

Ep #256: Selling Your School Vision (Part 1)



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Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 256.

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

Hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. Oh my gosh, for those of you who live in the United States, you have made it to Thanksgiving break. Now I know a lot of listeners don't live here in the US, and you're not on break right now. So I'm I see you, I hear you, I feel you if you're in the burn and in the struggle because we have listeners from all over the world, which just blows my mind. I'm so excited. That is so much fun.

But for people who do live here, this is a beautiful time of year. It's fall. The colors are gorgeous, the weather's cooler, everybody's into their pumpkin spice lattes. Thanksgiving is a time in the US where we get to enjoy some downtime, some rest, relaxation, and we gather and celebrate our gratitude, our appreciation, our thankfulness with our family and friends. So this is a beautiful time of year. I love this time of year.

My in-laws are coming to my house for the week. Alex is coming up to spend the week with us. He is such a brilliant chef. He's not a formal chef. He's just really good at cooking. I call him a chef. He's coming up to help me cook. My in-laws are coming down. We've got friends coming over. My friend, my best friend Jessica and her baby and her dad. The dad, they're all coming. I'm just so excited. So you can tell I'm giddy with energy and excitement. I'm so thrilled for each of you to be having this break.

So it's a great week to be listening to this podcast because this week's podcast and next week's podcast is the perfect podcast for you to grab a coffee or tea, snuggle in with your favorite journal or your notebook, and

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take notes because I'm going to dive in to all things school vision. You want to take time to process this information, to reflect on it, and to build a school vision.

So over the next two weeks, we're going to talk about the reasons that people don't follow your lead as a school leader. I'm just going to dive right into the truth of what that is and why that happens, and the problems that we face with creating a school vision. We're going to talk about how to create a school vision. Then next week, we're going to dive into how to sell your staff and school community a very compelling vision that you love, that they love, that everyone can get on board with. Okay.

When I say selling your school vision, what I mean by that, it's simply offering the vision you have for your school in a compelling way so that people buy into the vision. Now you're told as a new school leader, build relationships, establish buy-in. I thought a lot about this because it sounds very simple and easy to do. People say your first year, just build relationships. Get to know people, get to understand them, don't make a lot of changes. But eventually we need you to create buy in.

What does that mean? What are the obstacles that get in your way? How do we know we've accomplished buy in? I've been thinking about these things and putting them together in this visionary work for you as school leaders. So my goal for you as school leaders is to make the school vision process simple, easy, tangible, doable. That's the point of this. I've dug in deeply to this work.

The work that I'm presenting to you now, I feel like it's going to evolve over time. As I work with school leaders, as I bring on more school leaders into the Empowered Principal™ program and into this process, I'm going to evolve it. But I wanted to get it out to you now as it is in real time so that you can start to grab on to it and have something that helps you tangibly

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create a school vision and start to create buy in and sell this vision to your staff, your students, your school community, even your district. Okay.

So let's dive in. This week we're going to talk about the challenges with school visions and how to create one. I like to identify it as being very simple and tangible. The reason I use the word tangible is because your school vision, like when you talk about vision, it's very in your mind, right? It's an imagination. It's an image that you have in your brain. We want to take it from your brain and put it onto paper, and then put it from paper into action so that it becomes visceral and real and tangible. It becomes the actual experience that you're having as a school leader and that your teachers are having and that your students are having. Okay.

So this week, we're going to talk about that. Next week, we're going to talk about how to get people on board with your vision, how to sell your vision to them in a way that's intriguing, compelling, and really just too irresistible for them to say no. These are gonna be some of the most powerful podcast episodes I have ever offered.

So listen up, tune in, get your notebook. Really guys, listen as many times as you need. Share these podcasts with your colleagues and friends. Share them on social media, get these podcast episodes out to the world. We want every school leader to feel like they have a plan, they have a vision.

This vision does correlate to the three month plan that I've talked about earlier in the year. This is about creating the big picture, okay. Then the three month plan is what breaks it down. But I want you to share this with the world because we want all school leaders to feel supported, to feel productive, to feel appreciated, to feel like they have someone in their corner that they're not doing this in isolation. There's not that many people who know about this work and the podcast.

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So please feel free to share it. It's always going to be free. Of course, when you're ready, come work with me directly. Let's expedite your school vision into becoming the reality of your school leadership experience. Let's get started.

I'm going to start with other people's thoughts. I normally don't do that, but here's why. We're gonna get to coaching on your thoughts later in the episode, but I know that when it comes to school vision and school leadership, most of us school leaders are consumed in our own minds thinking about what other people are thinking. So let's just start there.

Let's look at what other people might be thinking and see the truth of what they're thinking and to see that it's separate from you and your vision. It's completely fine for other people to have thoughts. We want them to have thoughts. It means they're alive and well as humans on the planet. We want to consider their thoughts. We want to study their thoughts because doing so helps us to understand how to lead them and how to inspire them to strive to be the best versions of themselves.

That's what school leadership is. We want to inspire people into actions that elevate them into the highest version of themselves as teachers, as support staff, as students, as parents, as district leaders. We want to be the example of what is possible. That's what we're doing here in the Empowered Principal™ program.

So instead of spinning out in worry and fear about what other people are thinking and how that makes you not as good of a leader or not competent enough or not strong enough or not smart enough or not knowledgeable enough, let's look at what other people might be thinking so we can use this information to look at our own thoughts about them. Because guess what? The reason we worry so much about what other people are thinking is because we have thoughts about other people. It's just the reality.

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So let's look at why they might be thinking what they're thinking. Of course, we're speculating here. But the reason we do this is in order to coach ourselves on what we want to be thinking. To be intentional about what we want to be thinking, to not be consumed by what we're wondering what other people are thinking, and to really hone in. To create intentional beliefs about ourselves, about our staff and other people, whoever it is we're thinking about, and our school vision. What we want, okay.

Now, let's look at some of the reasons why people might not be following your lead. There's three that came to the top of my head. I'm sure there's more, but we're going to stick to three because I'm practicing constraint.

Number one, the obvious one is that you're unfamiliar to them. You are new to them. They're unfamiliar with you, with your style with your vision, with your philosophy, with the impact you might have on them. They might not be willing to invest in following you because they don't know what to expect.

So this is common, right? Everybody has a new principal at some point, and every teacher has a new principal to them at some point. So this is not uncommon. It's supposed to happen. So when you're new, of course, people are unfamiliar with you, your process, your style, your vision, all of that, how you approach things. They're a little unfamiliar with the difference between their old principal, the former. I shouldn't say old. Former principal and you, okay.

So when you're new, or you're new to them, you might not be new to school leadership. But when you're new to them, it's natural for them to be unfamiliar with you. Which leads me to number two, which is your one unfamiliar and new. Two, there's a lack of trust. There's a lack of foundation of trust because you're new and unfamiliar. Or they know you, but they've got reasons that go beyond you that they don't trust you.

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So, when we look at reasons why people don't trust, it really comes down to two things. They don't trust leadership positions in general. So that lack of trust, it might come from just not knowing you because you're new to them, but it can also come from an experience with a former leader.

I've had principals. I've worked with clients who have real trust issues with superintendents because of their experience with past superintendents. Or I've worked with aspiring school leaders who are still teachers, but they've had negative experiences or even traumatic experiences with a former principal.

So know that when somebody doesn't trust you as a leader, it might have nothing to do with you and everything to do with their past experience with a former leader, or just with their beliefs about leaders in general. Right? They might not trust leaders in general, or anybody who has positional authority over them. They might not trust leadership intention. They might not think you're looking out for their best interests.

So what we're noticing here is when people don't trust you, especially when you're new, it's usually stemming from an experience they've had in their past. Their thoughts about leaders in general, their beliefs about their intentions, the positional authority they have over you. So just notice this. When people don't trust, it's the position that they might not trust.

The other component of trust is that they might not trust the process. This happens in school leadership, I see it all the time. Here's what happens. Teachers, they want to follow you. It's not that they don't like you, or even if they trust you, but they get tired of trusting the process because the process changes all the time.

There's constantly changing priorities. They're overwhelmed with a number of expectations they're expected to follow out and do at an A plus level. They feel afraid to trust again because they've been disappointed or

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they've been hurt or criticized by a former leader, or they're scared to lose their jobs. So they don't want to trust, but they don't want to say anything. So they kind of go under the radar and just hover. They try to hide because they don't trust that they have the capacity to speak up and follow your lead and be a thought leader and support you wholeheartedly. Okay.

That leads me to the third one, which is status. So if you think about leadership, leadership is vulnerable. It's scary. When you are a leader and you're coming in, and you want teachers to follow your lead, when you follow their lead, that puts their status with their peers at jeopardy. What I mean by that is now if they speak up and they follow your lead and they support your lead and they advocate for your lead and your vision, they're putting themselves at risk for judgment and criticism and being ostracized by their peers, right? They are putting themselves out based on what other people will think about them if they support you.

Because here's the truth. There's always a group of teachers at a school who are not fans of the leader. There just tends to be that case. If you are a school leader and you have 100% buy in and 100% support, please reach out. I'll have you on the podcast because we want to share your magic with everybody. But for most people I work with, there's one or two or a small group of people that aren't fans of the school leadership position. Or maybe they're not fans of you personally.

But most times, the reason they're not fans is because of a past experience they've had and they're protecting themselves. They're in a state of fight or flight. Okay.

Newer teachers in your campus, they tend to fear this group, and they don't want to like put their status in danger because they want to be included. They want to feel like they belong. They want to be liked. They want to be a part of the team. So they will stay silent in order to self-Preserve. Okay.

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Just notice this on your campus. Just observe and take note of the dynamics that you see on your campus as it relates to people being unfamiliar with you or your process or your thoughts. Their level of trust in the position or trusting the process, and then their thoughts and fears around their status with their peers. Okay.

So let's move into how to get people to follow your lead. The simplest solution is to have a strong vision, to have a clear vision. One that you love, and one that they can buy into. One that they can fall in love with. One that they are intrigued by.

So how do you do that? It starts with your thoughts about yourself, about them, and about your vision. I want you to notice how this relates to the thoughts that other people are having. We truly are all on the same team here. We're on team human experience on planet earth. Because every single one of us, we have thoughts about ourselves. We have thoughts about other people. We have thoughts about the situations and circumstances that we're dealing with in our lives. Okay. No one's exempt from having thoughts.

So with this visionary mindset, you have to start with thoughts about yourself. You have to start with the belief that you already are a visionary leader. I don't care if you're brand new. I don't care if you're 10 years in. I don't care if you have doubts or don't believe in yourself. This is a self-concept development issue. When you first step into a leadership position for the very first time, there's typically a lag in your belief and in your ability to lead. Okay.

So you get hired as a school leader. So you have the title, the label of school leader, but your brain hasn't quite caught up to the fact that you are a school leader. It doesn't believe in you as a school leader. It doesn't identify you as a leader. You don't think you know what you're doing, or you

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don't feel like you have a vision. But the truth is that you do. You do have a school vision. It's why you're in education and in the position that you're in.

You do have an idea, an opinion, a set of beliefs about what you think makes a great school. So being new is irrelevant. You already have experience as a student, and as a teacher, and now as a school leader. I want you to really see how that's true. You already have a vision. That's what propelled you and pulled you into a school leadership role. Or if you're aspiring leader, it's what is pulling you.

Think about it. When you think about I want to become a school leader, I think I have what it takes. You have a vision of what that might look like and how it might feel like and what your school would be doing, the actions they'd be taking, the decisions you'd be making, how people would be thinking and feeling, how kids would be learning and growing. You have a vision.

One more thing I want to say about visionary mindset. You don't have to always 100% agree with your district's approach. They might have a school vision. They usually do, and it's pretty, very intangible. It's very nebulous, kind of up there pie in the sky. You can understand the result that they want from their vision. When you understand like what is it they're going for you can sell that vision through your own vision. Because I promise you, you can find threads where they are the same.

Your school vision, like what your school district wants is for kids to do well, for people to be happy coming to their schools, for their scores to go up, for kids to be thriving, for teachers to be happy there, for people to want to work there, for you to be leading. Like they want the same things you want. They might say it in a different way, but when you break it down to the fundamentals, everybody's on the same team.

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Everybody wants to love their job, have a great experience, have fun doing it, make progress, see kids thrive, have happy parents, right? That's what we want. We know that we don't get that experience 100% of the time, but our goal is to increase the percentage in which we find ourselves accomplishing goals, solving problems, helping other people, contributing, making kids' lives better, helping them learn in an easier way, helping teachers teach in an easier way, right? We all want that.

So let's define school vision. What is a school vision? A school vision, I love defining school vision. It's multifaceted for me. But the simplest way I say it is that a school vision is a bridge. Your school vision bridges the gap from where your school currently is to where you want your school to be. It's the approach you believe will create the desired outcomes you want for your school and your staff and your students.

It's the desired result you're working to create. It's the experience you want people to have on your campus while they're there, while they're working, while they're learning, while they're volunteering. It's how you want people to think and feel as a result of being a member of your school community. It's the way you want to conduct business at your site. This is how we do business. This is our community, our set of standards, our set of expectations.

Your school vision's also a roadmap. There are several ways to get there. You're simply going to choose as the school leader which direction you believe, is going to get your school there the fastest and the easiest. So challenge number one is not having a distinct and focused vision. It's easy to see why this is a challenge. When you're new, you don't know what you don't know.

Now, you might have this vision, but you have no idea the how. You can't know the how because you haven't done it before. We get worked up around the how. We want to know how. How do I get buy in? How do I get

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people to do what I want them to do? How do I get test scores up? We ask the wrong questions. The how is not where it's at. There's a million hows.

The question is who do we have to become to be the school that achieves these goals? What do schools who have already achieved the success we're looking for? What do they think? What do they do? How do they feel? How do they show up? What don't they spend time worrying about? Those are the questions you want to ask. Because here's what happens. We get stuck in the how, and then we become afraid of we're doing it wrong, or we're choosing the wrong focus. We spin out on all the ways we might be doing it wrong, and we never just decide how to do it right.

It's very difficult to choose one focus and priority in our schools, which is another challenge. There's a million priorities. Everything feels equally important. We want to fix everything at once. It's very challenging for your brain to say stop, hold the phone, let's choose one focus. We're going to tackle one thing at a time, one priority.

This is what I teach in the three month plan. In 90 days, we're going to tackle one thing. You keep doing that every 90 days. In one year's time you've tackled four big problems. Or it might have to stretch into six months or a year, but who cares? As long as you're looking at the next best thing for your school and figuring that one thing out. It's not to say you're not doing other things, but your focus, your intention, your goal is to focus on one thing.

It's difficult to do. I promise you. All of my school leaders and they have me as a coach every single week. It's still a challenge, which is why they coach with me because they get back on track. Okay.

The last reason is that it's difficult to articulate from the ambiguous to the specific. So having a school vision, you can see it in your mind. You can feel it. It can feel very visceral, but it is difficult to articulate in a way that

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people understand and kind of hold on to and create a tangible vision that can take you into action that creates the results you want.

So what leaders have been taught to do when they're creating a vision is to use buzzwords and use education vernacular. The problem with that obviously, is it makes it more intangible. It makes it more ambiguous. We're also taught to create a vision one time with all of our stakeholders to make this big deal and go through this huge process. By the time you're done, you're like I never want to have to do that again. It's so much work.

Then once we do that, we want to kind of wipe our hands from it and say whoo that's done. We post it everywhere. We print it. We put it on posters. We put it on billboards. We put it in our office, and we post it everywhere. I'm not saying any of those ways of doing it are wrong. I'm just noticing the trends that we've been taught.

But here's what we're not taught to do. We're not taught to develop a vision that guides our school focus and our culture. We're not taught to create a vision that's tangible and livable and messy and breathable. We're not taught to measure the progress towards the vision to create something that feels intangible and to make it tangible and measurable.

So what's the solution? Let's find a way to develop a vision that is tangible and livable. Here's the process. Step one, create. Create the vision through your leadership values. Your leadership values are the lens through which you create the vision. Because what you value is what you envision happening at your school. Step one is create.

Step two, assess. Assess where your school is at now, and where you want it to be. Step three, determine. Determine a theory for the gap between where you're at and where you want to be, and then create a plan to bridge that gap.

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Step one, create. Identify your leadership values. What matters to you, what do you believe creates progress, what do you cherish above all others? Then use these values to start painting a vision for yourself. Put your vision onto paper. Put pen to paper, okay? Step two, assess. Assess where your school is at. Don't be afraid to look at the data that shows you where you currently are.

So many of us want to put our head in the sand and hide from the data because it doesn't feel good, or we don't like it or other people don't agree with it, or they're judging us for it. But the only way to know where we're at and where we're going to create the roadmap is to just put the data to the test.

You can use a scale of one to 10 to help you measure. Just choose a number. Where are you at on a scale of one to 10? If 10 is your vision, how close are you? Think of it like the monkey bars or a ladder, right? Which rung are you on to get to the end of the monkey bars at the top of that ladder? Just choose the number. It doesn't matter. You're just making it up anyway.

But you want to get concrete with yourself. Where are we doing it right? Where are we struggling? What do I think is going to make the difference? That's step two of this process is just where do you want to be? Where do you want to be at the end of your school in one year, in three years?

How will you know you've attained this vision? What's going to be in place? What are the measurements? Then my favorite part, how will it feel to have attained to this vision? What's going to be happening at your school on a daily basis? You want to make this process very visceral in your body. You want to be able to feel it.

Then step three. Step three is determine. Determine a theory, which is basically your next best step. What's the best bang for your buck that you

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believe is going to get your school closer and close that gap from where you're at to where you want to be? So if you're at a three out of 10 on your school scale, what's going to get you to four? Don't think about seven, eight, nine. Think about four. We get distracted when we think about seven, eight, nine. Go to four. Base your theory on your leadership value so it feels aligned to you and natural. Doing this will make following the vision so much easier.

Then you've got to map out. You've got to get nitty gritty. Determine what decisions need to be made, what actions need to be taken, what steps need to be mapped out. Identify milestones and measurements for how you're going to celebrate your success. If you don't identify milestone measurements, you're not going to know you're on track. If you don't pre plan how you're going to celebrate success, you're going to blow past milestones and just keep going because you're so worried about getting to the 10. You're not going to celebrate four through nine. You see that?

Now it's a very simple process. Making it simple and not letting yourself get confused and not getting overwhelmed and stop telling yourself you don't know. You will create some benefits for your school and yourself. So let's look at those.

What are the results? A tangible, livable vision allows you to be very concrete in the communication you put out to your community, the expectations you have and how you articulate them to your staff and students, and the approach that you take on a daily basis. It helps you know what to measure and how to measure it. It gives you milestones to celebrate and keep you on track. Think about this.

Let's say you have a vision for where you want your school to be by the end of this school year. You get to the end of the school year, let's say you wanted to get to an eight and you got to a six. Are you going to celebrate three through six growth? Or are you going to condemn yourself for not

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doing seven and eight? You see that? You cannot fail if you have a vision you don't quit on.

If you celebrate the heck out of a six, and say okay, here's how we're going to go from six to eight. Next year, who cares how long it takes. You wanted it in one year. Maybe it takes you three. So what? You're still there. You're still at the happy land and the vision, right? Don't stop on yourself. Don't quit on yourself. Don't give up. Don't let go of that commitment. Celebrate every single win along the way.

Then when you're doing all of this, and you're having fun, your job becomes easier because your vision is so clear. It's easier to articulate. You don't have a problem getting up and speaking in front of people or writing a newsletter or meeting with new parents or talking to your staff at a staff meeting or providing professional development because you know exactly how to articulate yourself and articulate that vision. You live and breathe that vision. When you live and breathe a vision, people are more likely to understand its value.

What we're going to talk about next week is getting people on board with the vision. People need to understand the vision so clearly and feel it inside of their bones that they can't help but get on board with the vision. So your work comes first. Before you can sell a vision and create buy in of any kind with your staff, you have to have a vision. You have to understand your vision. It has to be visceral. It has to be articulate. It has to be simple and crisp and clear.

When you're busy doing this work, you're also building up your self-concept about who you are as a leader. I am a visionary leader. I know what I want. I know how to get there. I know how to do this. You're building up your self-concept as a thought leader, a visionary mindset leader. That energy, when you show up in that energy at your school, your teachers are going to be

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paying attention. I can't wait to tell you all the rest on next week's podcast. I'll talk to you then. Take good care. Bye.

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