

Ep #253: The Fall Dip



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With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 253.

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. It feels so good to be recording the podcast. I'm so happy to be here again. I batch these podcasts. So I did a big push in September and October so that I could travel. I've been out traveling. So much travel. I've traveled every single month if not once, twice. I was barely here in September. I'm heading out as I speak to the ASCD Leadership Summit in Maryland. I'm going to be presenting at their conference, their leadership conference in the end of October here.

I'm just so excited to be back on the podcast. So I want to say this. Happy November. This is the first week of November, and I want to celebrate you. This whole podcast is to celebrate you. Because the truth is you have just made it through one of the most difficult months of the school year, and that is October.

So many of my clients have been sharing with me quite emotionally how they've been feeling. They're so fatigued. They've been working so hard, putting in long hours, and they're tired. They're ready for a break. So some of you have fall breaks, which is a nice reprieve from the start of the school year. Others of you are kind of holding your breath waiting for Thanksgiving break. Maybe you had Labor Day or Veterans Day or maybe a day off in October or something like that. But many of you, this is the heaviest push that you do.

Now the end of the school year can get a little chaotic and squirrely. We'll talk about that then, but right now I want to celebrate you. So I really get a

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kick out of how October is National Principal's Month. So first of all, congratulations and happy Principal's Month for the month of October. I think every month should be Principal's Month because you guys are so amazing.

But I really get a kick out of how October is considered the national Principal's Month because I think they made it this month because this is the month that most principals either want to pass out from exhaustion or dust off their resume and decide to work somewhere very calm, very peaceful, and very quiet.

So happy Principal's Month. Sorry if I missed it on last month's podcast. But I have been working to the bone just like you. I have been really pushing hard trying to get out extra content. Our Facebook group is growing like crazy. I'm going to be doing some leadership Facebook Lives in that group. I'm really going to be pushing content and value and information and support into that group. So if you're not in the group, get in the group. If you're not on the email list, get on the email list. Okay.

So I want to celebrate you because if you are having a really tough month right now, I want you to first of all know that you are not alone. Every single school leader that I have been working with is really feeling the burn. This experience is what I call the fall dip. It is the mental and physical and emotional fatigue that comes with starting up a brand new school year.

So first of all, I want you to start by thinking about what you have already accomplished. Each of you have been going full steam ahead since July. If you are new, you got onboarded, and you're trying to figure everything out. But most of you have been hiring. This painful process of hiring and getting fully staffed this year.

You've been onboarding. You've been preparing master schedules and all of the pre-start school events, right. All of the professional development

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your teachers need and the professional development that you need and the trainings that you had to go through and were required of you to get started in the year. You've gone to all the meetings. I know there's a million of them. Planning and preparing your campus, getting it physically ready for your students and staff, your technology, make sure that's up and running for students and staff.

All of the energy that just goes into the first weeks of school, that excitement, all of it. The kids are so wound up. Parents are so excited. Teachers are all wound up. That's a great time of year, but all of that emotional energy can feel exhausting.

Then once you've got people on campus, you're training. You're teaching teachers the processes and the routines that they need to follow getting them on their lunch duty and yard duty and dismissal duty schedules. Getting teachers and students and parents all trained on school wide processes and protocols. Getting lunch under control, recesses under control, dismissal under control. You're welcoming in new families. Taking a little extra time to welcome them and comfort them and get them on board and having them feel like they belong to your school community.

You're making sure that safety plans and site plans and emergency drills, all of those things are getting done. You're trying to schedule teacher observations, which we're going to talk about on next week's podcast. I'm going to talk about how to develop a teacher evaluation philosophy. Okay, more on that next week. But you're also dealing with student behavior management. There is so much heavy lifting that goes into the start of a school year.

I want you to know number one, you're not alone. Number two, this happens every year. So it feels like the beginning of the year is pushing a boulder up the side of a mountain. If that's how you feel, you're right on track. Nothing's gone wrong. I promise you it will happen again.

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Now, I believe this year, there are extenuating circumstances. There are circumstances that have shifted and changed. Things we didn't anticipate or plan for. I'm going to talk about that more in a second, but I just want you to keep in mind that July through October is a lot of heavy lifting. I want you to plan and prepare for that.

What I mean by that is, when it comes to you, I want you to have a plan that ensures taking some time off once in a while, getting the rest you need. Yes, you might decide to overwork at the beginning because there is more to do.

But I also want to insist that you consider scheduling in time throughout your week where you don't work late one night, or you have something fun to look forward to, or you go home early on Friday afternoon. Something that you can wrap yourself around that gives you a little bit of R&R to replenish you or fuel you so that you have the energy and the bandwidth to keep going during the start of school year. I also want you to consider your teachers, okay.

So you are doing a million things and putting out 10x energy, and so are your teachers. You're also holding space for them. So in addition to all the tasks that you're doing, you're also holding space for your teachers, and your support staff and all the work that they are doing in trying to get the school ready for their students, right. So they're getting ready. You're getting ready. On top of that, you're trying to make life easier for them.

So teachers are going through the same beginning of the year energy when they're preparing for their classrooms, they're less than planning, they're meeting with their colleagues and their grade levels. They're meeting parents and welcoming students and teachers. They've got back to school night. They're teaching how to do classroom routines, getting to know their students, getting students to meet and be comfortable with each other and develop friendships.

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This particular year feels a little different, right? Every year feels a little bit different. But this year, in addition to the normal start of a school year, right. There's teaching assessing grades, report cards, parent teacher conferences. You as their leader, you're doing your best to hold space for yourself and for them. That's not easy when you're tired and you're stretched thin, and your teachers are also stretched thin and a little tired. Maybe they're getting a little bit whiny or a little bit complainy or a little bit snappy, right?

So, all of this to say the fall dip is a real deal. October is a tough month. But that's what this podcast is for. It's here to support you and to remind you you're normal. This is normal. Nothing's gone wrong. Everything's okay. You're going to be okay. I also want to say this.

To my brand new leaders out there, if you're brand new, I just want to say that you're going to multiply this, all that I just said, by 10 your first year. Because on top of having to figure this all out and being new, you still have to accomplish all of these goals. So whether you're veteran or new, the October dip is real. The fall dip is a real deal. Okay.

So, and I want to add this in closing. In addition to the normal fall dip that occurs every year, and you can look this up. I think on the New Teacher Center, there are studies out there that show—I think that there is a teacher study that shows teachers kind of had this peak of excitement. Then in the fall, especially in October and November, they really dip down.

Then they get into the holiday seasons where they can catch their breath and get some time off and be with family and friends and get some sleep, right. Then they peak back up, and then kind of wind down the school year. Same thing is true for school leadership, okay. It doesn't change just because you're in the school leadership role.

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Now, I want to share with you an email that I sent out to my list recently. The reason I did this is because in addition to the fall dip, the normal fall dip, I believe this year, this is 2022 if you're listening to this in real time. If not, if this is retro for you, we're coming off of the pandemic still right. We are faced with an unprecedented set of circumstances coming off of this COVID thing.

I want to say that the emotional tsunami that we were anticipating has definitely arrived. Students are unregulated and dysregulated. Teachers, parents, everybody feels very dysregulated emotionally, mentally. We have different thoughts and feelings and belief systems about school and about teaching and learning than we did pre-COVID. So what you signed up for pre-COVID is different than post-COVID.

We're in a new era, which I think is really exciting because we get to navigate these uncharted territories. We get to redecide, redesign, reimagine. We get to do all the new things. We can wipe the slate clean, and it's like what was working? What do we want to add? What do we want to change? How do we want to make this better? This is such a great opportunity. But I know when you're in the fall dip, you don't feel like you have the bandwidth or energy to do that.

So this year, 2022 and even in 2021, we have been tired for the last three to five years dealing with all of this. Okay. So I'm going to share an email that I wrote to my email list very recently. I wrote this in honor of one of my clients after a very emotional coaching session we had together. But I think this sums up what's happening for most school leaders.

Because here's what I know about coaching. If I'm coaching one client on it, it tends to come up across the board. What I coach on Monday, I'm coaching on Friday. Like people are having a similar experience. What one school leader is dealing with, I know. I know there are thousands more

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school leaders out there dealing with the same thing, which is why this podcast is so valuable to me and to all of you.

So may this email bring you some comfort. If you're feeling completely overwhelmed, because dot, dot, dot, you don't have all of your teachers or support staff positions filled. You spend your entire day focused on student behaviors, or being stuck in meetings. Your teachers are out sick. You're the only one available to sub. The district expects you to prioritize everything. There's 99 problems and getting to all of them is one of them. Right?

You're the only one available. If you're not in classrooms like you feel you should be or you're not on campus being visible like you think you should be, and the plan that you set for yourself is not in motion at all. If any of those things are happening. If you're not in classrooms, or you're working really long hours, mornings, late nights. If you're working on weekends and breaks, or you feel like you can't meet your goals because you're stretched thin helping everybody else, here's something that might help.

One, you aren't alone. Every single principal I work with is feeling some level of overwhelm right now. Please know support is here. You have a team. You're not alone. I don't want you to feel like you're working in isolation. Number two, you are not the problem. You are doing enough, and you are being enough. You don't need to fix or change anything about yourself as a leader.

Number three, the problem is that the circumstances have changed. The cards you have been dealt this year are not what you anticipated or planned for. That's not your fault. You don't have to change or fix anything about you. Number four, this means our expectations as school leaders must adjust based on the new set of circumstances we're dealing with. It's not a problem to adjust your expectations.

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Look, I'm going off script here, but I know many of you are dealing with an extraordinary amount of student behavior, student discipline, student dysregulation, student emotions, okay. You're also dealing with a lack of subs and a lack of teachers.

Either you don't have enough teachers, or if you do, you don't have subs, and teachers are getting sick because they're getting overwhelmed, and they're fatigued, and they're wearing down, and they need mental health days, and they need physical health days. They're taking time off, and you're the only one. You're frustrated because you're not getting to your site plans or your emergency plans or getting to the work you need to get done or teacher observations.

I want to offer, that it's okay to adjust your expectations. You don't have to be the A plus principal who's in classrooms observing, greeting and meeting people, being a superstar rockstar on campus. Right now, the only thing you have to decide is that it's okay to adjust your plan, your approach, your priorities, and how you spend your time this year. Because the set of circumstances are inviting you into a whole new set of priorities.

It might simply be that the only thing you accomplish for the week is student safety or student coverage. You might be ensuring that students are safe physically, mentally, emotionally. You might be working with students all day long. Or you might be subbing in a classroom covering for them. If those two things are what you're getting done, and you're not getting to the other stuff, that's okay. It really is okay. Please give yourself permission to stop judging yourself and comparing this year's work to past year's work. This is not the same year, okay?

What you're dealing with now and how you're spending your time is the new priority. It is the accomplishment of your work week. You can still feel accomplished when your professional goals are on hold. So if you wrote a professional goal like to be in the classrooms or giving more feedback or

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whatever it is you desire to do, you want to be that instructional leader, but what you're doing, what you're actually doing with your time, is spending time with students or in classrooms. Put that goal on hold, put it aside, and let this be the goal. Let student safety be the goal. Let student coverage be the goal. It's okay to pause the rest.

You're still moving your school forward when your current priority is student coverage and student safety. Your students are still getting what they need when you sub in class instead of working on the site improvement plan. It's okay for other tasks to go on hold or be delayed. It's also okay for them to be late. Did you hear me?

It really is okay given this your situation. Some things are going to go on hold. It's okay. You are a human being doing the very best you can with the resources you currently have. You're doing it right. You're not alone. We're in this together. Please let me know how I can be of help.

Principals, I invite you to join the email list if you're not already on the Empowered Principal™ email list. It's in the show notes before. The links down there below. If you're ready to make this year easier on yourself, and you need help adjusting your priorities and your expectations and your plan for the year, please do not hesitate to reach out and schedule a consult call with me. I will help you through the adjustments.

You do not have to do this in isolation. This job is very isolating. It doesn't need to be done alone. We're here for you. This community is here for you. We love you all. Thank you. Thank you for your service. I will talk with you next week. Take good care of yourself. Bye.

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