

Ep #223: Navigating Teacher Observation Write-Up Season with Wendy Cohen



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Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 223.

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, and welcome to April 2022. I'm so proud of you. You have been working so hard this year and the last year with COVID, pandemics, hybrid learning, back to school, all the mask mandates, all of the things. I'm just so proud of you. I just wanted to start this month by saying that. I'm really energized and excited to share with you the theme for the podcast throughout the month of April.

I'm recording these podcasts in March, which as you know is Women's History Month. In honor of our women leaders, I'm interviewing my women clients. They're sharing with you their progress, their gains, their wins, their successes, their accomplishments.

On today's podcast, I have Wendy Cohen. She is one of my clients. She's been working with me for two years. She's been on the podcast three times now. So she's been individually, this is her second time. She was in the mastermind interview a few months ago. But her story today is about how she learned how to empower herself in terms of time management, specifically as it relates to her teacher observations.

As you know, we have a lot of things we have to do in school leadership that we don't love and that require a lot of our time and attention. It's very easy to avoid these things or procrastinate them and put them off and just

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delay them to the point that it causes such a really painful experience for us.

So I hope you enjoy Wendy's story around her experience with teacher observation documents and write-ups, and how she learned how to take full ownership of her time without making it mean something bad about her or her capacity to lead. How she turned it into something she actually finds purpose and joy in doing. Enjoy the show. Here's to all of the women school leaders out there.

Angela: So for those of you who have been listening to the *Empowered Principal* podcast for quite some time, Wendy is...She's been on the show before. This is her second, actually, this is your third appearance, I might say. Because we did a mastermind round with the group. But you showed up as an individual client at the beginning of your journey, and here we are now over a year later. Year and a half later.

Wendy: Yes, it's actually going to be two years in June.

Angela: Oh my gosh.

Wendy: That we've been working together. It's been since June 2020.

Angela: Wow, time flies when we're having fun together.

Wendy: It does. But it's so exciting to be back. So thank you for inviting me.

Angela: Oh, I'm really happy to have you. What I love about this conversation, and it's just going to be that, just an open ended conversation between Wendy and I. But her progress and her development over the course of these last two years together is so profound that I want you, as

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the listener, to really hear the journey and listen to her insights and how her thoughts have shifted and her belief systems have shifted over the course of time to help her in terms of how she experiences the job as a school leader.

So she's just got stories. I'm really gonna just open the floor to her to let her start and tell her journey. We'll just chat away and let the listeners hear, as people say, all of the tea. We got to spill the tea today.

Wendy: Yes. This is a real life being a school administrator in 2021/22 on the tail end of this pandemic. So.

Angela: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Wendy: Thank you.

Angela: So tell us all the things Wendy. Like, I'm gonna let you start where you want to start because there's so much that I want to share, and I'm gonna let you start the course of this conversation.

Wendy: Yeah, thank you. So one of the most interesting, I would say, moments of growth that I experienced recently was in thinking about like managing the default demands, the workload. In particular in January, we finished up our first observation season. So that meant making sure that all the observations were conducted, written up, like entered into the system, returned to the teachers. Any follow up meetings or like opportunities to share resources. So all of that. So that had to be done by the end of January.

I had quite a few coaching sessions with Angela through January and into February about getting those done and the deadlines and managing

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everything. I had a really tough time for a couple of weeks there, especially leading up to my February midwinter recess because I was falling behind.

Angela: That was a thought.

Wendy: Yeah. Oh yes. Good catch. That.

Angela: It was a thought you were behind, but you were feeling behind because what? What was the thought creating the feeling of being behind for you?

Wendy: I think I was like shoulding myself. Like, you should have gotten these done sooner, or you should have managed your time better. You should have prioritized better. That I should have met the deadline for when they had to be submitted. I should return them to the teachers in a more timely fashion.

So I think I had an expectation of what I wanted it to look like, and then I was looking at the reality of I mean still working very hard. Doing my best every single day, and yet still, I wasn't producing the result I wanted in that moment.

So then we come up to February break, and I'm saying Angela, I don't want to spend my whole break writing up these observations. But now I'm in this position where I have to turn them around. You know I'm putting all this pressure on myself, and I think, in my mind, I was a little bit frustrated of well, we had the omicron variant and that really cut into my time in January. Because of that is why I didn't get that done.

One of the things we coached on was well, there's always going to be something. Whether that's a new demand from the district or a new student

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is admitted to your school, and they have a lot of needs, or you're unexpectedly short staffed, and you have to cover lunch duty. I mean, there's always going to be things that come up. So Angela very quickly was like, "Hold on, is it COVID? Or is it our thoughts and our feelings about the way things are going? Which things can we control in the situation?"

We had the same conversation with back to school planning in August, which was is it just because this year everything feels crazy? Or is it gonna feel crazy all the time? So just because we had a omicron surge, you know next year, I'm going to have the same season of observations. I'm going to anticipate the same types of things even without potentially an omicron surge. It's really not about the external factors. It's really about how am I thinking about what I'm doing? How am I creating systems to make sure that I am producing the result I want.

So I had a I had a couple of very difficult weeks there of putting a lot of pressure on myself that I didn't get them done in the time that I had initially set out. In the last couple of calls, I think one of the new realizations I had was well, it's either a little bit of discomfort now, or a whole lot of discomfort later. Which one would I prefer is to do one or two each week or then spend my entire break writing up observations.

Which is essentially what ended up happening over February is that I had to write up nine reports of like five or six pages each. I really wanted to like spend time outside and have a couple day periods for myself. Yes, I really wanted to enjoy, and I didn't set myself up for success with that.

So I think I'm feeling a lot more positive, a lot more hopeful about it now, especially after coming to that realization of well I can spend my whole April break doing this too and spend my whole Memorial Day weekend doing this too, or I just make a plan and set up some systems to tackle them one

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week at a time, one observation at a time. Then set myself up to be able to enjoy those breaks.

Instead of creating the situation where now I'm under immense pressure, partially from outside, but mostly from my own self of just oh you know, if you didn't get these done by X date, it means that either I wasn't efficient or I wasn't prioritizing or I wasn't following up, you know. All the things that I like to think that I can do as a school leader, and that I know I can do because I have evidence to believe it. I think in my head I was going through a whole story about like oh, I can't do the observation writeups. That means that I must be failing or I must be unsuccessful in my role.

Angela: Yeah. Yeah. I want to point out here that it was interesting because her brain...Like okay so the subject is teacher observations. We all have to do them. Nobody loves doing them. Very few people love doing them. You can either like try to convince yourself that you love them, or you can be honest with yourself and just say like, this is something I don't like to do. As part of my role as school leader, I signed up for this, and I don't love it.

I think that honesty with ourselves allows us to understand of course, we're procrastinating. Or of course we're avoiding because we just don't like doing it. We're not gonna like every part of the job. That's the reality. Like, I love coaching, and there are parts of my business I don't prefer to do as much as other parts. Like I want to coach. I want to write content. I love the podcast. Like so many things.

But I don't love doing my taxes. I just don't. Right? But I choose to do them because I prefer that outcome of having completed my taxes on time and being a taxpaying citizen over like being somebody who's negligent and who's running her business without, you know, good books.

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So I think there's all of that balance. But what you shared was so interesting because the brain was telling you like I don't want to do this, and it was avoiding things. But it was creating the very pain that you were trying to avoid, right?

Wendy: Yes. 100%.

Angela: And in that avoidance, in that procrastination, it actually caused more pain. There was a moment where you had to decide like which one of these situations is more painful? Not doing them or just sitting down and doing them?

Wendy: Absolutely. I think it's connected with another goal I had for myself, which was to be able to disconnect a little bit more when I was going home. That's something that we've coached on so much is time. You know, you don't have to be bringing your work home every night and going home eating dinner, then opening up the computer again, and working until midnight and falling asleep on my laptop. You know, the healthy balance that I've created.

I think I saw it as, again, a mismanagement of time or a failure to stick with my boundaries if I decided and chose to use an hour of my weekend to write up an observation. I feel like that's a much more empowered position to be in to say I'm going to choose to spend one hour on Sunday morning to write up one each week and know that I'm going to get them done in 12 weeks. Than to spend my entire April break writing up observations because I didn't make a plan, and I didn't budget that time.

So I think as much as I want to say I never open up my computer at home, and I'm still figuring out that balance a little bit. For me, it was okay my goal is to do one or two a week. The best way for me to make sure that that

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happens so that I don't create the same result that happened the last time was to experiment. Just from like a playful curiosity. Like what would happen if I did one hour on a Sunday? This is not like out of control, taking over my free time and my family time, but making a conscious decision to say I would rather give up this one hour now than give up my whole spring break writing these.

So I think that was another layer of pressure of like oh but you said you were going to be more mindful of working outside of school hours, and you weren't going to take this stuff home. So that means you can never touch it again. I had to say no, it's not that I'm never going to touch it. It's that I'm going to choose when I want to and be in control and empowered about it and do it from a conscious and intentional place. And not be at the will of the emails and at the will of the workload that I had.

So that if I'm choosing to do it and get them done now, yes, it's a little bit of discomfort now, but it enables me to have that much more enjoyable experience later on where I'm not in this now time crunch or power crunch of oh my gosh, now I have to get nine write ups down over my break. I have left myself in a position where this is the time it has to get done.

So that was like another thing I was experimenting with that I felt like well, does it mean that I've failed or been unsuccessful? No, it just means that I'm still figuring out the best balance. I'm still figuring out the best time, the best place, and the best pacing to get these done as I'm only in year three.

You know, this is only my second real round of doing observations because in year one, I didn't have it. So I think through trial and error, I'm figuring out like would I rather have my entire break taken up or would I rather spend one hour on Sunday to get these done? I'll choose the one hour on

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Sunday, right? A little bit of discomfort of doing something I don't love to do now versus a whole week of it.

Angela: Yeah, that is really important. This is something I was actually just coaching another client on this earlier today. We were talking about when you are taking ownership of your time and how you how you spend your time working and when you spend your time working and you're owning that, it's all based on how it feels.

So I teach, for my clients and for those of you who listen to the podcast, you know that I teach a process for not overworking. I teach you how to not overwork. We talk about boundaries, and then we have to sit with those boundaries and be uncomfortable when we feel the urge to work. We don't give into that urge. What are we making that mean if we don't work on the nights and weekends?

Like we go through this process, but what it ultimately comes down to, what Wendy is so beautifully sharing with us, is that it's all about how you feel when you're doing the task. When you have really good healthy boundaries around work, it's not a matter of when you're doing them and if you're working on the weekend or you're working at night or you're working even on a break. That's not as important as how you feel about it.

So, for example, Wendy, I know you kind of slipped into this all or nothing mindset with like I didn't have boundaries around work at working at home. Then I created the boundaries, and I practiced them. Then I got so rigid about not letting any work slip back into that time that it was this, you were now like feeling conflicted. Like I said I was gonna hold up to these boundaries, and now I want to do this work. Where is the balance there?

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It's really how you felt about the decision to do them on a Sunday morning, a little bit each week, so that you didn't have this blast of having to do them throughout your whole break. Now other people might do it differently. They might prefer the blast, or they might do it on in the evenings. Like, this is what I'm saying. It doesn't matter when you do the work, even if it's outside of your boundary sometimes. It matters how you feel about doing the work at that time. So for you, it sounds like Sunday mornings was the sweet spot.

Wendy: Yeah. I don't prefer to come in at 6:00 a.m. I know some people like to be here, the first one before any students or staff arrive, and that's their quiet time to get stuff done. That wasn't working for me. My mind is not sharp really at the end of the day to stay late and do them. That wasn't working for me.

I tried to get it done a little bit during the school day, but I found that there were a lot of interruptions. I really needed that sustained focus time. So that wasn't working great for me. Obviously leaving them to get them done over the break. I was like devastated that I had to spend my whole break doing them. So that was not working for me.

So I said let's try something different. I'm going to try and just pace them out. In our coaching call last week, you said to me it's just math. So if I have to do 16 observations, if I do one to two each week, it's very manageable and it's doable. I'm choosing to use that time and do it that way because I'm finding that that's a better fit for the way I work and just who I am. So it's just math.

Angela: Yeah. This is so great because, especially for this particular thing because it truly was a math problem to solve. Where it was like I have eight weeks. I have 16 observations. I mean this is what, third grade/fourth grade

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math where we're going to divide by two and then we can hold ourselves accountable to two. That feels reasonable, justifiably. It feels good, right. It's a manageable situation.

So I do love to look at our leadership experience as math because it makes it more believable that there's a solution. There's always a solution. We can always figure this out. I think you even said like this is figure out-able. I'm going to figure this out.

You know, as teachers, we teach a concept called fact and opinion in our in our studies. The brain offers us facts, and it offers us opinions. We spin out on our opinions, right? So here's the facts of the situation, which is the math part. Then we have our thoughts about the facts, which is the mind drama part, right. Which is the story, which is the opinion of those facts.

As school leaders, we want to practice separating those two out. Like here are the facts of the situation, and here's what I'm making it mean. What else might this mean? Then keep questioning that and playing with it, like you said, from a place of curiosity, and figuring out where the sweet spot is for you. Because for every leader it's different.

Like you said, some people love mornings. Some people are night people. Some people are like I want to get up and hammer it out on the on the weekend. Other people are like, I don't mind taking the break because I've got some downtime. There's no wrong way. Or you can do it at work by the way. Like there's no wrong way to approach a big task, especially one you don't like.

But I think the key really is how do you feel when you're doing it? Because this is another thing I've really learned in the last few weeks is that you can technically take action. You can check off your to do list and take these

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actions that you said you were going to take, but the result that they create differs depending on how you felt while you were doing it, right.

Because for Wendy basically what just happened is her February experience was excruciating. It was painful. She felt shame. She felt guilty. It was sad. There was a lot of sadness there, and a lot of pain. I felt for her. I know that experience. We've all done that to ourselves with our mind, but she needed that experience to understand like okay, that is definitely not how I want to feel and how I want to experience writing up these observations.

Then that opened her mind up to playing around with well, what will work? Let's try this. Let's try that. Let's try this. Until it was like ah, it's obvious to me that a Sunday morning at the cafe having a beautiful cup of coffee, writing these out, the experience of the observation process for you is better, right? Then that makes you not dislike the process as much. You're like oh, now I know when those observations come, I'm going to treat myself to a cup of coffee and hammer them out Sunday morning.

Then I'm going to plan. This is the other piece of advice I have for the listeners. Plan something very fun after those observations. So you're getting them done and you're looking forward to your afternoon, in this case, right Wendy?

So can you walk us through the transition in your mind from the February experience to the upcoming one in April? Actually, as this airs, it's going to be the beginning of April.

Wendy: Ah, perfect.

Angela: Yeah, it'll be perfect for listeners to hear.

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Wendy: Yeah. So I definitely had a couple of coaching calls with you where I worked this out. Even speaking to my principal, I'm an assistant principal now. Getting his take on best practices and ideas and where I was at and my plan to approach them in the next round.

One of the things I realized that Angela helped coach me on is it doesn't have to take 90 minutes. It can actually take 45 minutes, and that's totally fine. You know it's still gonna be a long write up. It's still gonna be detailed, but I don't have to belabor over it nearly as much as I was originally putting pressure on. So that alleviated some of the stress that came along with it.

Something else that I realized in going through this was I actually don't hate giving teachers feedback. I hate the tediousness of doing the write up.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: And tagging it and aligning with the framework and entering into the online system. Some of the paperwork is a little bit tedious. But I actually love going into classrooms. I love talking about curriculum and instruction. I love giving teachers ideas and seeing them to implement it. That stuff lights me up.

So the whole process, while it's not my favorite thing to go into the online system and go into the rubric and the framework and do all the nitty gritty of that part. I actually like the conversation that's happening between me and teachers and remembering the purpose of it and why we're doing these. It's not to enter it on time into the system. It's to provide teachers feedback about their practice and give them some next steps that are going to be helpful and bring another set of eyes into the classroom.

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So that reminder of like wait actually it doesn't have to be something that is so horrible and that I hate doing. I actually do like the purpose of the process. I just don't necessarily love the tediousness of the write-up part.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: So that was like another big realization there.

Angela: I love that so much because what you did was you found a way to find the process valuable. So what you did was you looked for the ways in which you did like the process.

So many times when we don't like something, our brain immediately goes to here are the 50 things I hate about teacher observation write ups. They take time. They're tedious. The technology doesn't work. It doesn't really matter. Teachers don't care. Whatever. Like our brain goes into this mah, mah, mah, mah of like what is wrong with the system that we don't like? It gives us lots of evidence to keep on hating it.

Wendy: Oh, yeah.

Angela: What you did was like what do I like about it? What does work? What is valuable about this? What is purposeful? What is meaningful for me? What is the value for teachers? What is the whole point of my choosing to take on this task, right? It's more than just compliance. For some of us, it feels like just compliance, but that's because we're believing I'm only doing this because I have to versus where can I see the value in this?

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Or like even if I don't see the value in it, how do I create value? How do I decide this is a valuable use of my time? Make it valuable. Make it feel valuable and meaningful. Does that make sense?

Wendy: Absolutely. I think that the cafe excursion and making it like a special weekend adventure and then rewarding yourself. I feel like even if you don't love curriculum and instruction that's not your jam, you can still find a way to create a nice routine and a ritual around it. Where you're carving out time for yourself and you're giving yourself that time to get your mind wrapped around the things you have to do and look at the week ahead. Just take that little bit of time of okay, I'm gonna see this teacher's math lesson on Thursday. Then on Sunday I'll write it up, and she'll have it back on Monday.

Something else that between February and now I think I've realized is just by having a system. Even if I haven't actually done 16 write ups, just knowing that I have done the math, and I put the visits on the calendar, and I have the Sunday morning time carved out. Just knowing what the plan is and when it's going to happen makes me feel so much better about the whole thing.

Angela: Yeah.

Wendy: Like well I'm only in my second week of doing this. So I've only done four out of my 16, but I know that I'm going to be on track to get them done because I have a system in place. I've done this math problem. This third grade math problem. Then something else is that I think I was also a little bit ashamed of asking for help or even asking for the check-ins from my principal.

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I just said to him, “Hey, I'm going to be putting it on the calendar. I'm going to put it on your calendar too so that you know when I'm going in. It would be really helpful if on Mondays you can just check in and say, hey did you get those two write-ups done for the week? Just to keep me accountable, and to keep me on top of it and to make sure it's top of mind.” Not because I can't do it by myself, but because I shouldn't have to because it's okay to ask for that type of support and that kind of accountability on it.

Because I'd much rather have that conversation with my principal of, “Yup, I observed her on Friday. I wasn't able to do it this Sunday because I had a family party, but I'm planning on doing it Wednesday morning when we have this other meeting going on. She should have it by Friday.” You know, I feel much more comfortable having that conversation with my principal than, “Hey, it's now January. We're going into February break. I need to see these 10 write-ups, and what's going on? How can we get these done?”

So to ask for help and just say, “Hey, this is my new plan. This is my new system. It'd be really helpful if you can just check in with me, and you'll see them on your calendar. You can follow up and make sure that I got to them. Makes me feel so much better. Because really his goal and my goal are the same, which is that I get them done and that teachers get the feedback.

So in asking for help and having his support, it's a win/win for both of us and for the teacher because they'll get them in a more timely way. It's no indication of a failure or weakness or inability to manage my time or inability to prioritize that I'm asking him to keep me on track with them. It's actually to both of our benefit and to the whole school and the students benefit too.

So that was another I had to kind of get over that story about well, if I need someone else to check up on me, that means I can't do it by myself. It's no.

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How great is it that you have someone who wants to support you and is able to take a few minutes to do that? Because you're on the same team, and you have the same goal.

So that was another like ah okay. I don't have to be embarrassed and ashamed that they're not getting done. I can ask for help and feel empowered about hey, this is the kind of support I need. At the end of the day, I'm still the one writing them. It's not my principal, you know. He can give me the reminders, but it's just to make sure that I'm doing the things that I have to do.

Angela: To great ah-has here. These are two empowered thoughts I want people to take away from the podcast today. Is number one, asking for help is not a problem. It's not a sign of weakness. It's not a sign that you're dependent on somebody else. It's not a sign that you're incapable or incompetent. It's a sign of awareness and accountability and responsibility. You're taking ownership and responsibility when you ask for help with the things you need help on.

What's irresponsible, what's not taking into accountability or responsibility is avoiding, procrastinating, not asking for the help. Then getting yourself into this space where now you're feeling ashamed of yourself for being in this hole that you've dug.

Second big takeaway. I think if every school leader could believe this thought to their core, there would be so much more trust in the educational system. That is we are on the same team. I preach this on the top of the mountain tops to all of my clients because you work with people all day. It's very easy to get cynical or to get negative or to start to critique or feel defensive when people are coming at you sideways and going off the rails. People say a lot of things and can behave in crazy ways.

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But if you can find the spot where you are on the same team, like with a parent, you guys are both on the same team for that student. You both want that student to have a happy, successful experience. As your principal, your boss, you're on the same team. Your district, your teachers, especially. Like leaning into believing you're on the same team and you trust your teammates and they have a lot to offer. You know, we're working towards the same goal.

Being in that energy feels, to me, so much better. It feels different than thinking I'm the boss, and they're the teachers. They're fighting against us. The parents are after you. Like it just creates a conflict with inside of you that I just think that's not a fun way to experience school leadership at all.

Wendy: No. I definitely have had that thought spiral of oh my principal wants to know how many more observations do I have to do before the deadline. He's checking up and this and this. I had to say it's not a gotchu. It's how can I help you? How can I support you? Can I take something off your plate to help you create more space for those, right? That we actually are on the same team.

So, you know, by having him check in on me, it's not because he's like wagging a finger in the air, like uh-oh you didn't get your two done this week. It's in order to be supportive and in order to create these kind of guideposts along the way.

If I have to just say honestly, I didn't get to it this week because we had state exams. I'm going to have another two on the calendar for next week. Again, I'd rather open up that dialogue and have someone check in with me. Then I have to remind myself it's not because you're doing something wrong. It's because we are all working together, and we are all on the same

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team to make sure that our teachers get feedback and our students get the best experience that they can get in school.

Angela: Yes. I also want to add something here that okay. This is such a good conversation. Number one, her belief that they were on the same team is what generated the result of her boss responding to her in a way that is yes. He is mirroring her belief we're on the same team. Because if when Wendy doesn't go to him and doesn't ask him that she needs support, or needs help, or wants an accountability partner in all of this, she's not being on the same team, right? Because she's withholding how she's feeling, what's going on for her. So she's not being a teammate.

In hindsight, then he has to come in and kind of be the questioner. Like, what's going on here? We need those reports done. Versus her being open and saying like look honestly, here's where I'm at. Here's where I want to be. I've done the work. I made a plan. I also know that these go off course. There are times when things come up at work, and you don't get them done. That's okay too knowing that you have a plan for the big picture. Right.

So you still believe I'm going to meet my deadline. I have a plan two plus two plus two plus two, whatever, is 16. Even if the two shifts around a little bit during the bigger picture, it doesn't matter. Because at the end of the day, you believe we're on the same team. I'm going to meet the deadline whether I do three this week and two next week and one here.

I don't want people to get caught up on I was supposed to do to this week, and I only got one done. Now I've got to do three, and now I'm behind. Then you go into this cycle. Because that is what's going to spin you into the like the bottomless pit of despair.

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Wendy: Yes.

Angela: Right.

Wendy: Of like the expectation versus reality. I think anticipating that things are going to come up and you had on your schedule you're going to go see math during fifth period, and then you show up there and they had a field trip or they had a special presentation.

Angela: Yeah. Things happen.

Wendy: Something had been at recess and the classes doing like a little restorative circle or something. The lessons not starting at that time, but you have to go to a meeting. I mean I think it's exactly like you said. Life happens, and there's got to be flexibility.

We've coached on this also just as far as my inner dialogue with myself and my self-talk. Thinking about well, if your friend were experiencing this, what would you say to your friend about it? What kind of thoughts and what kind of words would you use versus yourself, right? It's so much easier when you when you imagine that your friend is going through that versus yourself.

I think about if a teacher came to me and said, "Hey, I know that I have my grades due on this day. This thing came up. I have a plan to get it done by Sunday." I am so much more compassionate and have more respect and value that teacher and the trusting relationship we have versus what do you mean? You said you're going to get them done by Friday. Now you need until Monday. You didn't stick with your plan. When I think about that relationship, I would never want to be insensitive or inflexible with my teachers if they came to me with that.

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So why should I have that same concern going to my principal and saying, “Hey, I only got one this week because we have state exams, but I already have three on the calendar for the week following. I should be caught up by this day. If I'm having any issues, I'll reach out to you and let you know. Or hey, this other thing is coming up, and I know that I'm going to be pulled in a lot of different directions. Is there some way you can take this off my plate to help me stick with my goal?”

It becomes a dialogue then. It doesn't become an I gotchu or a I should have done this and a shame spiral. Sometimes I have to remind myself like if this were someone else experiencing this, what would I say? What would I offer to help alleviate that person's stress? Then just reminding that I also deserve that kind of grace and flexibility too.

Angela: With yourself, right?

Wendy: In my relationships. Absolutely.

Angela: Yeah, you want to be aware of the self-talk because the self-talk is what takes you down faster than anything. I love your strategy. I mean, I teach this strategy to other people, but definitely I always say to myself, like to my son. Would I ever say what I'm saying to myself to my child, my own child or to a student? If the answer is a no, then it has to be a no for me. Like I tell myself, you are not allowed to talk to me that way. Like let's look at this. Have some compassion with ourselves and some grace.

It's easy to tell other people, oh you're human. This happens. Things come up. It's not so easy to do that with ourselves. So we have to be aware and train ourselves with that. So I love that you consider like what would I say to my friend because it softens it immediately.

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I also want to share like just because Wendy and I, you know, we were in the mastermind. One of our colleagues, Jenna, we're going to give a shout out to Jenna. She gave us a time hack for teacher evaluations. I just want Wendy to share that because we're stealing it from Jenna. Jenna, sorry about this.

But I know Jenna's going to be on the podcast soon, and we're not talking about teacher evaluations. But because we are here today, I want to share that time hack because it is so valuable. It's such a time saver when you do it this way. Do you want to speak to that, Wendy, a little bit?

Wendy: Yes. I have been implementing it a little. We already shared a hack from Dina too so I'll give her a shout out in a second also. But the time hack I learned from Jenna was we were having a conversation about how once a couple of weeks have gone by, and you're trying to read your notes and kind of remember like what was going on in the lesson. You're like, hold on. It's no longer fresh in my mind. Let me look at the photos I took on my phone of all the charts and the activities and try and jog my memory.

So what Jenna does that I thought was brilliant is she actually double books the observation on her calendar. So in my district, we have a minimum of 15 minutes that we have to see a lesson for an informal observation. I usually like to stay for 20 minutes, maybe 25 depending on what part of the lesson I see.

So instead of just having it on my calendar for 20 minutes, you actually book the whole hour. Or if it's if it's a longer observation, you would book double the time. Then what Jenna does, which is so funny, she finds a secret location where no one's gonna find her. She'll tell her secretary.

Angela: We're ratting her out.

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Wendy: I am hiding. Sorry, just totally spilled your secret. So call the secretary and say I'm going to hide out in the library for the next half hour, and she'll go and she'll type it up right there on the spot while it's fresh. Which is genius because then you don't have to do the initial mental gymnastics of what did I mean when I said TS agrees 10 hands? You're like, what? What did that even mean? You're like trying to make sense of it.

So while I haven't been able to do the complete write up as my second half yet, what I have been doing is writing out my next steps immediately after. That way I don't have to sift through all my notes about the teacher said this and the students said this. 10 students raised their hands. The transition to four small groups and the stations rotated.

I will say something like differentiate the word period and give the students something to do while the one student's writing on the board. Like I'll write for myself what are the next steps. That way when I'm giving the feedback, I know that the things that were fresh and were the most meaningful action items for the teachers as the next steps are not going to be forgotten in the space between the time the observation happens, and when I'm actually reading over the notes and saying, "What did I even mean when I wrote that?" Because you remember because you were right there and you actually have it fresh.

So yes, I've been implementing that. Even just having like those two next steps written out and maybe highlighting a couple of key parts in the lesson. Even if I can't write my five page report in those 30 minutes, at least I know what I wanted to say. By the time Sunday comes around, I can revisit and say oh, yes, yes, yes, exactly. Because the one student was writing on the board, and everyone else was kind of watching along, but they can have their own copy. Then they could write it too.

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That would be a much more engaging way of doing it instead of me reading the notes and being like huh? What did I mean here? What was I trying to say?

Angela: Yeah. It is such a time saver to capture your observation in real time. Basically, this is what's happening because you can't be capturing the observation while you're observing. You think you are, but like you're typing up some things or you're taking some notes, but then there's that moment right afterwards where you're processing the observation, and it's right there. You're right there in your memory. It's right in front of you.

You don't have to spend time wasting time going back through to reengage that memory because it's right there. You can write it all out and spit it out in a matter of a few minutes. At least, like get an outline or notes or however works for you. Get some specific comments you wanted to make, get those captured. Then you have such a better sense of if you have to go in and do the scoring. Like everybody is different in terms of their format but go in and do the scoring and the commenting to a deeper level.

I think it's brilliant. It is definitely how I did my observations. Once I figured that little that little secret out, it made it so much less painful. So I'm happy to hear that you're trying it out. You'll have to let us know how it goes for you, but it sounds like it's working.

Wendy: Yeah. Even if, again, I can't get the entire write up done. I have to sit with the rubric and really tease through, at least I know what it is that I want to say once that scoring piece is done and the tedious piece is done. Again, the valuable part of the process, which I find is the actual feedback, not the entering into the system part. I know that is going to be done in a high quality way because I'm taking the time while it's fresh to get that part done.

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Angela: Yeah.

Wendy: So that's been feeling really good. Then I have to also just shout out. We already shouted out Jenna, but I also want to shout out Dina. She's the one who gave me the make it like a Sunday ritual, go to a café, and make it like a special adventure just for you. But I know that you also have talked with Dina about how much space you give something.

I kind of alluded to this earlier where if you put the time on your calendar and you say I have an hour on Sunday morning. You could belabor it, and you can stretch it out. You can say, "Okay, I want to come back to this later because I really want to make sure I reread that part and I revise that part. Oh, I'll wait another day to hand this back because I want to revisit that." Or you can just say I gave myself an hour. I'm going to produce what I can produce in an hour. Let me read it over, make sure there's no like glaring errors or anything like that.

But you could probably go back to this for days and days and days and spend hours and hours and hours and still find things to add in. Because there's always more to improve and there's always more that you don't get to discuss about a lesson because so much is happening in such a short time.

I find that it grows to the amount of space that you give it. By giving it like a hard cap and just say okay, like I got three components done in 30 minutes. Now I'm going to move on to the next component. I'll go back and I'll clean up my notes, but I'm not going to rewrite that whole section again. Even if well, let me sleep on it. Maybe I'll think of something else I want to add. It's like no. Just give the feedback you want to give. Don't overthink it. Keep it moving. You could spend all day or you can spend an hour.

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It's one of those done is better than perfect things. Where not that I'm going to be negligent or not give decent feedback. I want to make sure that I'm giving meaningful notes, but I'm also not going to stress out that it's not like a professional text on education every time I write a write up for a teacher. Like it can just be this is what I saw. This is what I thought was really working in your classroom. Here's some ideas to integrate next time and call it a day.

Angela: Yes. Okay, so many good nuggets here. Number one, do not get in the cycle of the eternal editing syndrome. Where you are eternally or endlessly editing and editing and editing. That's just a form of perfection, right, that's kind of bubbling up to the surface. Because you're thinking it's not good enough. It's not good enough. It's not good enough. The problem with endless editing is that it's a diminishing return on investment. So the more time you invest in these teacher observation, the less return on your time investment you're getting.

The other thing I want to say is when you go with your gut instinct, you've got to trust that what came up for you in that observation is what was needed to be said. You don't have to say it all. You say what comes up in the observation for you in that moment. Here's the one little nugget. Look, teacher's not going to implement 10 different new things you offer. Find one thing. Give them lots of love, find the one thing, and then let them just kind of chew on that and think about it and process it and see how that is true feedback and how they can implement it. That's it.

If you can offer that every single time and trust that your initial observation feedback is the right observation feedback and is what they need to hear, you don't have to fill in the blanks to polish it to perfection. What does that even mean anyway? But I'm going to tell you waste of time, B plus work. It's what they need to hear. Trust the process.

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With Dina, I told her. I said you've got to play the time test game where she was giving hours on end to these observations. I was like, no, no, no. We're not doing that, right? Like, we're gonna start with an hour. She got it down, you know. She's doing them between, you know, 15 minutes and probably 45 minutes at most, but.

Wendy: Yeah.

Angela: Actually, she just went to the cafe this weekend. So she's thrilled.

Wendy: Oh, great. I'm sure she had a yummy drink too.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: Absolutely. I think I probably spend 45 minutes/an hour on them because, again, I'm still learning the rubric. I want to make sure I'm using the languaging and doing a decent job at it. But also, less is more. You know at first I was like but I didn't include any comments on the bulletin boards. It's like maybe there was nothing to comment. Maybe the real feedback you wanted to give was about the small group activity that the kids were working on. Maybe you don't even need to write a comment about the bulletin boards.

But as you're saying, like the going back and revising and adding on and adding on is like how many next steps can people have before they lose focus on what it is that was the most important thing. Maybe that extra bulletin board comment that I didn't even need to add in the first place is now distracting from the real meat and potatoes of the feedback I wanted to give.

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Maybe easier and more intuitive for the teachers to read something that's, here's what I loved. Here's some next steps. Take away all the fluff of and your bulletin boards had the student created work. It's not that—

Angela: Nobody cares. No.

Wendy: You had an organization system for the materials.

Angela: Yeah.

Wendy: The things that are not the focus of the write up, don't—

Angela: I love this.

Wendy: You don't have to go and add in extras just to add in extras. Just focus on the things that are important and less is more.

Angela: Yeah, this is so brilliant. Cut out all the fluff. Say the one thing you really want to say that you want them to focus on, even if it's not the easy thing to say or the fun thing to say or the fun thing for them to hear. But I will tell you this. Like what's so great about that is you're making it more valuable because you are practicing constraint.

So here's what's happening. When you think you've got to tell the teacher everything, that becomes about you. Who you are as a leader. Am I giving enough feedback? Do am I doing my job? Am I being competent enough? The evaluation turns into what it is about you. I want school leaders to practice the art of constraint. What's the one thing in the most simple clear terms that this teacher needs from me right now? Go. Like say the one thing and let them go. Then you have to practice that art of restraint in wanting to say all the things.

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Because you're just overwhelming them and you're not going to get an effective feedback response from that teacher if they're having to filter through pages and pages of feedback. Doesn't make sense. You wouldn't do that to a student. We don't want to do it to teachers, right?

Wendy: Absolutely. I think there is ways to make this process meaningful with the feedback, and then there's also the rest of your relationship with the teacher outside of just the write up, right.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: So I do two write-ups a year. I'm in their classrooms every day, or at least a few times a week that I pop in and I say hi. Or we do walkthroughs or something like that. If I really want to say something about the bulletin board, or I want to say something about the kid whose desk is a mess inside, that can happen in the 98% of the time outside of the write-up.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: Use the write-ups as a place to focus the most important key pieces of feedback. It's not the only opportunity that I have to speak to this teacher about things I'm seeing as like another set of eyes in the room. So I always just want to like prioritize, you know, the write up is for a certain purpose, but it's not the only opportunity to have conversations with the teacher. There's so much more to our relationship and my role as a supervisor than just what goes in the five page write-up two times a year.

Angela: Right. Exactly. Oh, that's so good. The formal observation is not the only space to provide feedback, and the 98% of time where you're in there just building relationship and being with students, that is a perfect time to give lots of love and kudos about the bulletin boards and other little

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things that I see. I see this, I hear you, I acknowledge you. I'm celebrating this part of you, but it doesn't have to go into the formal observation. That's so brilliant.

Wendy: Absolutely. I even think of the same for report cards. I'm sorry to cut you off. The same thing for students. You have one or two parent teacher conferences a year. Are you going to spend the time talking about their progress in reading and writing and math? Or you're going to spend the entire meetings talking about behavior? Right?

Let's focus on the real reason that we're here is to make sure your students are growing and learning and getting a high quality education. We're gonna acknowledge that the behavior is something that we're working on too, but let's like focus on the most important thing in that space. Then build the relationship and have time to address those things outside of there.

Like you can tell a student hey as reminder, we're not talking in the hallway, but you're not going to do it in a reading conference or a writing conference or during a math test. You're going to have that conversation outside of that time. So it's like making that time purposeful and not letting it take over the entire relationship you have with the teacher.

Angela: Yes. This is what I teach in the coaching program is prioritizing and constraining. Then like understanding when to implement different aspects of your leadership skill set, and when those conversations are appropriate and aren't. So I mean, that's wonderful. Okay, we're wrapping up on time. I just want to like, is there any... I know it's been an hour already. Can you believe it? Is there any last words of wisdom, thoughts that you want to share with people out there?

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I really want you to share like where are you now, and how does it feel now versus how it felt in February? Just kind of summarize like if there's one little gift you could give them, what would it be in terms of a thought?

Wendy: I think my feeling now is just a sense of empowerment, a sense of confidence, and a sense of being in control. Where in February I was like oh my gosh. I let this escape me or I let this fall through the cracks. Something like that, and was, again, putting so much pressure on myself.

I think one of my big takeaways and something that I didn't mention is just knowing what the flow of the year feels like and knowing what the cycles of the year are. We talked about balancing like times when you're onstage and you're visible and you're out in the halls now in the classrooms and times when you're more behind closed doors. You're in meetings. You're doing computer based stuff, and you may not be as present in the in the hallways.

Just knowing that there will be times during the year where both of those things will be possible. It's okay if during write up season, I'm behind closed doors more. During observation season, I'm out and about more. That like there's nothing wrong, you know. I think part of our coaching has been like you're having this thought or you're having this story, but is there actually any problem?

Is there actually something wrong with during these this two week time, you're spending a little bit of time on write-ups because that's when your deadline is? Or knowing the beginning of the year, you're going to have this taking up a lot of space on your schedule. Or testing season you're not going to be in classrooms observing because students are taking state exams. Just anticipating that and knowing it's okay, and I'm expecting it, and it's normal. Instead of like I should be doing something different.

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So like during those weeks of state exams, I'm not going to be giving myself a hard time if I didn't get my two observations done this week. I'm like hello, they're taking a state test. You're not getting two observations done this week. You can anticipate that. You can expect it and there's actually not a problem because you know about it.

The same thing for the different seasons of the year. Graduation time, back to school time, the day before Halloween. I mean, there are lots of times in the year when it's going to be possible. I'm going to have more bandwidth. There's other times in the year when I'm just going to accept and expect that that's not going to be the time to do it, and there's actually nothing wrong.

Angela: Yeah. I love that. That is golden. I mean, you guys, I actually need to have Wendy on again because there's so much we didn't get to cover today.

Wendy: Oh my gosh. Yes.

Angela: I would love—Like the last few weeks have been magic with you. All the breakthroughs and all of the successes. Just your belief system shifts around your ownership of your time, your ownership of your energy, and just knowing, like working with other people, what's theirs and what's yours. Really feeling like full ownership and empowerment of who you are in your position. It has been just magical to watch.

I'm just so honored to be your coach and be a part of it all. And to know you just as a friend and as a client. I look forward to having more of these conversations with you because there're so much fun.

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Wendy: Yes, me too. I am so grateful. I think as a professional, this coaching has pushed me so much. But the most important thing I've gotten is just to know myself so much better and to be able to catch myself. Like ah, you're doing that thing again. Or o hey, you know that you don't really love doing these write-ups. So don't throw a tantrum about it. Just create a system and create a plan.

Angela: Yeah.

Wendy: So just knowing myself and knowing my style and knowing the way I work and being able to reflect on how things are going and having a coach as like a processor to help me through that. I feel like I know myself so much better.

Yes, I still have plenty of things that I'm working on, but just being aware of like yep. That's something that my brain likes to do. Okay. Yep. I know that that's something that I can always talk to Angela about on Tuesday when I coach with her. Having that support has just, again, it's been like a feeling of relief knowing that I always have my coaching sessions and always having you to help me. Again, everything's figure outable.

Angela: Yes. It is.

Wendy: To just help me work through whatever's coming up. So.

Angela: Right. Oh, thank you so much. It's so fun. Here's what I love about this. I just want to say for people who are new to coaching, I have really come to realize like how few people understand what coaching is and how it helps and what the experience of coaching. It's new to educators. I think we talk about instructional coaching, but this is very different, right?

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This is my mindset coaching based on how we're thinking and feeling, and what we want. And getting very clear on the results we want to create for ourselves and the experience we want to have as leaders, both in our professional life and our personal lives. We want to have that balance.

But what's really fun about this is you can create awareness. You can be like onto yourself, and still need coaching, right? Like, I see my brain acting up all the time, but I can't always coach myself around it or see through it. So it's fun to know to show up to a call and be like, here's what I know is going on with me. It helps solve the problem so much faster, right?

Because if you think about if you had gone through that experience in February, but you weren't able to process it with a set of eyes outside of your own, that cycle might repeat itself many, many times before your brains like that's it. We cannot do this anymore, right? Versus we were able to break it after one cycle.

Wendy: Yeah. To say hey, I see what's happening here. I know what you're doing, you know. I have plenty of things, you know, processing emotion and being present for discomfort. I can refresh my emails and respond to emails lightning fast all day to avoid doing something that I really don't want to do.

But just knowing that that's why I'm doing it and to say wait, you just checked your emails five minutes ago. You still haven't finished that observation right up. Let's call ourselves out on that, you know. We talked about this with Angela. Let's catch ourselves. Let's use those strategies that we planned on.

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So just knowing yourself and knowing the way that your brain works, sometimes for good or for bad. It's just information and helps you make a different choice. So.

Angela: So fun.

Wendy: It's been a fun experimental process figuring all that out. Again, just so grateful to have someone who I can be very honest with even when I don't want to necessarily acknowledge all those things outside myself.

Angela: Yeah. But we're on to ourselves. We know like honesty just helps us figure this out faster, right? I get it. I do it too all the time. Totally. So anyway, such a pleasure. I'm so glad you came back on the podcast. People are gonna love this because they're in the throes of end of year activities, observations, letting people go, hiring, observation, like all things HR, all things end of the year, lots of big tasks coming up. I really hope this has been helpful for those out there who are struggling to manage time.

I'm definitely going to be having more people on the podcast this month to talk about their different time management strategies, how they're using their resources, you know financial resources, or just people resources, their human resources, to really help you guys figure out this whole game. Because this job is huge. It's big, and we want to manage not just our time, but our resources, and our energy. Our emotional energy, physical energy, mental energy. So thank you so much for being here.

Wendy: Absolutely.

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