

Ep #258: Fully Enjoy Your Holiday Break



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 258.

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. Welcome to December. Can you believe it? Oh, my goodness, what is happening right now. I feel like fall goes so fast. We just celebrated the US Thanksgiving holiday. So if you live in in the United States and you celebrated your holiday, I'm going to talk about that holiday. I'm going to set you up for a very successful and fully enjoyable holiday season.

As most of you know, December is the month of holidays. All across the world, we have different holidays that we celebrate. Some are religious, some are not, but there tends to be a break this time of year. I want to set you up to have the most fulfilling break that you can have. So here in the US, the holidays are coming. We have the winter holidays. We have the New Year's Eve coming. I know we celebrate that all across the world.

I want to start by talking about how you celebrated this past holiday. So for those of you who don't live here and you didn't celebrate Thanksgiving, that's fine. Just think back to the last time you had a break that was longer than a long weekend. So a significant break, maybe three or four or five days off or a full week off. Think about how you spent your last break from school. Okay.

I want you to ask yourself some questions. Because the goal of this podcast is to be very intentional about the time that we're away from work, as intentional with that time as we are when we are at work and the way

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that we spend our time at work. I talk a lot about time management and being intentional with our time as a school leader, but that also includes being intentional with our time when we're not working.

What else do you want to be doing with your time other than school leadership? I know it's fun. I know it's busy. I know it's all consuming at times, but we cannot continue to identify ourselves solely as school leaders. Work tends to be our comfort zone. It tends to be where we feel the best, where we feel most natural, where we belong. It feels like a second home to us.

I understand that, but I really want to address the issue of how we're spending our breaks. This might feel fluffy to you, but hear me out. Listen to the full podcast. It's short and sweet. Okay. Think about your last break. Were you fully present during that break? Were you engaged in the daily activities of that, or were you thinking about work? Did you plan how you were going to spend that break? Did you plan a vacation? Did you plan a staycation? Did you plan to be with your kids or your family or by yourself? How did you spend that time?

Did you think about work and not work, just feeling stressed about it or worried about or ruminating over it in your mind as it's playing in the background while you're kind of going through the motions of being on break? Did you work when you didn't want to work? You felt compelled you had to work, or you just wanted to catch up quick? Or did you intend to work? Did you schedule time over your break to get some things done because it felt good and you had the time and you wanted to work?

Notice the difference between feeling like you had to work, feeling that urge to work, and giving in to that urge when you really wanted the break. Versus giving yourself the break, feeling rested, and then having some time available to catch up on some things or to do something that you want it to

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do when you have the peace and quiet to be able to think clearly and plan out your vision and your three month plan.

Did you let yourself enjoy your break? Did you enjoy the time you had away from work, or did the work hang over your head? Did you notice that you didn't enjoy being away from work? I know for some of us, for many of us I will say, sometimes we prefer to work. We would rather work. That feels more comfortable to be working and in our routine and in the expertise energy of who we are and what we know and getting things done and fixing problems and answering emails and completing tasks, all of that.

We would rather be in that space because it feels very productive than perhaps being at home where we might have other things we have to contend with or deal with or confront or talk about, things that make us feel uncomfortable or awkward.

Maybe Thanksgiving is really stressful for you because you don't like to cook. Yet every year you find yourself having to spend days on end cooking food, you don't really enjoy cooking. Or that you're spending hours in the kitchen, and you'd rather just order it out, have it delivered, or go out for Thanksgiving. Think about how you spent the time. Was it intentional?

So for me personally, I think back. This time of year really resonates with me because I remember being a school leader, and I remember feeling like I was hanging on by a thread waiting for Thanksgiving break to come. Because my district, we basically went nonstop from July 1 all the way until Thanksgiving. I think we had Labor Day, and then we had Veterans Day. That was really it. Those were the only two days off between—I mean Fourth of July and all of that.

But when I think about what once school started, we had the Labor Day break and the Veterans Day break. That was it until Thanksgiving. So

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everyone was holding their breath for Thanksgiving break. When I think about that, I love fall. It's my favorite season. October felt so long. Even though I love fall. I love all the things pumpkin, apples, candles, fall. I just love it, but October felt excruciatingly long as a school administrator. I actually just recorded a podcast called The Fall Dip. I recorded that a couple of weeks ago. So listen to that if you're feeling stretched thin.

So for me, what would happen by the time November rolled around, all I could think about was the break. I was so excited for the break. I would daydream about the break. I would daydream about not having to come into work and get ready and drive in and be on point and be there for everybody else. I just I wanted to not do anything. That's all I could think about. I wanted to sleep in. I wanted to have fun with friends and family. I wanted to not think about work.

But what happened was in the weeks leading up to the break, which is where you're at right now heading into the holiday season, what happened for me was I would start to overwork. The thought driving the overworking was, if I get this one more thing done, if I get this project done, or this observation done, or if I crank out newsletters ahead of time, or if I get the staff meeting planned. I just kept adding things to my plate to get done before the break so that I could relax.

It was like I was telling myself I had to get all of this to do list done in order to have permission to be able to relax over the break. If I didn't get this done, then I wasn't going to be able to relax, or I was going to have to work on my break. I just kept adding things to that list. No matter how much I got done, more needed to get done.

If any of you out there are feeling my vibe and this is resonating with you, it makes sense, right? Our brain thinks that when x gets done, then we can relax. We don't give ourselves permission to let it be what it is right here

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right now and still have the permission to take a break and relax. So I found myself hustling, especially that week before break. I pushed myself so hard. I gave it everything.

By the time the break rolled around, and I actually was home, I would almost always be sick. I would come down with something, whether it was a cold or the flu or pneumonia or bronchitis, strep throat, pinkeye. I mean a cold sore, something. My body just would explode from the exhaustion and the overworking and the overexerting.

Then being sick made my break less enjoyable. I remember thinking. I would be lying in bed like I was so mad that I was sick on my break, but I thought to myself, well, at least I'm sick over the break so I don't have to take days off. Is that you? Do you think this? Or you're like well, at least I'm sick over my break. No. That's not okay. We continue to work ourselves into the ground, and then we are sick on the break, or we just sleep the break away because we're so tired because we pushed ourselves so hard so we had permission to relax.

It's insane, right? This is insane. I want to stop this cycle. It's the insanity cycle. We're going to stop it by planning our break ahead of time. The thought work that comes with that, which is you have permission. You are worthy to take a break. You deserve to take the break. You have full permission from yourself. It's okay for other people to go take breaks. It's okay for other people to wait for you to have your break. We have to give ourselves full permission that we are worthy, and we deserve to have a break that feels good for us, that feels amazing to us, that is spent in the way we want to spend it.

I know this sounds frivolous, but planning your break is the difference between sustainability as a school leader and burnout as a school leader. So if you're going 100 miles an hour, if you're afraid to stop overworking, if

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you're afraid that if you slow down and let yourself relax, like if you give yourself full permission to sleep in and stay in your jammies and not do anything, not answer to anybody, not check emails, whatever it is that sounds like a dream come true for you.

If you're afraid that you're never going to want to go back, this is the podcast for you. I promise you the relaxation and the rest that your body is craving is exactly what you need in order to want to go back. The only reason you would never want to go back to work is because you would work yourself to the bone. The reason you don't want to go back to work is because it's relentless, right?

But if you went back to work rested, and you thought to yourself I'm gonna make sure that I continue to have rest periodically. Yes, I might work hard, but I'm gonna come home at the end of the night, put my head on the pillow, and get the rest I need knowing tomorrow's work can be tomorrow. It doesn't have to all be done today. When you can get into that mindset, that is how you stay sustainable as a school leader.

So I didn't learn this, unfortunately, until the last couple of years, two or three years maybe of my school leadership experience, right? I realized I've got to plan my breaks and honor them just as I would my work calendar. I didn't want to have to plan one more thing. So I was in resistance to the thought of planning my break. I knew I needed to plan it, and I knew I wanted to plan it. But I didn't. I was in resistance to planning it because that's what we do as school leaders. We plan all day long. So I didn't want to make decisions about my break. Isn't that funny?

But I want you to hear this out. Right? I didn't plan my break because I didn't think that the planning would make a difference. I felt too tired to have a plan. But what I was really saying to myself is I don't value the time that I'm off of work as much as I value the time I am at work because I don't

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care to plan it. I don't want to plan it. I don't value investing a little bit of time to plan that break.

What happens? The break never goes as I thought it would. So my breaks always felt less satisfying than I wanted them to feel. I would go back to work wondering why I didn't feel rested. I didn't feel satisfied. I didn't feel like I had enough break. But it's because number one, sometimes I worked on my breaks. Or if I didn't work on my breaks, I was thinking about work on my breaks, or I was having that urge to work. Or I was just ruminating and worrying with no action, which was consuming my mental energy, and I wasn't present.

Or even if I was like checked out of work and in the mind, I hadn't decided what I was actually going to focus my brain on for the week. So I was kind of just like going through the motions of break without any real plan of how I wanted to experience it. Okay. So I highly encourage you. Map out your break the same way you map out work. Decide the outcome you want to create.

What is the experience you want to have? How do you want to feel by the end of break? Do you want to feel more rested? Do you want to have spent time with family or friends? Do you need alone time? Do you want to read for pleasure? Do you want to travel? Do you want to dive back into some favorite hobbies? Decide ahead of time the experience that you want to have on your break.

Here's the thing, I am not saying overschedule yourself or have your break feel like it needs to be productive every minute of the day for the two weeks. Not in the sense that you're accomplishing a task or some kind of family commitment or you're overextending yourself in your personal life. No, that's a no.

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What I am saying is if you are physically, mentally, or emotionally exhausted, or all three, check all three boxes, and all you can think about is sleeping and having days where you do nothing. There is no physical exertion, no mental exertion, no emotional exertion. If that's what you want, put that on the calendar.

I do this for myself now all the time. I have full days that I block out that is titled do whatever I want in the moment day. This is the day I let myself sleep in for as long as I want. I let myself get up and do where ever the day takes me. I let myself play on the phone without judgment. I watch the social media posts, the videos, I play games on my, whatever entertains me.

I let myself be a kid and just lay around, watch TV, or look at my phone, or take a nap, or read a book for fun or bake some cookies. Whatever calls to me. Play music, go for walks, call my friends. I don't know. Whatever your soul is craving, give it permission to be in the driver's seat for a day, put it down on your calendar.

Here's why. When you decide I'm going to be on the couch all day in my comfy sweats, watching shows, eating popcorn and pizza, and letting myself be lazy with the most absolute pleasure and zero guilt or regret. When you put that on the calendar, and you do that, you honor it, it feels so good. When your brains like oh, we have this whole day we really could be working. We could be working on the site plan. We could get that safety plan done. Oh, I could write a newsletter.

It's like nope, that's an off the table today because what I have planned is this. I'm indulging myself by choice, and it feels so much better than indulging yourself with guilt. Or indulging yourself with the urge to work and then giving into that urge. Then you're mad at yourself because you said you were going to take the break and you did it.

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I have to tell you, I would have never enjoyed a day like this before. Because first of all, I thought it shouldn't happen. Second of all, because I judged myself for being unproductive. That is still a work in progress, but I am practicing active unproductivity. Number three, if I didn't plan for it and on the rare occasion, I actually like did have a lazy day, but it wasn't really planned. The only reason that would ever happen is because I was too sick or too tired to do anything else.

Number four, I never allowed myself. This is why I never felt like I was having fun. I never felt rested. I never felt fulfilled. I always was working and being productive and on the go and solving other people's problems and answering other people's emails and meeting with other people and figuring out their needs. I never gave myself permission to have a meeting with myself on the couch with a Diet Coke and popcorn. I don't know.

So when you decide ahead of time to enjoy yourself, what you're doing is giving yourself permission to enjoy your life. You are reminding yourself that there are other things in your life that you love, and that they are just as important as work. Do you hear me? Putting yourself in what you love to do on your calendar tells the universe I matter. What I love to do is important.

I'm not here on this earth just for the sole purpose to serve my school. Yes, it's important, but you're also a person with multiple facets in your life. You're a mom or a dad or a wife or a husband or a partner or a friend or a daughter or a son or an athlete or maybe a walker, a baker, a pianist, a crafter, a traveler, a learner. I could go on for hours. Whatever fills your soul. Let it come to the surface during the breaks. Give it time to be in the driver's seat. You're not only defined as a school leader. Don't ever buy into that. Ever. That is not only who you are.

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When you don't take the time to plan out your break and decide what you want to gain from that time that you're on break, you're going to feel very passive in your life as though the break came and went and you didn't get what you needed from it. It just happened to you. Now I know again, this sounds fluffy, but it's the difference between principals who love their jobs and sustain themselves for the long haul in this industry.

Education is a high burnout profession. The reason it's high burnout is because we do not give as much priority to the other parts of our life as we do to the professional parts of our life. If there is one emotion that I can offer you to consider when it comes to taking your break, it's trust.

Trust your body to tell you what it needs. Trust that your break is for you to enjoy it the way that you want. Trust that taking a full day or a full week to rest and relax does not mean you'll never want to work again, and that you're going to be so far behind, you'll never catch up. Trust that your school is going to be just fine for the week. You know what everybody else is out wanting to have their break too. If you're busy writing emails, answering emails, they're gonna feel like they have to do it too. Stop the madness. Break the cycle. Be the example.

Trust yourself that you can handle waiting to answer that email and that others can handle waiting to receive an email back from you. Trust that you will get tomorrow's work done tomorrow. Trust that you don't need to keep up. You are keeping up by resting up, by enjoying up, by living it up. Plan your break right now.

Whatever this podcast is, it's the first week of December this very week. Plan your break. Ask yourself, how do you want to feel by the end of that break and why? How does planning your break and taking one that feels good serve you, serve your school for the better? How is it safe to take a break? Some of us don't feel it is safe to slow down and take a break.

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I promise you it's safe. It's the best thing you can do for yourself and your school. You've got to sell yourself on the value of this break. It has to be equally important as your work is, and you have to establish that importance by planning it and scheduling it in to your calendar. Put your fun, your downtime, your rest, the activities you want to be doing, the people you want to be hanging out with and spending time with. I encourage you this will be a game changer if you take your breaks as seriously as you take work.

So join the Facebook group, post how you're planning to spend your break. We're doing a whole thing in Facebook. So I'm recording this in October. I'm starting a whole thing on the fall dip and how to prevent that, how to keep your morale up and running. In December as you're listening to this, we're going to be talking about all the fun ways we're spending break, how to relax, how not to give into the urge to work, and how to trust that the school and the people are going to be okay when their school leader loves her and himself enough to take a break. I love you guys so much. I will talk with you next week. Take good care. Bye.

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learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.