

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

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.

Hey there everybody. This is Angela coming to you with a bonus episode. I'm recording this at the beginning of August 2022. So if you're listening to this in real time, this is going to be extremely relevant information. If you're listening to this in the future, you can apply what I'm talking about to any difficult situation you're facing as a leader. But the topic of today is starting your school year not fully staffed.

I wasn't planning to address this, but it's coming up in conversations with my clients and conversations on Facebook and in other social media platforms. It's coming up in consults. So I'm working with a lot of people who are considering coaching. The reason they're reaching out for coaching is because they are so stressed out about the beginning of the year and not starting the school year off fully staffed.

So I am going to address the reality of the teacher shortage. For many of you, you're starting the school year not fully staffed. Not everybody, but many of you. Whether it's classroom teachers, and you need a body in front of children before day one, or maybe you have support staff, paraprofessionals, custodians, office staff. Maybe it's mental health staff, instructional coaches.

Like there's so many different positions that different schools have. So it could be an issue of an actual teacher shortage, or maybe it's just a staffing shortage. Whatever you are dealing with, whatever position is open and available still in your school, and you're stressed about it, this bonus podcast is for you.

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

The reason this feels extremely stressful is because you understand the negative impact that it can have when you're not fully staffed. It impacts everyone. It impacts students. It impacts the staff. It impacts parents and the community, and it impacts you the most right.

Students are underserved when they don't have teachers, or they don't have paraprofessionals to support them, or you don't have qualified special education teachers or speech and language teachers or title and resource teachers. Students are underserved when you're not fully staffed.

So, of course, you're stressed out when you're thinking that students are being underserved. Because the reason students being underserved is a problem is that you are probably believing when they don't get their services they're going to get behind, right? So then we go down this rabbit hole of the negative impact, short term and long term effects that low staffing or understaffing will have on our students. Very normal to think that, okay.

Staff. Your staff are negatively impacted. They're stretched thin. They're having to do double coverage, or they're not able to get their prep time, which is a contract issue for many people. Your staff are having to support brand new teachers because the people you are able to hire are new or inexperienced or under experience or maybe they're not the top of the line teachers. I don't know.

But a lot of people are saying to me I'm just having to hire somebody with a heartbeat who's got a four year credential. There's emergency credentials going on. States are doing all kinds of crazy things so that you can hire humans to get them in front of kids, okay?

Your staff is going to be stretched very thin. That stresses you out when they are stressed out because they're tired and exhausted and coming at you and telling you to fix this problem for them so that they can go back to

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Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

normal so that they can get to teaching students in the way that they're used to teaching them okay.

Then you've got parents. Parents are stressed out. They're worried about their kids. Is there going to be coverage? Are they qualified? Are they credentialed? Do they have experience and knowledge? This kind of thing with the beginning of the year happens with parents every year. There's always a parent who's freaking out about their teacher and getting in a different classroom, or is this the best teacher? Can they get with their friends?

Now you have that additional stress of is this person certified? What's gonna happen if we don't have enough staff? My student has an IEP and needs a support member. All of those things, right? So parents freak out. Staff is overworked and stretched thin. Students are underserved.

You, my friend, are kind of where the buck stops, right? You are the person who is expected to solve this problem. Parents want you solving it for them. Teachers want you solving it for them. District Office wants you hiring and solving it for them. You're left to your own devices about how this is going to be resolved. Okay?

Now, I first want to acknowledge the level of pressure you are under, and encourage you not to diminish how you're feeling right now. To tell yourself I shouldn't be stressed, or I shouldn't be pressured, or that you shouldn't be feeling how you're feeling or that you don't have time. I don't have time to feel stressed. I don't have time to think about this because I've got to get to solving it.

I want to caution you not to dismiss how you're feeling. Because that emotional energy when you are stressed or you are panicked and you feel pressure, that energy is what's driving the way you're approaching hiring, the way you're approaching staffing, the way you're approaching problem

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

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

solving as you're faced with this challenge of not being staffed for the year. So dismissing or ignoring or trying to avoid or resist and pretend that you're not stressed, and that it isn't a problem. That like fake positivity stuff, that isn't going to help you solve this problem.

So please give yourself the acknowledgement that yeah, this is hard. This is not how a typical year starts. Okay, this is the reality that we're dealing with. It doesn't feel good. It's not ideal. It's not what we prefer or want for the beginning of a school year, but it is what we've been dealt. Okay.

So, first of all, acknowledge how you're feeling. Let yourself just take a minute, put your hands on your heart, your chest, and just I'm feeling stressed right now. I'm feeling overwhelmed right now. I don't have enough teachers. My brain isn't quite sure how to solve this problem yet. I feel the pressure, I feel the panic, I feel the overwhelm. I'm having a human moment right now. I'm having a human experience.

It is rough to start the year without a full staff. There is no doubt about that. We're not trying to Positive Polly talk here and get you to just ignore the stress that you're under and the pressure that you're under. Okay. If you are a fully staffed principal, I want you to notice what you're thinking right now. Because my guess is that if you are fully staffed as you're listening to this, you are counting your blessings right now because you can only imagine how stressed you would be if you were in the situation your colleagues are in.

So if you are fully staffed, do count your blessings. Then reach out to somebody who's not, give them some TLC, acknowledge them, show them support, ask them if there's anything you can do to help, think of people who might be available for them, really send them the love. Because you know you would not want to be in their situation. We don't want to hide behind the fact that we have it. We don't want to feel guilty that we have a full staff, and they don't.

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

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

We want to support them. Give them some love. Okay. So if you are fully staffed, think of somebody who's not and reach out to them or join in on the Empowered Principal™ Facebook group, and share the love, share the support, share your ideas for how we can be of help to those who aren't fully staffed.

All right. But for those of you who are not staffed, and you are stressing out, I just want you to hear this. We see you, we feel you, and we support you. You know me. As a coach for school leaders, I want to offer some encouragement and some empowerment for you. Even when things feel discouraging, exhausting, and maybe even hopeless, you do have the intelligence and the perseverance within you to create a solution to this problem you are facing.

Here's how I know you have what it takes. Right now in this very moment as you are working, you are in the process of leading your school. Even if that looks like interviewing after school's already started, maybe having to spend your day subbing for a class or rearranging the master schedule or adjusting for coverage. Maybe you are hustling, and it's not how you typically start the year off.

But I want you to see this. The actions that you're taking right now might not feel like a typical start to the year. They might not be the actions you would prefer to be taking or even want to be taking. You might be in some resistance, but I want you to see that these are the actions that a leader, an empowered leader, takes on to ensure that the show goes on. Okay.

The other tasks that you're aching to get to, that you're itching. You have an urge to be going back to your work. One of my clients is like, "I can't do my work because I'm doing everybody else's work." I thought that is your work, right? If you have to cover, there's a priority there, and you have to cover it, that is your work. The other work might be getting placed on the back burner right now.

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

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

I want you to know that's okay. You have decided, probably very quickly, you decided to prioritize staffing because you know and you understand the value of having a full staff, and you understand the consequence of not. The cost of not having a full staff, right. So we prioritize this very quickly because having a full staff is highly valuable. The benefit of having our staff far outweighs the cost of doing this work. Right?

Even if we have to hustle, even if we have to put some things on the backburner, we would far rather do those things and hustle our way to the solution because we understand the benefit. But we also understand the cost associated, the consequence of not prioritizing staffing and not getting to it and not being in resistance to it.

When we're in resistance, and we don't want to do it, and we procrastinate and delay, or we just sit here and throw our hands up like there's nobody out there to hire. What can I do? We prolong our stress and the pressure we're under and the pain that we're in. Okay.

So you right now if you're out there hustling to get your staff full, I want you to see the leader that you're being. Letting other things wait in order to put out the fire that's right in front of you, that is the type of decision that an empowered leader makes to ensure smoother sailing in the future.

So if you can just take one minute right now, sit back, give yourself a chance to take a deep breath, and observe the full course of the school year. Like scan out and maintain some perspective here. Like give yourself a minute to look at the whole year. What you will see is that this current situation you're dealing with right now, it's just one chapter of the entire school year.

It might be true. You might never be fully staffed this year. You might have to create solutions that you've never had to do before. Or you might have to run your school in a way that doesn't feel like you're fully functioning, right?

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Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

You might have to cut maybe some courses, or you might have to make your classrooms larger, or you might have to team teach. You might have to come up with some interesting solutions to this amount of teacher availability. But if you really scan out, what you'll see is that this is a chapter, and that this big wave, right. It's like an ocean wave coming at you. You feel like you're being crashed on right now, but that wave goes up, and it goes down.

This is a temporary situation. Every situation is temporary. If we can give ourselves that perspective like oh I'm in a moment right now that feels overwhelming, that feels high pressure, that feels high stakes, that feels very stressful to me. But I also know that this situation, along with every other situation in school leadership, it truly is temporary, and it is a moment in time. It's just one chapter.

So now, how long and painful this chapter lasts for you is going to be determined by how you're thinking about it. Do you see it as a permanent and irreversible situation? Or do you see it as a puzzle to be solved? Because when you see it as a puzzle to be solved, what you're saying to yourself as I know this is temporary. I know there's a solution. I just got to figure it out. Then we can move on to another problem, another puzzle, another solution. Okay.

Do you believe this is the worst thing that could be happening to you right now? Are you in doom and gloom, compare and despair? Other people are staffed, I'm not. Poor me. Life is over. This is the worst thing that can happen. Or are you reminding yourself of the things that are going well? Of what is working, of what you do have in place. That there are worse things that could happen to you, and that your brain is just making it mean something very terrible because of the stress it's feeling.

Our brains like to go to all or none thinking. So in this case, you might be having an all or none experience. This is so terrible. This is the worst thing

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

that can happen. I'm never going to figure this out. Or you can push it gently back the other way. How can I solve this? What would I do if I absolutely didn't have the staff I needed? How would I make things work? What is going well? What do I have in place?

Do you focus on about how you feel about the positions that aren't filled yet? Or are you focusing on how you feel about the staff who you do have, who are committed, who are backing you up and supporting you and getting in those classrooms and teaching children? Think about how grateful you are for the people who are there versus spinning out in frustration and panic about the people who aren't there.

Now, when we're faced with a harsh reality, especially the ones we do not like, I want you to see that there is still room to create some peace of mind and comfort. You do have the opportunity to embrace trust, safety, peace, calm, comfort. All of those feelings are still available to you even in a stressful situation, even in a situation that feels hard, and feels time constrained and feels like a high pressure situation.

We do still have space and room to move our thoughts around to create a little bit more comfort, a little bit more relief. It doesn't mean we're going to just throw out all the bad emotion or the negative emotion. It just means we're going to make peace with it. Okay.

Here are some thoughts that might help you through the challenge of this year staffing shortage. Even though this isn't ideal, I will figure out a way. I want to keep our school functioning. We're going to get creative about how that looks this year. I'm going to be open to it looking different than it ever has before. Maybe this is an opportunity to see how things can be different. Maybe this is an exercise in how we can function with less people and less manpower.

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

What if it's possible that we can provide the same level of service, the same quality of service with less people? What would that even look like? Your brain is going to hurt when you ask yourself that question because it's going to require it to think outside of the ways it's thought before. But we're inviting that discourse and that dissonance in our brain. We want our brain to get to work at solving this problem.

I trust that people will step up, and that the people we need to hire are coming. You have to believe that there are qualified people out there who want to work for you. If you're thinking to yourself nobody's good. There's nobody out there. Everybody's been taken. There's no chance of me hiring and getting these filled. Of course, you're going to create that result for yourself.

Trust that your staff that you do already have are going to step in and help support you and support students during the time you are spending hiring and onboarding and getting that person up and running. But you've got to believe they're out there for you. Okay.

We are modeling for students how to make things work in difficult situations. We think that if everything isn't running perfectly that we're going to negatively impact student learning. I want to offer that sometimes students observing us having to deal with an imperfect system and the realities of life is the learning. It is how they develop the skill set of figuring out how to do hard things. It's not the goal for school to be perfectly smooth for our students and working exactly as we think it should be all of the time. Okay.

This experience is teaching both students and adults how to be adaptive, how to be resourceful, how to have perseverance and patience and hold space for as long as it takes to figure this out. I want you to know you're doing the best you can. You have what it takes to figure this out. You don't

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

have to fix every single problem all at once. It's okay for you to take a break and try again later.

Because the goal is not for you to be perfect. The goal is for you to understand yourself. I have the capacity to do this. I trust myself. I trust that the people are coming. I trust that my people I do have are here, and they're all in, and they're here for me, and I'm here for them. So you trust yourself, you trust your staff, and you trust the process of hiring, and you trust the process of problem solving. That even if the solution isn't you find the right hire, it could also be that the solution is something you've never even considered before. Okay.

So the last thing I'm going to say is this. You have an endless number of thoughts available to you that can help you feel better about the staffing shortage. Some of those thoughts will provide you relief. They will feel good. You will be reminded that this is temporary, things are going to be okay. They'll work out the way they're meant to work out. You don't have to solve everything all at once. It's okay to take a break. Like some of those thoughts just feel like instant relief.

Other of the thoughts are going to irritate you. You're going to resist them. You're going to be like there's no way that's true. I can't even grasp that that thought could even be true, at least for me, for my school. It might be true for other schools. It might not be true for mine. You might have thoughts around resources. Maybe you're like well, easy for them to say. They've got money. Or easy for them to say, they have a huge staff. Or easy for them to say they have teachers who are willing to work double shifts or something. I don't know.

But there are going to be some thoughts that I offer to you that feel good and some thoughts that you feel resistant to. That's totally normal. The goal here isn't to be fake. It's not to fake it till you make it and be faking your

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

positivity. The goal is to get honest with yourself and allow yourself permission to feel bad and embrace that emotion. Just feel it.

If you're overwhelmed, sit down for a minute and let overwhelm vibrate in your body. You're like I'm super overwhelmed right now. I'm feeling it. I'm feeling the burn. I'm super stressed right now. That means you're having a human moment, a human experience. Acknowledge that feeling. Okay.

But then also be honest with yourself and acknowledge that the reason you feel that way is because of the way your brain is choosing to think in that moment about hiring, about staffing about the problem you have in front of you to solve. It's not the fact that you are short a certain number of teachers or staff members. It's your thoughts about the fact that you have a shortage. What are your thoughts about the staffing shortage? That is where the emotional reaction in your body is triggered from. Okay?

How do we know this is true? Different principals in the same situation. There's a lot of you out there that don't have enough staff to start your school year. Yet each of you feel a little bit differently about it. That's because you're having different thoughts. Your brain is offering you different thoughts and belief systems around this issue.

Some of you are optimistic. You're gonna get the right people. They're on their way. I know I'm gonna find them. I'm getting to work and getting busy figuring out coverage until I get those people hired, but I trust that they're coming. Even if they're not, I've got a plan in place.

Then there's others who are frustrated that they even have to deal with this in the first place. So they're just resistant to the situation itself. They don't even want to deal with the staffing shortage. They're mad about it. They're frustrated. They're angry. Then they end up spinning out in discouragement because they don't have what they want. They think they should have teachers, that they should have everybody in place, that school should be

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

Bonus: Starting the Year Not Fully Staffed

ready to go, that they shouldn't have to be dealing with this stuff. All of that resistance.

When you're saying this should happen, this shouldn't happen. It should be this way, not this way. Anytime you're using the word should, you know that you're in resistance. You're fighting against the reality of the shortage. But my question to you is this. Which principal has the better chance of closing this chapter of the year? The principal who's going to choose to feel stressed and keep going with the belief that there is a solution to this puzzle, or the principal who spends out in frustration and resistance and discouragement and hopelessness that there's just no solution out there? Which principal actually gets out of the problem faster? Think about that.

Sending you all the love. I know this is hard. I'm here for you. These are the kinds of topics that I coach school leaders through. If you want to have a one on one coach, I'm inviting you in. Spots are filling up very quickly, and I don't want you to delay your decision. Make a decision. I want to coach. I'm going to get my finances in order, and I'm ready to go.

Let's solve this problem. Let's get you feeling better so that you can close this chapter and move on to what matters most, and that is supporting your staff, students, and school community to have the best year ever. Have an amazing week. Talk to you guys next week. Oh, this is a bonus week. So I'll talk to you on Tuesday. Bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal™ Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.