him to leave, and they left. The room is silent. It was a very awkward moment, to say the least.

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

I took another big breath. Had to get it all out. The first thing I did was apologize to the audience for the disruption. "I am so sorry that that happened. I'm sorry you had to witness that. My sincerest apologies. Let's get back to the agenda." I started rolling into my agenda.

My school site council president stood up and said, "Angela, are you okay?" I felt the tears coming. My throat kind of clenched and I felt tears coming to my eyes. I looked at him and I said, "Thank you Greg. I am shaken up, but I'm okay. I am truly sorry that all of you had to experience this situation along with me." He said, "I think you handled it beautifully."

People stood up and started walking up to me. I did cry. People were hugging me, and that's where I just felt the emotion all came out. People were saying like, "We love you." I can still feel it, right. "We love you. We love this school. We love everything you do for this school. What he said was wrong." It was kind of a Hallmark moment, I'm not going to lie.

But I'm going to tell you what I learned from the entire experience. Number one, haters are the ones who feel the hate. They are the ones in misery. People who spend their time hating on you are choosing to spend their time being furious in their own bodies, in their own lives. They're furious at you not because of you but because of them. They are not deciding to spend their time building up their life and their contribution. What they are deciding to do is spend their time tearing down other people.

You see this as a phenomenon across the world given our access to the internet and social media. People who are jealous or upset or furious or don't like you, all the ugly feels. Basically what their brain is saying, "I want her or him to behave in a different way. I want them to behave in my way, the way that benefits me. The way that makes me like them. The way that gives me what I want."

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

When you don't behave in that way and they can't process their own thoughts and feeling about you, about the way you decide to show up, they dispel that emotional energy in their bodies. They have to get it out somehow. The way they do that is through public hating.

So you, as the recipient of the hate, you're going to feel scared and nervous and afraid or you're going to worry about their behavior. The more time you spend in that energy, the more time you give them fuel. The more time you're thinking about them and what they're doing and what they're saying and is it true and you're doubting yourself, all of that. You're just giving them what they want. You're adding fuel to that fire. Don't give it fuel.

Number two, haters are the ones who look bad. Not the ones being hated. Hated on someone and spending time trying to get someone cancelled only looks back on the hater. It's a very ugly display of human character, and people are turned off by it even when they are passively participating. It makes the hater unwelcomed in the group and unwelcoming to others. It makes everyone who's around it feel bad. Nobody feels good around a hater, ever, ever. Even the person who's hating, hate is not a fun feeling.

I just want to say a note about passive hating, by the way. Because there's people who are out there leading the packs and then there's the people who are following. They might not be saying anything or really doing anything, but they're following and they're passively engaged in it. So the people who are around haters but they claim not to be a hater. If you think about it, who's going to identify as a hater? If I say, "Hey, are you a hater?" You're going to say no. No way. I'm not a hater. So do all the haters. They don't believe they're haters. It's kind of interesting, right.

Let me say this out of complete love for anyone and everyone. The entire human race including you, my love. We have all been a hater at some point and to some level in our lives. Because unfortunately hate is one of the

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

human emotions, and we're all human. We've all had thoughts that feel hateful to us.

Maybe we've said we hated one of our brothers or sisters or our parents as kids when we were mad. We say we hate our ex or we hate a friend who hurt us or we hate traffic or we hate that it's raining outside. We hate who's been elected. That's a fun one, right?

We've all experienced the emotion of hate. It's not the emotion that's the problem. We are wired to feel hate sometimes. When we have intense dislike for a person or a thing, person, place, or thing for a noun in our lives, but it's not the hate that's the problem. It's what you do in response and reaction to the emotion of hate that matters.

You can process your hate and coach yourself to think differently to shift out of hate and into a more neutral emotional state. When you do that, that's when you're choosing to respond as the best version of yourself. The highest most highest functioning version of yourself.

Sometimes because we're human we engage in passive hating. We consume it on social media or listen to the news or read about it online. Even things like Yelp and Amazon, any review can be amazing or you can spend your time hating. We as school leaders, we get caught up in this. Get complain about the district administration or the country or the state or the feds. We complain about some of our teachers or maybe our paras or maybe some of our parents or even some of our kids, right? We might complain about a colleague.

Maybe we sit in a situation where we're in a meeting or we're at lunch with a group of friends. We're listening to other people hate on somebody, and we don't really say anything. It makes us uncomfortable. But we don't speak up. We don't invite people to stop the conversation. Look, we've all

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

done it. I feel highly uncomfortable doing things like that. So please, don't chastise yourself for that. It's really hard to do.

Even when you find yourself being passive and not speaking up, just notice what were your thoughts? What were you afraid of? Why were you afraid to speak up? Just notice it. See if you can coach yourself through that. Hate is on the human emotional spectrum. It's how you process and react to it that makes the difference.

So I encourage each of us to acknowledge when we feel it and notice the urge to respond to it. When you're feeling hateful and very, very angry, what urges do you have? How do you want to act? What do you want to say? What do you want to do? What do you want to decide? What do you want to believe? How do you want to show up in the world when you're feeling very angry? Notice that urge, and then pause. Pause, let it pass, and make a conscious decision to redirect yourself to a more productive approach.

If we react to haters with hate, and believe me. When my brain perceives an attack on me and my brain goes into fight or flight, I'm a fighter. I am going to feel the urge to attack right back. That is my natural tendency. It's how I was trained. I don't know if it's nature or nurture, but the combination of those two makes me a fighter. So I have to notice this intense urge and let it pass before I can calm myself down emotionally and clear my brain enough to think with my prefrontal cortex and make more logical decisions and choices about how I'm going to show up.

So if you go into fight or flight and you tend to be like fight or freeze, you might find yourself avoiding conversations all together or not speaking up. Just kind of freezing when you find yourself around those hating conversations. Just notice yourself. Notice which way you tend to lean and

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

be aware of it. Also know that passive hating is still a form of hating. Haters are the ones who look bad, even when they're doing it passively.

So we've all done it. Don't hate on yourself for that. Just be aware of it and ask yourself, "What would I like to do to reduce the amount of time I spend in passive hate?" Or just even in your own mental hate. Even if you're not spreading it around, hate does not serve.

Number three, there's a reason people engage in hating. Number one, it makes them feel more powerful and in control in that moment. There is some temporary momentum around the hating frenzy, and it feels very justified and very righteous. It's very ego driven. Number two, people engage in hating because it's the human tribal mentality. We are wired to belong and we deeply fear being ostracized.

So when someone leads the pack with hating on someone, other people will passively join in because they feel that the hate will turn onto them. It's a very subconscious, very visceral reaction and decision, but you can see why people who normally wouldn't choose to be a hater on their own accord might get involved in situations because of their own fears about being the target.

Number three, people love them some drama. Haters are very dramatic, and people like the drama. The brain likes it. It's entertaining. It's exciting for a hot minute. The brain loves the stimulation, unless the hate turns onto us. Then brain doesn't love it so much.

Number four, hating serves no purpose. Zero. It doesn't change situations or circumstances. It doesn't make you a better person. It doesn't make the other person a bad person. So if you're hating on somebody, it doesn't turn that person magically into a bad person. It turns you into a bad person. It doesn't get you what you want. It doesn't make you stronger or more

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

powerful. It doesn't serve the world in any way, shape, or form. It just doesn't.

Now, this doesn't stop people from being haters because they think it works for them because of that immediate gratification that they're getting from it. It's also a form of buffering. If you think about it, haters are hating on you because they're avoiding taking ownership and responsibility of their own life and their own emotions. They're blaming you for how they feel. They want you to change for them to feel better.

They're using their energy, focus, time, and attention to dump on you versus getting the work at being amazing themselves. When you can see that, you can see the truth of that, the hating just doesn't have the energy it once had. It doesn't have the sharpness that it seems to have when you see that it's really about themselves 100%.

So I want you to notice. I want you to notice these truths. Haters are the ones who feel the hate. They're the ones who are miserable. Haters are the ones who look bad, not the ones being hated. There's a reason people engage in hating. If you see people who are engaging in hate that you are shocked or surprised by, notice they're reacting at a very visceral fight or flight level. There's a reason, and that can help you neutralize the pack mentality of, "They're all out to get me."

Most likely there's one person flapping their gums and the rest are just listening out of fear that it could be on them. If they don't chime in then they must be on the opposition, then they're going to be a target, right. So if you're not with us, you're with them. Kind of that mentality. Hating serves no purpose.

Finally number five, you can handle haters. It feels terrible. It is not fun my friends, but you can handle it. Here's the deal. When you understand that



## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

you're not the one doing it wrong, you're not the one that's in pain, you're not the one who looks bad, you can take a moment to see how you are so thankful for yourself for doing it right. For not reacting to those haters.

For being open to actual valid feedback and being willing to hear feedback that's authentic and helps you become a better leader, and taking responsibility and owning the faults you do have as a human and as a leader. You can look at all the ways in which you are winning in leadership and life. You can see the haters for what they really are. Haters of themselves.

Let me end with this. You don't have to let a hater consume you. You can focus on all thought ways that you are doing it right and that you are proud of yourself. This work is very important. If you don't validate yourself, if you don't have a high opinion of you and you're looking to people outside of you externally to validate you, a hater is going to take you down mentally, emotionally, physically, psychologically. You will be a mess when a hater comes at you because you believe that validation is external.

I want you to believe that you have what it takes. That you are proud of yourself. That you have your own back. You are winning when you put on positive vibes out of love into the world and into your school. You don't have to be distraught, even if the worst case scenario happens. Even if that parent that's hating on you complains to the superintendent and the superintendent buys into their story and releases you from your position. That's the worst thing you can imagine happening, and it actually happens.

You can still hold your head high knowing that you are proud of the way you handled yourself and that you have your own back. You're going to go and get yours. You're going to go find a better job in a better district of people who have the wherewithal and support you. You're going to go on and be the next best version of yourself.

## Ep #215: Dealing with the Haters

When you let that person be a hater without needing them to change and you spend your time focusing on who you want to be as a school leader in this world, you become untouchable. Your heart, your mind, and your soul become impenetrable. Eventually you will feel gratitude, and I say eventually, you will feel gratitude for the experience.

Because even in the worst cases of experiences, that experience will provide you with the strategies and tool and knowledge and information about yourself and the world that you need to step into your future, to become the version of you that has more value to offer, more support to provide, more love to give. Haters can never take away from you. They can only give you experience. You know what? They hate that.

If you want support through the experience of a hater whether you have one now, you need to process one from your past, or you're afraid you might have one in the future, sign up immediately for the Empowered Principal coaching program. It's my one-on-one exclusive coaching program specifically for school leaders. The best part about it? It's private. It's confidential. It's with me personally, and you do not have to worry because we are going to process this in a very private confidential way.

So if you want help, sign up immediately. Let's get started. There's no time like the present. I love you. Don't be a hater. Talk to you guys next week. Bye.

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](http://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.