

## Ep #244: Why You Have an Office



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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## Ep #244: Why You Have an Office

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 244.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal™ Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well hello my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. I have a very short and sweet but very impactful podcast for you today. This is going to seem frivolous, but it's actually not. It's actually a big deal, and I believe that it uncovers and unveils some belief systems we have in education that are hindering our ability to get stuff done, to stop being interrupted all of the time, to stop being available 24/7, and to stop overworking so that you can accomplish what you need to accomplish and get it done.

I laugh because I just got off the phone with one of my clients. She said, "Sometimes I find a storage closet, and I sit there to get work done so that I don't have to be interrupted." She said she gets more done in 30 minutes in that closet than she does in her office. We had a good laugh for that. The reason we had a good laugh about that is because I did the same thing. I would go find little nooks and crannies. I would "hide" from my staff, and then I would be nervous that I would be caught, or I would be found, right?

I have a couple of other clients who have said they do the same thing. So I want to talk about this behavior. Why are we hiding in our closets on our campus? Why are we not working in our office? If you think about this, that is an action line you're taking. So in the STEAR cycle, that action of hiding on your campus to get work done is coming from a thought and a feeling.

So what I think is happening and what was happening with my client is that when I asked her why is she doing that? She said, "Well, I get more done in less time. Because when I'm in my office, I feel guilty. I feel like I shouldn't

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be in my office. I feel like when people see me in my office working, they have the thought that I should be out on campus. I should be in classrooms, or I should be in the lunchroom or on yard duty. That I should be out and about at all times, and that I shouldn't be the principal who sits in her office. So I go and I hide to get my work done.”

So I laughed about this that I said hey, if you look at this STEAR cycle, here's what's happening. The situation is you've got work you've got to get done, and you want to do it without interruption. Well the thought is I don't want to be interrupted. Being in my office means I'm going to be interrupted, or it means that people are going to see me and then I shouldn't be working on whatever it is I'm working on.

It's like you're hiding the work that you need to do as a school leader, and you don't want people to see that you're working. So you hide in the closet to one, avoid interruptions and two, to get the work done. But what ends up happening, or this is what was going on with my client, is she said, “I feel like I need to be available all the time.” The feeling was guilt. The result of that is she's hiding in the closet being less available to her staff.

So we got into this conversation about her thoughts about her office. I know that many, many school leaders have been told don't sit in your office all day. Don't be the principal who locks her herself or himself away in the office. Get out and be visible and be present and be engaged and be on your campus. Okay.

We've been sold that belief system as a principal so much so that we now feel guilty if we have to sit down and get some work done that is required of us, but we feel bad about doing it in our office. So we either go into the closet or we run off to Starbucks, or we go somewhere else where we aren't seen. That defeats the whole purpose of it. It's like we're hiding the fact that we have work to do, and sometimes the work that we have to do

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requires us to sit down at a desk and to work on a computer. That's part of the demand of our job.

But we're hiding that part of our job because we believe that we should be available to people 24/7. That we should not be seen in our office. That goodness sakes forbid we close the door and get some work done without interruption. I think we also think that if I'm in my office, that door should be open. It means I'm available. Or even if you close the door, people knock anyway and continue to interrupt you.

So let's talk about what's happening here. If you have an office but you don't feel like you can use it to sit down and do work, either without interruption or you're worried about what other people will think if they see you working in your office or with your door closed, we want to explore that.

What is the purpose of your office? Your office is like a teacher's classroom. It is the space that you design to get work done. Sometimes that work looks like having a parent meeting in there or having a teacher meeting or talking with a student, talking with a staff member, talking with the district level person. Sometimes it involves meetings.

Other times it involves getting your work done, the little, tiny, mundane things that you need to do. Checking your email, writing up the newsletter, looking at the budget, figuring stuff out on the computer. There's nothing wrong with you working in your office. There's nothing wrong with setting boundaries around your office. You would never go into a classroom and interrupt a teacher over and over again and ask him or her questions while they're teaching. Because that space is designed for that person to do their work, which is teach children.

So if we are not going to go in and interrupt teachers in their workspace, you want to set up some expectations with your staff where if you have your door closed, or whatever signal you use to identify I'm working on

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something, and I can't be interrupted. If you don't feel you can set an expectation or a boundary around your ability to sit in your office and work, what is the point of that office then? Why do you have an office? How do you want to utilize your office space? What do you want it to feel like?

When you walk into your office, do you feel guilty for being in there because you're supposed to be out on campus? Notice that. What is that about? There is a purpose to your office. There's a reason you have an office. The district provided you an office because you are the school leader. You deserve to have a space that is private and your own to sit down and concentrate and work. That is the purpose of your office.

How do you want to think and feel about your office? You want your office to be a space as a respite for you to have a place to go so that you can get your work done. We want people to see us working. It's okay for your teachers and parents and staff and students to see that sometimes you use your office to sit down and focus and get you know what done. Get your stuff done. Okay? Come on now.

I know this sounds trivial and it sounds light, and it sounds silly, but it really is a problem for many school leaders. They don't feel like it's acceptable for them to be in their office. I invite empowered principals to redefine what their office means to them, how they want to feel about that office, the intention behind that office, what it's for. It's for working. It's okay to sit in your office and work. It's okay for you to expect to not be interrupted when your door is closed, or when your blinds are shut or when you have a note on the door, whatever your signal is.

So I want you to ask yourself how do you feel about your office right now? What are your thoughts about working in there? What would it look like to block off an hour a day or two hours a day where you are actually working on the things you need to work on in order to go home on time to your

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family and friends, and to not feel like you have to sit in a closet and then be worried that you'll be discovered. You know?

It's kind of insane what we're doing here, and it doesn't really make any sense. You have an office. It's a designated space for you to do your work. It should be a very inviting calm place. It's almost like having your home. When you come home for the day, your home should be your respite. It's your space. It's where you feel comfortable. It's where you can concentrate. It's where you are in charge of that energy in that space.

So you want to think about how you want to think of your space, how you want to feel about your space? Why is your office a space for you to work without interruption? How is that okay? Why is that acceptable? Why is it better for you to be seen in your office, for people to see you working? Right?

I want to invite you that if people never see you working, and you're just running around your campus all day looking busy or looking important or looking like you're connecting with people, then they're wondering when does she ever do her work? You have to be in balance with that. There is time for you to sit in that office and work, and there's time for you to be out and about, and there's time for you to be in your office with the door open and be pleasantly okay with somebody popping in for a minute or two or five. Okay.

So you need to define what is the purpose of your office? What do you want it to be? Why do you have an office? How do you want to utilize that space? Do you want it to be a place where you can go and concentrate? Then, if so, what do teachers need to think and understand and know about your use of your office? What expectations and boundaries do you need to put in place for you to use your office in the way you want and in the way you need?

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I know this sounds kind of silly, but think about this coming into the school year. You can totally change the way you feel about your office, the way you utilize that space, implement the expectations and the boundaries that you want to have around your space.

Say look, I don't come into classrooms and constantly knock on your door and interrupt you and talk to you while you're working. I'm not doing that to you, and I'm going to ask you that if my sign is up or my door is closed or my shades are closed, whatever it is the signal, then I ask you, unless it's a true emergency, to not interrupt me or to go to the Secretary and schedule an appointment. I'm happy to meet with you, but there are things I have to do as a school leader that require my focus and my concentration without interruption.

It's okay to ask your staff and to have some boundaries around your office. It being your space, and you get to utilize it however you want. I would love to hear your thoughts on how you're going to use your office, how you're going to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency for you, what boundaries and expectations you're going to put in.

If you struggle with being in your office because you feel guilty or you feel like you shouldn't or you feel like you're—Like a lot of people have very open offices where there's lots of windows where everybody can see you. How can you create some privacy for yourself? But really what this is about is making it okay for you to own that office space and to utilize it for concentration and times of not being interrupted, and to get your work done in the least amount of time possible.

I can't imagine that it was very comfortable sitting in the closet working on projects, as my client was doing. This really changed the game for her. So let me know how it's going for you. You can join the Facebook group and share there. You can post pictures of your office. I love seeing people.

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They're so creative in how you decorate and design and utilize your office space. Share ideas with other people in the Facebook group.

Or you can just email me directly. Let me know how it's going. If you're having a struggle with working in your office, or you're nervous to work in your office, maybe your superintendent has told you don't be in your office. You have to think in all honesty, are they ever in their office? Of course they are. They're in there all the time working. So is that a realistic expectation of you to never be in your office? If so, why would they give you an office in the first place?

So things to think about, things to consider. I hope this has been helpful. Please share your thoughts around your office, how you're going to implement it and utilize it and really establish your office as a place for you to get your work done. Have an empowered week, and I will tell back with you next week. Take care. Bye.

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