

## Ep #233: Why Mental Health Matters



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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## Ep #233: Why Mental Health Matters

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 233.

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.

Hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday and welcome to June. You made it. Most of you are done. You've crossed the finish line. I just want to congratulate you on a year well done. Next week, I'm going to talk about how to wrap up the year and prepare yourself for next year. I have a process I'm going to teach you.

But this week, I'm jumping in at the beginning of June here, and I'm recording this in May. So for those of you who follow the podcast you know that I tend to record a month in advance. So this podcast is really dedicated to the month of May, which, as many of you know, is Mental Health Awareness Month. So I'm taking a moment to acknowledge and honor the intention behind Mental Health Awareness Month and the personal meaning it has for me.

I'm going to share something with you that's very personal to me because I want you to understand the value of your own mental and emotional wellness and the importance of prioritizing mental and emotional wellness in our schools. And the cost of not making this work a priority for ourselves, those we lead, our students, and our community.

At the end of April, I learned that a very dear family friend had ended her life. This conversation today is in honor of her. I can only hope that her life leads to a legacy of normalizing conversations around physical, mental, and emotional wellness in our schools for every single person on our campus and in our school communities.

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When I learned about the news of my friend, I reacted in the way any other person might react when they receive shocking and heart wrenching news. I had a visceral emotional reaction. I had a physical illness come over me. I was in shock. I remember gasping. I remember putting my hand over my mouth. I remember I just kept saying no, no, no. I almost hyperventilated. I was nauseous. My head was spinning. My brain was just in confusion almost. It was asking why? What happened? How could this be? Not her. This doesn't happen to people like her.

After the initial waves of grief washed over me, my coaching brain couldn't help but kick in. I started thinking about her STEAR cycle. I thought about what she must have been thinking and feeling in order to make the decision she made to take the action of ending her life. So I put it in a STEAR cycle. The A-line, the approach that she decided on, the decision she made, the action she took was to end her life.

At first, it was really hard. I couldn't imagine. I couldn't imagine the thoughts that must have been going through her mind and the emotions that she must have been feeling. My mind didn't want to go to the place because I was so consumed by my own thoughts and my own grief. But as the days went on, I couldn't stop thinking about what happened. Of course, I'll never really know. I can only speculate. My theory is that it boiled down to something like this.

My theory is that her thoughts about the 50/50 balance of life became unbalanced. That life in her mind might have tipped to 80/20 or 90/10. That life was 80% hard and just 20% joyful or maybe 90% difficult and 10%, or 99. I don't know. What I do want to acknowledge about this specific situation is that in my friend's case, she was dealing with a chronic medical issue that included very intense pain.

So she had actually been managing her physical pain for years with her mental and emotional resilience. My friend was mentally and emotionally as

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strong as she could be to deal with her physical pain. You would not have labeled my friend as mentally or emotionally unstable. You would have not seen any signs of that interacting with her. Very pleasant, very smart, very successful, kind, generous, loving.

I think what most people assume is that when people make a decision to end their life, the assumption is that the driving force behind that decision is that they were mentally or emotionally unstable. I don't know that this was the case for my friend. But I do know that it is the case for other people.

I will say that I do believe that our physical and mental and emotional being is all intertwined. There's no separation between the physical, the mental, and the emotional aspect of our humanness, and they are all intertwined and impacted by one another.

So the physical pain in her life created thoughts around the unbalance of a 50/50 life experience. I'm assuming that the physical pain created thoughts that led her to believe that life wasn't possible to be 50/50. That it was unbearable and insurmountable. That it was going to be a 90/10 experience for the rest of her life. That it was permanent. That her future, as she looked into her future, all she could see was more pain than joy. That the scales had tipped unfavorably for her.

Perhaps she wasn't able to see that her life still was 50/50 even with this pain. Maybe she wasn't able to focus on the time she was happy because of the pain, or maybe the 50/50 didn't feel compelling enough for her. I'm guessing that the physical pain in her life fully engulfed her mind to the point she wasn't able to access thoughts that allowed her to feel the emotions of hope and trust and belief and faith and optimism. That the only solution she was able to access felt justifiable and reasonable to her.

I've agonized over her STEAR cycle over the last couple of weeks as I've been processing my own grief. Even in this extreme circumstance, the

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STEAR cycle was in motion. It's just how the human brain works. It's how each and every one of our brains work, regardless of the situation, regardless of who we are, male or female or other or they. Regardless of where we live, when we were born, any experience we've ever had, the STEAR cycle is always in motion.

I want to say something very clearly. I want to acknowledge upfront that coaching, that life coaching, what I offer, what I'm trained in and what I offer, it is one approach to solutions. I believe it is an incredible approach. I believe that it's new and innovative and exciting and successful. I believe it works all of the time. I believe it is a way to create solutions. It provides solutions to many, many of the challenges we face throughout our careers and our life.

It's one of the most effective support systems I have ever experienced in my own life. And I've been through quite a bit of trauma. I'm 100% sold on the power of coaching. Coaching unveils solutions that once felt impossible. It uncovers layers of understanding as to why we do what we do, and it offers alternative ways to think moving forward. It creates our future and allows us to design the experience we most desire to have in our lives in every aspect.

This is how I have become who I am today. It's why I help hundreds of people every year become better versions of themselves. It helps you in your career and professional accomplishments. It helps you in your personal life with your friends, your family, raising your children, going through marriages, going through partnerships, going through love, going through breakups, going through heartbreaks, spiritual connection, self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others, compassion, self-care, care for other people, your relationships with humans and money and time. It's all available to us through coaching.

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It helps us lose weight. It helps us forgive our parents. It helps us trust ourselves. It helps us build up our self-confidence and our self-concept of who we are and what we're capable of achieving. It helps us build stronger relationships. Coaching offers so many solutions. It's not the only solution available. There are many other services and supports and solutions in the world to help people facilitate their mental and emotional state.

Coaching is not therapy. It is not therapy. It is not intended to diagnose or offer medical therapeutical intervention. There are people who need services beyond what coaching offers. Some people use them in combination. I have many clients who are also seeing therapists, are also seeing medical doctors. They're also seeing their dentist, of course, right? Coaching is in addition to other supports in our lives. So I have clients who have therapists and have me. Different services provide different functions.

So I want to offer that while I do believe coaching has tools and resources to offer many solutions. In most cases, coaching is not the only option available to people. In the show notes, I have listed some resources. I implore you, please, if you are struggling or somebody you know is struggling, and you need immediate assistance, please contact one of the listed resources to get the help you need.

For the purpose of this podcast, I'm here to discuss the urgency to prioritize your own mental and emotional wellbeing as the leader of your school and to support you in your work. To allow social and emotional learning for yourself, your staff, and your students to be the one priority, to give yourself permission to talk about it, to establish it as normal, to integrate it into your school culture and climate and campus, and to have it be an integral part of the school experience.

Look, I know what you're up against. Every time there is a tragedy, every time there is a school shooting, or there is a death at a school or a campus. Or anytime there has anything to do with a big national tragedy or a tragedy

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in your community or in your state or in your district, there is an immediate shout out for the need to teach mental and emotional wellness strategies in our schools.

But the reality for school leaders is that you're told to implement SEL, but not at the expense of other curriculum. Not at the expense of test scores, not at the expense of instructional minutes. So basically, what you're told is hey implement this SEL program, but don't take any time away from other things.

So what they're telling you is prioritize it but don't prioritize it. Because what really matters are test scores. What really matters are the instructional minutes. What really matters is attendance. Okay. So I want to acknowledge this. I know what you're up against. I have lived it.

At the end of the day, we all know what happens. The public cry for SEL fades. The pressure on the districts fade. The urgency fades. What happens is that you are back to being pressured about academics and test scores while having to continue to lead adults and students who are struggling mentally and emotionally. This cycle happens every time a tragedy is brought to our attention. There's a cry for change. That cry quickly fades and dissipates back into status quo and doing things the way they've always been done.

So I want you to know I understand the contradicting priorities here. You have teachers who believe that they went into teaching to teach academics, not to teach children how to navigate mental and emotional demands of being human.

I've had teachers tell their principals who work with me I didn't go into teaching for this. I'm not supposed to teach them how to be emotional or how to manage their mind. I'm here to teach curriculum. I'm here to teach academics. I know how to do a lesson plan. That's my job. My job is not to

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deal with behavior or to deal with emotions or to deal with mental distress. I'm not certified in that.

So I know, school leaders, that you have teachers pressing back on you, and that you also have bosses and district level administrators who are solely focused on getting those test scores raised, getting those raising attendance rates, raising test scores, and it puts you in a quandary.

So I want to ask you, it's just you and I here. Your boss isn't listening. Your teachers aren't listening. If you could decide on one true priority, if there really is truly only one priority, priority means one. If there's one priority, is the priority academics or is the priority SEL? Of course, I know what your brain wants to say. It wants to say the answers and. We want the answer to be and.

I do think there's a way to live in the land of and on this one. I do think it's possible to have one priority that offers the balance in the service that we provide to students. But to start with the idea of this one priority, we have to ask ourselves which priority offers us the result we most want? And does that one priority serve the other priority? So in this case, do we most want mentally and emotionally well students and staff? Do we want mentally and emotionally stable students and staff? Or do we most want them to achieve higher academic performances?

It feels like it's a tough question to answer because our brain says, "Well, ideally we want both. We want emotionally and mentally stable and resilient and well balanced humans to work with and students to teach. And we want them to be successful."

So how do we get to the land of and? How do we do both? I say yes, it's true. We do want both. We do want them to be both mentally and emotionally resilient. And we want them to be successful academically because we want them to be successful in life. Okay.

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So we have a problem to solve here. We need to come up with an answer and a solution. So I'm going to offer a coaching solution to this problem by asking a series of problem solving questions. So I want you to stick with me here. I'm going to circle back to the value of mental health. But in order to do that, I want to highlight and illustrate the connection between academic success and mental and emotional wellness.

Okay, so question number one. This is a coaching question I ask my clients. What is the problem exactly? Is there a problem here and what is it exactly? When you think about the solution to more students performing at grade level and beyond, which for now is what we're using here as the metric of academic success, right? We want them to be performing at grade level or beyond. What do you think creates that solution?

When I ask this question, what I hear most often is number one, students need to be in school. If we go through like what are the steps that need to be in place in order for students to perform at grade level. Number one, they need to be in school. Number two, they need to be engaged.

Number three, the teacher needs to be engaging and implement best practices, meaning strong teaching, strong support staff. Then number four, students and teachers need to exercise grit and resilience. These are the answers I most commonly get when I ask the question what is the problem, and what do you think the solution is?

I know. There are many other indicators and factors that go into this but hear me out. When I read the headlines on educational topics or I'm talking with a client and they're referring to student attendance and attrition, student engagement, teacher efficacy, instructional coaching, hiring quality support staff, hiring quality teachers, and looking for ways to increase staff and student's ability to stick with doing hard things and having the emotional bandwidth to keep going. This is how I know that these are the things people believe are the solution.

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So let's just assume those four areas are the solution. Let's say that's true. If we break each four of these areas down, what we're going to find are more questions. So if we break it down to number one, student attendance, two, engage students, three, teachers who engage through best practice, and four, exercising grit and resilience, we're gonna look at each one of these with more questions. Coaching involves a lot of questions by the way. Because that's how we create solutions is by asking questions.

So student attendance. Why is student attendance a problem? What makes a student want to be in school? Think about that. What makes a student want to be in school is how they feel when they are in school. It's their thoughts about school. What they're thinking about school and how they're feeling when they are in school. What they feel about their teachers, what they feel about their peers, what they feel about themselves, and their ability to learn.

Students who want to be in school have positive thoughts and feelings about school. Students who don't want to be in school have negative thoughts and feelings about school. The same is true for parents. Parents who don't require their children to attend school have different thoughts about school and formal education than do parents who can't imagine not sending their kids to school, can't imagine not requiring their students to get up and go to school every day.

But as you all know, there are parents who see the value in attendance and parents who don't see the value in attendance. And students who see the value in attendance and want to be in school and students who do not see value in attendance and wanting to be in school. Okay notice. Thoughts and feelings are driving decisions around student attendance.

Number two, engaged students. We believe that one, students need to be at school. Two, they need to be engaged. So why is student engagement a problem? Why is student disengagement a problem? When they're not

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engaged, we believe that they're not learning. Many times the data reflects this back to us.

Students who are more engaged tend to be more successful in their assessments and in their testing and in their homework and in the work that teachers observe. Students who are disengaged are sometimes not as successful. Sometimes that's true. We also know sometimes students appear to be disengaged and are actually picking up everything we're teaching. Okay. We know that's also true.

But if engagement is the answer, if that's our theory, if we believe engagement is the solution, then we have to ask ourselves why aren't students engaging? They're not engaging because of their thoughts and emotions about what's happening in that classroom. They have thoughts, they have feelings about engagement. Whether they should be engaged, whether they value engagement, whether they care, what engagement looks like, whether it's important to them, whether it's captivating their attention. But they are having thoughts and feelings about engagement. So are teachers, by the way. Okay. Just notice that.

Three, the third solution. We think once they're in school, once they're engaged, then we have to have teachers who are engaging them through best practice. Okay. So if we believe that solution number three is engaging teachers and teachers who engage through best practices, now we have to ask ourselves what is the problem here in this area? We ask ourselves what is the difference between successful teachers and unsuccessful teachers?

Here's what we do know. We know it's more than just experience because there are fabulous first year teachers and there are flatline veteran teachers. So it's not just experience. It's not where they went to school. It's not how many years they've taught. It's not the grade levels they teach necessarily.

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The difference between successful and unsuccessful teachers is their self-efficacy, right? It's their thoughts and emotions. It's their belief about who they are and what they're capable of and thoughts about their classroom management, thoughts about students, thoughts about parents, thoughts about teaching thoughts about curriculum. It's their thoughts and their belief systems around their capacity to be successful teachers. Okay, thoughts and emotions show up again.

Finally, number four, if students are in school, they're engaged, and teachers are doing their part, what's number four? Grit and resilience. We believe that students need to exhibit grit and resilience and teachers as well. So why is this a problem? When students and teachers aren't able to execute grit and resilience in their lives, it slows down learning. They have to stop and process their feelings. Or it puts them on pause completely because they're reeling in this emotion. They're reacting to the emotion, and they have disengaged completely from teaching or learning.

What happens when we're reeling in the opposite of grit and resilience, which becomes resistance and inflexibility, rigidity, right? That's a problem because when we are in resistance and inflexibility, we're not available and open for learning and growth. This is a problem because we think that students and teachers should always be able to exercise grit and resilience at every point along the way. So we think they should always be able to exercise grit and resilience, and we also believe that slowing down to process emotion is a problem. Just notice that.

Versus accepting that people are humans who have the experience of the entire range of emotions, the 50/50 of life. Okay. So that's one end of the problem. We think that people should always be able to exercise grit and resilience. That's kind of this all or none mentality. On the flip side of that, we feel like either they should have it all, or if they exercise none of the time. There are some people who spend the majority of time in resistance

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and in inflexibility. When they're on that end of the spectrum, they have very little resilience for feeling any kind of uncomfortable emotion.

So what's happening is people haven't been taught to have uncomfortable emotions and continue taking actions anyway. So one of the things we have to learn is that there are times when life feels hard, life is hard, that emotions feel bad, and it doesn't mean we have to shut down life. We don't have to stay in bed. We can still get up and show up and do B plus work even though we feel bad. We can still show up.

There's that balance, right? We can feel bad and show up. We don't have to feel good all the time before we decide to show up. So there's understanding the balance of grit and resilience.

When we ask ourselves to identify the specifics of a problem, why it's a problem, what we most often find that what's behind the problem are always thoughts and emotions. We have thoughts that propel us towards achievement and thoughts that hold us back from taking action towards achievement. We have emotions that inspire us to take action towards achievement, and we have emotions that make us avoid taking action towards achievement.

Can you see what's happening here? Humans, by design, are driven by thoughts and emotions. They are driven by mental and emotional functionality. This is how we function through our thoughts and our emotions.

If our minds and emotions are what compels us to take actions towards achievement then doesn't it make sense to ensure that our mental and emotional processes are functioning at their highest capacity? Shouldn't this mean that mental and emotional health and wellness is of the highest priority? That mental and emotional wellness is the solution to higher academic achievement.

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Isn't it worth at the very least to consider that it might be the solution? That it might make teaching and learning easier when we teach our children and our staff and ourselves how to be mentally and emotionally resilient? How to understand how our thoughts work, how to understand how our emotions work, where they come from, how to process them, how to allow them without resisting them or trying to avoid them? What if the solution to academic achievement was mental and emotional health, mental and emotional tools, mental and emotional wellness, mental and emotional resilience?

Look, I'm not saying that we throw academics out the window and spend the entire day teaching mental and emotional wellness. I'm not saying that. What I am saying is we need to get honest with ourselves and realize that our current approach is not creating the results we want for all kids. In many cases, it's creating more problems. It is moving us farther away from our goals as educators.

I'm saying that the solution to achievement isn't more instructional minutes, more academic time, less music and arts and recess time, more summer school, more curriculum, different curriculum, pressuring teachers, pressuring students, micromanaging and putting the fear of God into students and staff to perform.

The solution, just maybe, is much more simple than we think it is. What if, just what if, it's a matter of slowing down by 10% to account for the mental and emotional exercises required for students to learn how to process emotions that come up in their learning in real time. Not as an afterthought, not as the aftermath of learning, not in reaction to learning, but we're going to teach them as part of the lesson.

Here's what might come up for you when you're trying something new, when you're failing, when you're not understanding it, when you don't get

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the grade you wanted. Here's what's going to come up. It's okay. It's normal. Everyone feels this way. Here's how to process it.

What if we accounted for that in our lesson plans and gave ourselves time to teach the academics along with the mental and emotional wellness? What if we showed students that what's going on in their mind is what's causing their discomfort in real time? That emotions are not a problem, and that nothing's gone wrong.

They're totally normal for being human, and that they're going to be okay even when something is hard to learn, or somebody said something mean, or they didn't make the football team, or they got dumped by a girlfriend or boyfriend, or they fail the test. We are creating mental and emotional distress in our schools by not addressing how to handle it.

The reason we don't teach this is because we haven't been taught ourselves. It's not your fault. It's not your parents fault. It's not your school's fault. No one has been teaching how to manage our minds and our emotions until now, until life coaching was created. But now that it's available to us, why wouldn't we implement this into our practice as school leaders and as teachers?

It's like saying no to the copy machine. I'll just handwrite everything. It's like saying no to curriculum. No, I'll just figure it out myself. It's like saying no to whiteboards or smart boards or smelly markers, right? All the things we love about teaching, all of the basic tools that you cannot imagine living with that once upon a time back in the olden days had not yet been invented.

Think about this. There are new tools being invented every day, every week, every year. Life coaching tools are new inventions and new tools and strategies for school leadership, for you to coach your teachers, for you to

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coach students. They are the latest cutting edge technology of the mind and the heart. We now have the tools we didn't have before.

It's like airplanes. Before airplanes were invented, the only option for human beings was to travel by land or sea. When airplanes were first invented and then eventually became commercial, I'm sure that people were at first afraid to fly. They were new and there was a chance that could crash, and I'm sure that they did.

That's even true today. Nothing is perfect. No system is perfect. No product is perfect. No processes perfect. But the failures did not stop pilots from wanting to fly, from wanting to be the captain of their craft, or to work on improving flight practices for pilots. It didn't stop engineers from enhancing the quality of aircrafts, or the experience for the passengers of flying. It didn't stop passengers from wanting to get on a plane and travel from A to B 10 times faster or to be able to travel to places that were inaccessible prior to the invention of flight for human beings.

Life coaching tools are like airplanes, they are a miracle. They are a gift. They enhance our ability to create results in our life. They give us access to what was once inaccessible. They help you get from A to B 10 times faster. They help you transform who you are as a leader in all areas of your life. It helps you solve problems more quickly, and it allows for the 50/50 human mental and emotional experience.

My friends out there who are leading schools, please hear me. We can save lives with these tools. When students and teachers understand why they feel terrible, what's causing it, that the emotion is temporary even though it's intense, and how to allow themselves to feel bad and process the motion so that they can move forward, so that they can continue taking action, perhaps it will give students hope. Perhaps less students will give up. Perhaps less teachers will burn out. Perhaps less school leaders will leave the profession. We will not know until we give it a try.

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But here's what we do know. We do know that mental and emotional health matters. It matters more than most other things on this planet. Let's test this theory and see what we can solve and who we can help.

This podcast is dedicated to my friend Betsy. I am doing this work for her and for all of those in education, for students and educators who at one point along the journey have suffered. We're in this together my friends, I am here to help you. I have new tools, new strategies, and new solutions. Join me in the Empowered Principal™ program, and let's help all the people. I love you all so much. Take good mental, emotional, and physical care of yourself, and I will talk to you next week. Take care, bye.

Hey there empowered principles. I want to invite you to my upcoming workshop, the Three Month Plan, on Wednesday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> at 4:00 p.m. Central/7:00 p.m. Eastern time. I created the Three Month Plan process in response to school leaders who felt that mapping out the full year was daunting and honestly not very useful.

The truth is you can't possibly know everything that will happen between now and next June, but you can more accurately anticipate what to expect over the next three months of your school leadership journey. Breaking the school year into three month segments makes school leadership feel much more manageable and less overwhelming. You don't have to take everything into account all at once. Just the things that are coming up in the next 90 days.

This workshop will include time for you to begin mapping out your plan and have your questions clarified. When you register for the workshop, I'll send you the Three Month Plan template. I'll teach you the process and walk you through the plan step by step. The registration link is in the show notes. Sign up today for the workshop, and you will receive an email with the template.

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The Three Month Plan workshop is on Wednesday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> at 4:00 p.m. Pacific/7:00 p.m. Eastern. You must attend live to receive live coaching and support on the three month process. Join us today. Register now and you will receive the three month template in your email box. I'll see you there.

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.