

Ep #248: Navigating Parent Guilt as a School Leader with Rebecca Olson



Full Episode Transcript

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Angela Kelly

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Hello Empowered Principals, welcome to episode 248.

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.

Angela: Hello, my empowered leaders. I have yet another amazing person for you on the podcast today. Here's the deal, I have an abundance of friends who also happen to be life coaches. And I started thinking about what are all of the problems that you all are facing out there in the world as school leaders? Not just as it relates to leadership, but as it relates to life. And it just so happens I know people.

And so I've got here with me today, my friend and colleague, Rebecca Olson, she is a life coach for working moms. And we are here to talk today about parent guilt as a working parent. So most of you are moms, not all of you, some of you dads out there too, doesn't matter. But if you're a working parent and you are a school leader, my speculation is that you have some level of guilt going on about the job and working and your own kids.

And Rebecca and I are just going to hash it all out for you today so that you can feel amazing about who you are as a school leader and as a parent. So, Rebecca, welcome to the podcast.

Rebecca: It's so good to be here, Angela. Thank you for having me, I'm so excited.

Angela: I'm really looking forward to this conversation for two reasons. Number one, of course, I know that my current clients and my potential

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clients who are out there listening, the audience members, this is a topic of struggle for people. So I know this is going to be super helpful.

But I also have to say it's a little bit selfish because when I was a principal I was a single mom at the beginning of that journey. And I experienced a ton of guilt because the things that I shared with you that are obstacles for my listeners were definitely obstacles for me. So it's going to affirm that I did the right thing and I was a good mom. And I'm really looking forward to hearing you say that.

Rebecca: Yeah, and I love this because I come from a family of educators. So I have three of my four grandparents were all teachers, actually three of them taught at the same school at one point, which was very bizarre.

Angela: That's so cool.

Rebecca: And then my mom was a teacher, and then she was a principal, well she was a middle school principal, then an elementary principal, and then she went to the administrative side. And then she ended her career as the assistant superintendent at the county level. And then my stepdad moved similar career for him all the way up to a superintendent of school.

So I have grown up in an educators family so I remember it as a kid, I remember my mom actually going through credentialing, because that was after I was born. She became a teacher after I was born. And anyway, so I feel like I have some insider scoop into like what it feels like to be in an educator's family and to live that life, because they were so passionate about what they did.

Anyway, so there's so much good stuff, so I love that I can pair some of my background with some of the stuff that I work on.

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Angela: And I did know this about you, but I remember us talking about this from the very beginning and like that just makes you being on the podcast even more magical, because you're just speaking to your own family, your own people, your own experience. And you have that perspective of being the child of an educator, right?

Rebecca: Totally.

Angela: And being the mom, right?

Rebecca: Yeah.

Angela: And now you're the mom coach and I love what you do and I wish that I had had your services back when I was struggling as a school leader because half of my brain spinning was on, am I being a good enough mom? I've really spent nights up late at night thinking about that. And like my kid had some things going on with his dad and all of that at the time, but this is going to be so powerful for people.

So especially, listeners out there, if you are a single parent or you are co-parenting and your kid is, maybe you don't even have them full time, like I did not have Alex full time at that moment in time. But there's a lot of thoughts that can really cloud our judgment and make us feel guilty and actually take us off the path of school leadership if we're not mindful of what we're thinking and how we're feeling and other alternate thoughts that are also true about who we are as working moms.

So, Rebecca, I'm going to turn it over to you. I sent Rebecca some prompts, like I just had a huge list that just poured out of me when she asked me like, well, what can we talk about? I'm like there are so many things.

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But I think one of the first things that school leaders feel guilty about is they want the job so bad, and then they work so hard to get it. They get credentialed and they do all the interviewing, and they probably get a lot of nos, and then they finally get the yes and they're super excited. And then the real work starts and now they feel like they have to put the job ahead of their own kids and family.

Rebecca: Right, yeah. Gosh, there's so much, we're just going to have such a rich conversation around this. I should say that I am, just to clarify, I am a life coach for working moms. Specifically I work with women that really want to work, like that describe themselves as career driven women, were usually very passionate about their job before they had kids.

And then kids come along and they're like, gosh, I cannot just keep operating in the same way that I was operating before, right? Like our kiddos, just we don't know how much energy and how much space, like emotional space they're going to take up that all used to be directed to our jobs before, right?

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: Because really I can't imagine there's almost anybody that stays in education that doesn't feel passionate about it, right? It's a really challenging field, it's a very passion driven field, you know, everybody cares a lot about kids and the next generation. And so there's a particular kind of person that decides to like, I'm going to stay in this, it means a lot to me.

And they got into it and then it's like their baby, and then all of a sudden they have babies and they're like, "I don't know how to juggle two babies at the same time when all of my energy went to one," right?

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Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: So it's almost like a very specific mind, I think, that lives this very passion, you know, career focused life and then, obviously, becomes apparent as well. And this is true for caregiver, you know, people that are caregiving for their parents, or elderly, like this all fits into that category, right? There's so much of that, it can run the spectrum.

Angela: Yes, exactly.

Rebecca: And I want to go back to one of the things you said. One of your very first sentences out of your mouth was talking about leadership. And one of the things that I think is so important for us to understand is that leadership and our personal life aren't separate. You cannot have a conversation around leadership and not have a conversation about who you are as an individual, and a human, and as a mom, and as a spouse if you're married, and whomever you are.

This whole idea of work/life balance as if they're separate, you know, we don't exist in that world. I talk sometimes about like the word integration, I think it's a better word to use. But we're just getting at this idea that we're like one whole human being, we're not two separate human beings.

And then to be the best leader you have to be, you have to be thinking you're the best mom, and you're the best spouse, and you're the best human. Because if you're not thinking that, just like you were saying, you have all these thoughts about how terrible you are over on this side of life and of course it's going to have a huge effect on how you show up in your leadership roles, and at your schools and so forth, and vice versa, right?

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And so it really is, it's like you're an integrated person stop trying to be separate.

Angela: Yes, I do teach that. But the way that you said it makes it more, I feel like, visual and concrete in the sense that it's not a teeter totter where we're trying to create a balance of work on this side and home life on this side because the teeter totter does give an all or none approach, like it has to be this or that.

And I like what you said where there isn't even the balance, we're not trying to balance anything. We're just trying to be this one human who has these different facets of his or her life. And that it's one journey, basically. One experience, one journey.

Rebecca: For sure, it's one journey. And it's about becoming the best human being that you can possibly be and not seeing yourself through any, like living a very intentional life, right? I think that's what I was coming back to, intentionality being such a big word I think we're going to come back to that a lot as we have this discussion.

Because when we talk about balance, a lot of time we think about like the amount of time that we work. And ultimately, the amount of time that you work is like a completely neutral circumstance, right? Like some people work 40 hours a week jobs and some people work 60 hours a week jobs, and some people work 20 hours a week. And all of them can feel imbalanced or balanced, there isn't a situation that actually creates this magical state of balance that we all kind of seek, right?

Angela: Yes.

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Rebecca: It's about being intentional. And I just had a conversation with a woman the other day as we were discussing it, and she was like, "I think you're going to tell me that I need to stop working as much but I just love what I do." And I said, "No, I'm not going to tell you you need to stop working as much. I just want to make sure the working that you're doing is decided and intentional ahead of time, and not from a reactive place."

Because if it's intentional and you've thought through the idea that you are doing what you're doing, you love what you're doing, you don't mind logging on after the kids go to sleep, then great. I just want to make sure that you're doing it from the right place and from an intentional space. And that, I think, is going to be, this is such an important conversation, I think, for educators that do tend to "overwork," you know, work past the normal-ish work frame and have to log back on or work on the weekends or whatever.

If it comes from an intentional place, then it's not going to feel like you're out of balance, right?

Angela: Exactly. It's about choosing, it's about owning the decision to work after hours or work on the weekend. And I tell people, like at the beginning of the year as this podcast is dropping is the perfect time because there are things, there are activities, and there are tasks at the beginning of the year that you're setting up. Systems in place and training and all of that, that might require you, or you might feel obligated to work longer hours.

There's not a problem with that. You're not doing wrong by your family if you're making that decision with intentionality, knowing that you're the one in charge and you're the one making the decision, and you like your reason for doing it. With the expectation that like this isn't forever, I'm going to do this for a temporary amount of time, for a finite amount of time.

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Rebecca: A container of time.

Angela: Yes, a container of time and then I will also include on my, I teach them a three month plan. But in the three month plan there might be some overworking at the beginning and then you're going to balance that or intentionally also decide here are things I'm going to do with my family and block off maybe a weekend or a week or something where you're with your family.

Rebecca: Yeah, I love that. And this was one of things that you said to me was that a lot of your people, they have this idea that they're putting their job above their family. They're putting their school above their family, they're putting, you know, they're putting what they're doing above their family, ultimately.

And the importance of recognizing that what you do is a really big part of like the lessons that flow out of you to your kids. And that deciding to be in a very passion-filled job that you love, supporting the kids and the people that you do support, and wanting to teach your kids to do something that they love and be all in to something. All of those things are amazing lessons that we teach our kids, right, if we decide to redirect our brain.

The problem is most of us think that time with our kids is what makes us great moms or great parents, right?

Angela: Oh, that's so good.

Rebecca: And we have this just general idea that if we spent more time with our kids, we would be better parents, generally speaking. But if we really believed that, then what we're saying is that every stay at home mom

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is better than every working mom because they spend all day with their kids.

But of course, we would universally never say that. If you ask somebody that there, they would be like, "Well, of course not." Right, because time and how good of a parent you are, have nothing to do with one another.

Angela: Just like the amount of time you spend at work doesn't make you necessarily a better principal or a better leader. Time isn't the measurement that you're using to determine your, well your worth as a mother, or parent, a school leader. But society has taught us that like time on task, buns in seat kind of mentality is the determination between successful people, however you define that, and then not successful people.

Rebecca: Totally, totally.

Angela: What do you recommend, Rebecca? Like what do you recommend that they do? How do they measure their success?

Rebecca: I mean, I think that's a really important question to be asking. On some level that's an individualized question, right?

Angela: Exactly.

Rebecca: We should be asking that of ourselves, like what really does make me a great mom? You know, I love really pushing my clients to name, like to think of themselves, to boast about themselves in both areas of life. But because a lot of us are really negative about ourselves in our mom life, or in our parent life, right, we tend to sit there first. And I'm like,

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no, no, I want you to tell me what makes you an exceptional parent, exceptional parent.

And it's not that you just, you know, I feed my kids and I make sure that they're clothed and I make sure that their bathed, so it's none of those things. How do you uniquely go about being a parent that makes you amazing at it? That makes you exceptional at it? Most of us never think about ourselves that way.

And it's really hard to think about ourselves in that way because we're told, particularly as women, and I've been on a little kick about this lately, we're told to not boast about ourself, right? We're told to be humble. Which I just looked up the word humility the other day and it means to not think very highly of yourself.

I'm like why in the world would I never want to think highly of myself? Why would I ever want to teach my kids to not think highly of themselves, right? Like that's ridiculous. No, you are an exceptional parent, you need to decide what that is.

Angela: Right.

Rebecca: What makes you exceptional? And it's going to be unique to you. It's going to be about the way you go about interacting with your kids. It's going to be the way you approach situations. It's going to be little moments that you connect with your kids on. It's the inherent belief that I was meant to be this kid's parent, and nobody can do it better than me. Like how do you know that for sure?

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And that's an exercise, you can just literally take that question and answer it. How do I know for sure I was meant to be this kid's parent and that I am an exceptional parent for them?

Angela: This is so good.

Rebecca: Yeah, your brain is going to offer to you all of the reasons why you're not.

Angela: Right, we're really good at that part.

Rebecca: Yeah, we're really good at that part. That's going to easily surface while you try to answer this question. That's like no problem, it's okay, of course.

Angela: Especially if you have teenagers at home telling you how you're not being a good parent.

Rebecca: I have no doubt. I have no doubt.

Angela: That's when you really got to double down. It's like your teen might tell you otherwise, but you want to like counterbalance that with, no, there's some things I'm doing right here. So even if you're getting feedback that you're not, you have to realize that you are the perfect parent for that child. They were brought into the world to be your child. And I just, I love that thought because nobody can do it better than you, they're yours, right? That's so magical to think of it that way, I love that.

Rebecca: It feels good, right?

Angela: It feels great.

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Rebecca: And that's kind of the point, in a lot of ways we're wanting to shift to the way you're feeling, you're experiencing. So you being a parent in your body so that like you have this foundation of understanding that no matter how much time I spend with them, no matter if it's the beginning of the school year, the end of the school year, or summer, I am still a great parent, and here's why, because none of it has to do with time.

Angela: No.

Rebecca: And I remember, you know, this would be a really fascinating conversation to have with my mom in particular about what was going on when I was a kid. I spent a lot of time with my grandparents, and I have no doubt I spent a lot of time with my grandparents because my mom was back to school trying to get her credential and she was working full time.

And my dad, my dad worked nights for a long time when she was in school. There was a long period, like early childhood I spent a lot of time with my grandparents. And I have no negative memories about that whatsoever. I loved the time that I spent with my grandparents.

Angela: Yeah.

Rebecca: The two that I mostly spent with, they have passed now, but I have the most amazing memories of them. This fondness, this connection with my grandparents I would have never had if I didn't spend so much time with them. And I just loved it. And so, I don't know, probably my mom dealt with a lot of mom guilt, I don't know, she's never told me that before.

But when I think about what I gained because my parents had to decide at some point like our jobs are important and this is what we're doing. And so here's how we're handling the kids, and the grandparents are going to

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watch the kids for an extended period of time and I'm just going to decide that's like the best thing for them and I'm so glad that they get to develop this relationship with their grandparents.

Angela: Right.

Rebecca: It's a completely different perspective versus saying, I can't watch them, I should be the one that watches them. I feel bad that I have to leave them with someone else and that shouldn't be the way it is. You could take that viewpoint if you want.

Angela: Right, right. But that doesn't feel so good.

Rebecca: It doesn't feel so good. And it also, I mean, there's just always two sides of the coin, it just depends on the way that you want to think about it, right?

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: And so the fact that we have to juggle childcare for jobs because they require late nights at times, or they require events, or they require whatever it may be. They require you to work hours that are off at various times, you could decide to see that as the most amazing thing for your kids and the greatest opportunity for them. And how it actually makes you such a great parent that you have found them this wonderful scenario that is going to be, you know, it's just going to be amazing for them.

Angela: Okay, I love this so much. I'm thinking about myself and my clients because a couple of things here. Number one, I just want to share my personal story because I was thinking, when you were talking I was thinking how my son, he was in daycare from the time he was three months

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old because I knew at about six to eight weeks I was like, I am not meant to be a stay at home mom.

I could feel it in my bones. I'm like, I need to work, I need that professional aspect in my life, I want to be with my colleagues and I wanted to work really bad. So I am one of those moms who who noticed right away. Stay at home mom full time, it's amazing for people who want it. It wasn't for me.

And then I got to work and I had to find infant daycare because he was still quite young when I went back to work, around three or four months. And I found somebody and of course I had the, I'm missing out and I'm not going to see all of the milestones and things. But my daycare person was amazing, she shared everything with me.

And it got to the point where Alex was like, "No, mommy don't," like I would run and pick him up early and he would be like, "No, mommy, don't pick me up early," like not ready. And then I was like so sad about that.

Rebecca: Oh, we totally had the same experience.

Angela: But my son is now 23 and in hindsight he was like, that's when I got to socialize, I learned how to be social. I have lifelong friends from my infant daycare and then through his other daycare experiences. He loved daycare, he loved it. And so what you think is maybe detrimental to your child, isn't in their eyes detrimental at all. It might be the best thing that happened to them.

And then I thought about my clients who, number one, want to go back to work and are worried about missing out on their infants. I have some who just had babies like in the last week to a couple months ago. And they're

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debating this, but they know they want to be working. That really resonated with me.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Angela: We don't know that it's a detriment to our kid, I think is what I'm trying to say.

Rebecca: Yes, we assign that meaning to them because we're not with them, right? Which is why, and I mean there's a natural sense to that, right? Like our kids are generally, not all of our kids are born out of us, we adopt, we have other means of how kids come to us. But they come into our lives and we have an instinct to be connected to them at all times. It's the mama bear instinct is what I call it, right?

And it's this instinct that I need to be with them protecting them, guiding them at all times. But that's a part of our like survival brain. It's the part of us that is just about keeping us alive, not necessarily keeping us happy, right? And so we have to, at some point, decide to like rise above that part of our brain and say, but I can think about this in another way. And how else might I think about this that serves me?

I had a very similar experience to you, just to share. Like I remember the moment when I think my daughter was going through a bunch of animal sounds, like moo or something like that. And I looked at my husband and I was like, "Did you teach her that?" And he was like, "No." And I'm like, "I didn't teach her that. She must have done that at daycare. I didn't know she could do that yet."

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Like it was this moment or it just dawned on me that she was learning so many things I would have never even thought to teach her because I'm sure I would have thought she wasn't ready for it yet.

Angela: Right.

Rebecca: And you know, just the infinite amount of knowledge that she brought home in a much earlier stage than I probably would have ever given her exposure to. It really was a moment that was changing for me. I went, oh, daycare is the best thing for her. Like for sure I should continue to work full time. And this is great, she's thriving, I'm thriving. This is great.

Angela: Right, yeah. And I know we've kind of like danced around this but I want to say it directly, if you're a school leader who wants to be at work, and you feel that in your heart and soul and you know you are meant to be a working parent, that is the best gift you can give your child, is for you to be happy and pursuing your professional goals and dreams.

One, like happy mom, if you're happy in your life, you're going to be a happier parent, which you might define as a better parent. But also you're modeling for your child, like don't choose to be unhappy because you think or society tells you that this is the way to be the best version of yourself.

The way to be the best version of yourself is to follow your intuition, and your heart, and your soul, and what fills you. What makes you feel complete, and happy, and successful, and productive, and evolves you. And I think that intuition and just knowing who you are and who you're meant to be, that is the best gift you could ever give your kids. So your kids are going to be fine and they're going to be successful whether you're working or whether you choose to stay at home.

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Now, with that being said, I have some parents who secretly want to be at home, but they feel like they should be working. And then that gets into like whatever, like there are other things, like there are reasons driving that. But they start resenting the work because it's taking them away from their kids. What would you say to a person, and I know that's not your ideal clientele. But what would you say to somebody who called you and said-

Rebecca: No, but for sure it comes up all of the time.

Angela: Oh, does it? Okay. Can you speak to that?

Rebecca: Oh yeah, it comes up all the time because I do tend to work with a lot of women that they started out being career driven. And then motherhood has a fundamental, you know, a fundamental change happens within us.

Angela: Like they didn't see it coming.

Rebecca: They don't see it coming, right? And then they don't know what to do and then there's a lot of confusion in that.

Angela: Like almost like they're in conflict. I feel like I have a client right now, she feels in conflict with what to do with her career because she couldn't have imagined before the baby.

Rebecca: Totally.

Angela: Okay.

Rebecca: It happens all of the time, I call it the identity crisis.

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Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: And it really does feel like a crisis inside of us going on. And there is a point where you have to decide. And you used the word choose a moment ago, I wrote it down, which was funny because just before that I had written down another thought. I'm like, I'm going to share this. And then you actually said it, which is that we think that we have to choose between working and being a good leader, a good educator, or being a good mom.

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: And that idea that these two things are in conflict is causing a whole lot of problems, right?

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: Versus believing that you can do both, right. And it's a question I often ask these particular women that are thinking about leaving their job and thinking about wanting to be a stay at home mom. I say, well, if you could feel more balanced, let's just assume that your current job, you can feel more balanced in it, we could figure that out. Then do you want to go?

And for half of them, they're like probably not actually. And it's like, okay, we've got a different question then that we need to be answering here. Is this a balance issue? Or is this like a truly I am changing course and I want to take a completely different path?

Choosing is really important and I think at this season of life, I think every season of life for sure, but particularly becoming a parent, it's a very important time that you re-decide to continue to do what it is you're doing.

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Recommit back into being an educator, a teacher, whoever you are, or not, right?

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: But there is moment where you need to stop and go, “Oh, I've been on this path for some time now in my life. It has felt good up till this moment, but now I have this other thing in my life that takes up a whole lot of time, and energy, and space, and emotions. Do I still want to be on this path? Or do I want to take a different route? Why or why not?” Right? And that is going to be, it's a really important moment.

I would say half the people, at least half, probably more like 75% go, “Yep, I'm still on the same path, we just need to recommit back into it.” Why do you want to be on this path? What's important about it to you? What do you love about it?

Angela: Yeah, and what it can look like with with both. I call it the land of and. Like if you could live in the land of and would you do it? And if so, like defining what that land of and looks like.

Rebecca: Yeah, what does it mean to be a great leader and a great mom? We spend a lot of time thinking about each of those potentially separately, but let's put them together and let's talk about what that means.

Angela: Like that package, yeah.

Rebecca: That package all together, what does it mean to be those two things together?

Angela: I love that.

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Rebecca: And to choose to believe that those two things are possible at the same time. Great leader, great mom, or great parent, right? And kind of eradicating the idea that you even have to choose. And I like to think about when we go to that place of like maybe I should just quit, we all go there. Maybe I should just quit, I for sure have been there in both previous job and currently as a coach, right?

Angela: especially after a hard day.

Rebecca: For sure, things get hard and it's like maybe I should just quit. That is like a security measure in our head, like I put it in the action line. It's something that we do when we're thinking something about ourselves, usually about ourselves personally. Some place of like inadequacy, incapable, you know, inferior in some way, it's usually tied to something like that.

And one of the things that we do is we start indulging in maybe I should just quit. The only solution here is for me to work part-time. The only solution here for me is to leave this field that I'm in altogether, right? And so I like to point that out, that it's almost like a defense mechanism. Because for sure, it probably would be easier to just quit than it would be to figure out how to like integrate these two things into your life.

That's going to maybe be, objectively speaking, a harder route. Maybe not, it kind of depends on the situation.

Angela: Right, but it's the tediousness of having to like really slow down and think through what would this look like? Like the fastest way to get to relief is just to quit because then you don't have to figure it out. But that's going to create another result in your life that you may not be happy with.

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Rebecca: Yep. And for a lot of people they can't quit, right?

Angela: Yeah.

Rebecca: They have to continue to work, whether it's this job or another job, they have to make money. For educators, I'm sure a lot of them carry the benefits for the family because there are oftentimes a lot of good benefits that come with it. And so they can't, and there's this feeling of stuckness, like I don't have a choice.

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: Whenever we feel like we don't have a choice there is, like nothing good comes from that place.

Angela: No.

Rebecca: We don't come up with good ideas. We can't show up as our best self. We feel controlled and we feel like our life isn't our own, we lost agency in some way.

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: All of it, terrible place to be operating from, right? Which is why choice is so important. If you “have” to stay in your job because your family needs money, you can decide and love those reasons. Like yeah, I want to support my family. Here's how we use this money, here's why it's important that I work. Here's why it's important that I keep these benefits. Here's how we're all benefiting from it financially. Here's how my kids are benefiting from here. Here's how I'm benefiting from it, right?

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You can re-direct your brain to all of the choices on why you choose to stay from just the financial side if you want to. And think through, sometimes I like to think through the other side with my clients and say, okay, so you quit. Now what?

Angela: Now play it out, yeah.

Rebecca: Let's talk about how you decided to stay at home, and how did you make that work financially? And then they have to go through the process, well, we stopped saving for retirement. We sell these stocks off, we do this and do this because we're not going to starve, right? We're going to still live. Maybe we have to move houses, we have to do all this.

I'm like, okay, so do you notice that it's a choice? You could still do that, you could still go, it's none of the things you want to do, I understand that. But if push came to shove and you lost this job and never get another job again, you would still survive. And here's all the things that you could do. Now you have a choice, would you like to do those things that would let you be home? Or would you like to do this over here decide to stay.

Angela: And figure this out, yeah.

Rebecca: And decide to stay and work on your mindset around why you're staying, right?

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: It's like you've got to see that there's always a choice ahead of you because you have to feel in control of your life. That's such an important part of creating balance, is feeling like you're in the driver's seat of it at any given time, right?

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Angela: That's so good because the brain can't see that it's a choice, especially when you feel like the job is happening to you. And you just can't see on the other side of it because you've limited yourself of I have to stay. But the truth is that you never do have to stay.

And I love how, like to release that thought, that you're the victim of your circumstances, you're like let's paint the picture of how it is both a choice and then you get to step into that decision. It's like, oh, I can either figure this out not working. Or I can figure this out how I am going to stay and make this work.

Rebecca: Both probably feel uncomfortable.

Angela: Yeah. They're 50/50 either way, right?

Rebecca: Both have their own set of challenges, totally. So which one do you want? Which challenge do you want to overcome?

Angela: Exactly. And what are the short and long term benefits of each of those paths? And which one do you like better? It really just comes down to what you prefer.

Rebecca: Which one do you like better, right? And in that kind of scenario, most people would say I would rather just keep working. It's like okay, well, you can't be a victim anymore. We're going to like redirect your brain whenever you think you're a victim. And now that you've decided to stay, now we can have a conversation around how to create balance while continuing to be great at what you do, right?

Angela: Yes.

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Rebecca: And there was a couple of other things that you said when we were messaging about this. Things like, you know, not wanting to be with their kids at the end of a workday because they just spent all day with kids,

Angela: With everybody else's kids, right?

Rebecca: With everybody else's kids except your own.

Angela: Yeah, I had that thought myself. To be honest with you, there were times where I'm like, the last thing I want to do is be around five year olds and go to PTA meetings and go to somebody else's school because I've just spent 12 hours at my own school.

And I have a client who called, the reason she hired me, she's like, "I am coming home so exhausted that I do not feel like I have energy and time to even be present for my own family, my own kids. I feel like I have to take a nap." And so, okay, let's say we're in the space where principals out there have decided, nope, I have decided I'm going to be a parent and I'm going to work. I'm going to be a school leader and with my family, whether I have a partner or spouse and children. Now what?

Okay, so now let's talk about the realities of the day, of the job. Sometimes you come home exhausted, or sometimes you're kind of burned out on kid business.

Rebecca: Yeah, sure are.

Angela: Or even if you're an executive mom and you've had a big day or a rough day at work, and you're just kind of spent. How do you coach your clients on that, Rebecca? Like how do they handle those day to day

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impacts that the job might have on you emotionally or mentally, or physically even?

Rebecca: Yeah, and I think there's two parts of this conversation.

Angela: Okay.

Rebecca: There's one that's like the long term goal is to lessen that, right?

Angela: Okay, yeah.

Rebecca: It's to get to a place where you're not coming home as exhausted every single day.

Angela: Right.

Rebecca: Doing the things that you need to do during the day so that you don't have that. And that's not going to be the reality all of the time. For a lot of people, particularly if you're in a passion driven job you put a lot of yourself in it. And various seasons it takes a lot out of you, right?

Angela: Yeah.

Rebecca: We want to normalize that on some level and not say that that's a terrible or bad thing or it makes you a bad parent, you know, whatever it may be. I liken it sometimes, like the word exhaustion is really interesting because a lot of us think that that's something that happens to us. And exhaustion is something that we create. And that is something that, it's an emotion, we feel exhausted, right? And yes, I'm not talking about like sleep deprivation, that's different.

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Angela: Like physical fatigue.

Rebecca: Yes, what we're talking about is like an emotional exhaustion on some level.

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: And we can operate and be great parents and feel exhausted at the same time. We do, in fact, know how to do both things at the same time. I like to liken it sometimes to another emotion that almost everyone says is okay to feel, and that's grief.

When somebody dies, we feel sad and we grieve. And we have this feeling of grief that does not go away instantaneously. We don't stop feeding our children, we don't stop interacting with them, we don't stop clothing them, we don't stop showing up for them. We just do it with this other kind of icky emotion tagging along with us, right? And everybody goes, well, that makes perfect sense because somebody just died in your life and that's a very sad experience.

Angela: Yes.

Rebecca: So in a similar way, we can feel exhausted and still show up for our kids at the same time. We might do it in more comfortable clothing, we might decide that it's okay to have a little bit extra screen time tonight. We might decide to just do a shorter period of time where we're super focused on them. We might do all sorts of things differently if we were to not judge the fact that sometimes we come home and we're really, really tired.

Angela: Yes.

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Rebecca: And we express that differently to our kids too. I'm in the middle of a huge move in my life and like lots and lots of emotion is happening with me. I'm leaving the house I've been in for 15 years. It's the house I've lived in the longest in my life. It's where I've raised my kids thus far, they're five and seven.

I have so much emotion around this and I am crying a lot. And my kids, particularly my daughter who's seven, will say like, "What's going on Mom?" It's like I'm just really sad. And I'm really excited about what's happening too, and I'm really sad. And I'm feeling both of those things at the same time and just right now it's making me cry.

And sometimes she'll ask me for way more attention than I can give her, than I have energy for. And I'll just go, "I'm really sorry. I love you so much, I am just really, really tired and sad. And I just need a little bit of space for myself right now. I just love you, can I have maybe 10 minutes and I'll come back and we'll just check in a few minutes later and see where you're at and see where I'm at?"

And she'll be like, I mean she's disappointed, but she wants so much energy from me all of the time. I can never give her enough satisfying energy for either kid ultimately. But it's this place of like, I communicate that to her because I don't think I'm being a terrible parent and that I should feel a certain way at any given time.

It's like I'm human, I have this experience. I share that with them, I communicate that with them. I show up how I need to show up as a human, express what I need. Like I show up differently because I'm not judging the fact that I'm having whatever experience I'm having right now as a human being, right?

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Angela: Yes. Okay, this actually brings me back to what I was thinking about and then I lost my train of thought. But this idea, I have a lot of clients who will say, “When I get home and I'm so tired and I still have to do laundry, and have to make dinner, and I have all these parental obligations.”

Rebecca: I call that caretaking obligations. I think there's a difference between like I got to keep my kid alive and I got to like train them up to be a certain kind of human being. Which are two different energies, right? But we do, we have an immense amount of caretaking obligations when we get home, particularly with little kids.

Angela: Yes. Thank you for clarifying that, that's so brilliant. And they will say to me like, my kid just wants, and you said it's so perfectly like, they just want my energy. They want me. They want me and they're upset at me, like this is how they'll say it, right? Like, my kids are mad or they're crying and all they want is mommy or daddy. And it's almost like they haven't defined any boundaries between them and their kids and what their kids need and what they need.

And I love how you just explained that it's okay and appropriate to model, this is how I'm feeling, I'm a human having an experience. One, it's okay. Two, I need some space and boundaries. And three, I'm not abandoning you, I'm just going to take care of myself for 10 minutes to refuel enough to be able to check in with you. That's so different than thinking you're doing something wrong because your kids are super needy.

Rebecca: You shouldn't be feeling this way and your kids are needy, and I can't serve them, and I'm a terrible mom because of that.

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Angela: It's like I shouldn't be human because now I'm a parent and their needs come first. That's not true.

Rebecca: Right, 100%. Yeah, and oh gosh, I could give a whole like spiel about our kid's needs coming before our own. We put ourselves at the bottom of the priority list almost always, right? And we have to intentionally put ourselves at the top because when our cup is overflowing, everybody below us benefits from that, right? But if we're at the bottom, we will never be filled up enough to really be able to serve.

I fundamentally don't believe that our kids come first. I just don't. I believe that you come first as a human being because I know that when you come first as a human being you will show up as the person you want to show up as. You will shape them in the way that you want to shape them as. You will have more energy for them. You will be who you want to be and they will be a better version of them because of that, right?

And so, no, there's nothing that your kid asks you for that you have to do. I don't even, just for the extreme example I talk to them about what if you didn't feed your kids? Like what would they do? You don't have to feed your kids, like that's a choice.

I mean, my seven year old, she could probably live quite some time without me ever feeding her at this point. My five year old, he'd go through the snacks probably pretty fast. But he would find his way, he can make an egg even actually at this point. So maybe he would be able to survive.

But even then I just see like, they don't need a home cooked meal. They don't need, you know, sure, we could just make bagels for dinner sometimes, that's okay. Like I can have them eat oatmeal. You get to

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decide what makes you, again, what makes you a great parent, and what makes you a great mom, and what's okay.

Sure, I would rather teach my kid that when they're having a bad day and oatmeal makes them feel good, like eat the oatmeal. What other standard do you got to live by but whatever feels right to you? It's fine.

Angela: Yeah, I think what you're saying, and I love that we're ending on this note, is really, really questioning like whatever thoughts are coming up that includes judgment of you as a parent, questioning that. Because I feel like we have to break through all of those old school definitions or whatever we've been taught about what is a good parent, what is not a good parent.

Really, like who cares? We had one rule in our house, and that was don't die. And after that a lot of stuff went to the, I was like there are days like if you're not dead when I come home, I have been a successful parent, you have been a successful child.

Rebecca: Yeah, for sure.

Angela: It just kind of was that for a while. And we joke about it now that he's an adult. But he's like it actually was so, and I think what's so fun about the stage of life I'm in is I'm getting feedback from my own child about the benefits and how I was an exceptional parent. And it's because I wasn't trying to be a perfect parent.

I let him see the good, bad and the ugly of my life and just my experience on the planet. And he's like, I just grew from that. you trusted me, you let me do things I made mistakes. And that gets into like your thoughts about parenting and your children and all of that, which is what your expertise is in.

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But I really think, you know, parents out there, if you are a parent and a working school leader and you have thoughts about parenting about yourself, a lot of it is self-judgment. And it's coming from external, you know, society messaging.

Rebecca: I mean, for sure sometimes just a mindset shift on some of these things is enough and things change, right?

Angela: Right.

Rebecca: Oftentimes that's not the case, there's still some things we got to do. Like you still have to figure out probably how to put up some more boundaries at work. You probably still need to figure out how to be a little bit more efficient with your time, to be okay with telling people no and shutting the door and having your heads down time and getting stuff done. Like you got to figure some of those things out, for sure.

But that will come infinitely faster, and it'll happen quicker for you and you'll have better ideas on how to do it when you're not sitting and indulging in this place of judgment. I am a bad mom. I can't do this. I'm no good at this. I'm never going to figure this out. I'm a bad leader, right?

When we strip away all of the self-judgment and we say, okay, here's how I'm a great mom, I know I'm a great mom, foundationally I believe all of these things. I also foundationally believe I'm a great leader and this is where I'm supposed to be. Now I know that, so now I'm going to go through some trial and error as I figure out how to manage both of these at the same time. Which, by the way, you've never done before.

So the fact that you even, that most of us go into the workforce and go, oh, I'm going to just go back and do exactly the same things that I was doing

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before and magically it's going to work. Like that was never going to happen to begin with. And it's a time to just go, yeah, I probably can't keep doing what I was doing before because I didn't have a tiny human then that was taking up my time and my energy and my space and my other resources, and now I do.

So now it's time to problem solve for how I do both. And to do it from a place of love, and self-compassion, and trust, and belief in self that it's going to feel easier, it's going to come easier. It's 100% going to be a better mind space to be in as you go about making the changes that have to happen.

Angela: Yes. Yes. Awesome. Awesome. Rebecca, thank you so much. Can you tell listeners where to find you, where to find your content? How can they connect with you? Tell them all the things.

Rebecca: Yes, I love it. So my website is just rebeccaolsencoaching.com. And you can find all of the information about the coaching that I do, I work with clients in a group, I also work with clients one on one. You can follow me on both LinkedIn and Instagram, Rebecca Olsen Coach, those are great places to see a lot of content.

And then I also have a podcast, *The Ambitious and Balanced Working Moms*. And so that's a great place to listen to and get a lot of support for being a working parent and yeah, all the things.

Angela: Yeah. So listen to *The Empowered Principal™ Podcast* t on your way to work and then listen to Rebecca's podcast on your way home.

Rebecca: On your way home, I love it.

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Angela: So that you can transition from leader to mom in no time at all.

Rebecca: That was a great tagline, Angela, nice job.

Angela: Yeah, I love it. I love it. No, Rebecca, she's one of my favorite people. We met years ago in our coaching business mentoring program and we see each other twice a year. I don't get to see you this time because you're moving, and that's okay. I'll be sad but hopefully you'll be at the next round. Did you see where it is?

Rebecca: No, I didn't.

Angela: We're going back to Cabo.

Rebecca: Oh really?

Angela: Yeah, in January. So hopefully you'll be more settled and ready to go by then.

Rebecca: We shall see.

Angela: I know, I know. I'm sending you all the love. Good luck on your move, enjoy your family time. And again, if you guys want more of Rebecca, she's got a lot of content out there in the podcast. So be sure to check that all out. Rebecca, thank you so much for your time. I know this was really precious time as you're in the middle of your move. I really appreciate you taking time out for our school leaders out there.

Rebecca: Absolutely. Always, always, and always. Thanks again for having me, Angela.

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Angela: Yeah. Thanks so much. Take good care.

All right, everybody. Bye. Talk to you next week.

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