

Ep #267: The Stigma of Asking for Help



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 267.

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. Welcome to February 2023. How're you doing out there? Hey, before I start this podcast, I have to take a moment and shout myself out and celebrate. Hey, I tell you guys to celebrate yourselves. I need to model that and honor that and be a product of my product.

I have to tell you something. The 260th episode of this podcast, which dropped I think at the end of December maybe? Maybe January? Not quite sure. But that podcast 260 was the five year anniversary of the *Empowered Principal™ Podcast*. 260 episodes, how did I miss that? Oh, my goodness. But actually, I do know how I missed it because it was in the middle of the holidays. It was November, December, January. It was all the holidays, all the travel, all the family things. You guys know, it's busy.

So I have to apologize for missing it, but I'm going to take a moment to celebrate it and to acknowledge myself and to model why we should celebrate and how to celebrate and just to pat ourselves on the back for the hard work we've been doing.

Look you guys, the version of me five years ago who had no idea what she was doing and was just starting this podcast, didn't know what content to create or what to say or how to say it. I am so grateful to that version of me, that five-year younger version of me, because she put me in this position

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where this podcast, it's so powerful, and it's helping people all over the world.

260 episodes, five years. That is huge. That is five years of consistently showing up, creating content, recording every single week, coaching my clients, learning from them, developing concepts at a deeper and deeper level. Then trying to figure out how to create and format this content in a consumable way to make it simple and easy to understand.

I've been showing up for myself and for you, week after week for the last five years. I am so proud of myself. I'm so proud of this accomplishment. I love this podcast and the value stack that I've created. I've been stacking valuable content year after year, week after week for you, for principals to learn about and implement in your life and in your careers as school leaders.

This podcast is 100% free for every school leader on the planet, and it always will be. I know it has helped thousands of school leaders because I've heard from you. I hear you. I see you. I feel you. If you haven't worked directly with me yet, I do hope, in all honesty, to work with you soon one day. I hope, actually no. I know this podcast has been a huge source of value and support because you've told me.

I know it's provided courage and leverage and empowerment for you to be the best version of yourself as a school leader, to take yourself and your school to new heights. This podcast alone even without personally coaching me provides so much free value and content. I'm always saying to the clients that I work with who've hired me just imagine the value and empowerment and solutions we're going to create together throughout our work. Working hand in hand every single week for an entire year.

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Most of my clients are two years in, three years in, some are four and five years in. Can you see how we're going to expand and evolve you as a school leader? We love geeking out and talking about that. It's not just about who they're becoming in leading their school, but how you feel as a human, the experience of your school leadership journey, your professional journey, your personal journey. Just being a human on the planet and applying these tools on an everyday level. Looking at the sunset differently, loving your spouse or partner differently because of coaching, talking to your kids and having conversations with your own children differently and showing up differently because of coaching.

Handling conversations and communications and problems meaning like conflicts or differences of opinion. Being able to show up and handle those differently at work because of coaching tools. Being able to create results you never thought were possible because you've learned how to create and carry on and lead in new and just revolutionary ways. It blows my mind the help that I'm offering, and I'm so proud of it, and I'm so excited.

I'm just really also blown away by the podcast experience I've had in becoming a podcaster and now being a five-year veteran of podcasting. I absolutely love it. Even when I have to rerecord right, Angela? I'm talking to my producer Angela. Well, actually Devon is my gal at.

I just have to do a shout-out right away. My production team at Digital Freedom Productions, huge shout out to Pavel and Angela and Devon and the entire team. They are amazing. I got an email from Devon today saying oh my gosh, episode, what is this episode? 267. I recorded it, but the audio came out horrible. I'm not sure what happened, and I hope it's not happening right now because I've got to get this to hurt because it's due next week. I mean, it's coming out next week. So we have to get this done.

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But I want to tell you how much fun, how much love I have for this team. They are incredible. They are the best of the best. Let me tell you guys, I get solicited in emails, especially all the time by people, companies, and people, individuals, whatever wanting to produce this podcast. Offering me like free samples and free podcast recordings and all of that.

There is not a chance on this green earth I would ever change my company from Digital Freedom Productions. They are amazing. Nothing could take me away from Pavel and his team. I love them so, so much. I actually got to meet Angela at a conference in November recently, and I was so excited to meet her.

So I have to tell you this too. Back in the beginning, I talked about being new and embracing being new and being awkward and being uncomfortable. All of the feelings that come with being new. Pavel can attest to this. If you listen back to the beginning of this podcast, when I first started I was so new, and I was so scared. He would have to call me and give me constructive feedback about how to podcast correctly, the mic, the audio quality, and just how to speak more naturally.

Because in the beginning, of course, I was like spending hours, like eight hours, writing one podcast, and then I would articulate it and read it to you very robotically. You go back and listen, it's on there. But as Pavel can probably remember, he had to coach me and guide me, and I had no idea what I was doing. But if you just listen to them, you're gonna hear me being new and awkward and uncomfortable. Embrace being new.

Right now for my brand new client who's out there and she's brand new, she got thrown into the position. I shouldn't say thrown in. She accepted it. But mid-year, there was a change in guard where the principal left and they asked her to take over the principalship, and she's brand new. Just a month in. I want you to embrace being new. Let it be fun. Even though it's

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awkward, even though it's uncomfortable, being new at something can be super fun.

I think back to those days. Yeah, it felt hard. Yeah, I cried. Yes, I had to re-record lots of times. But that is where I stacked up my experience. I had to let it be B minus, and it's out there for the world to hear. I don't mind. I don't even care that it's B minus. It's okay because you can hear my evolution.

Now, one of the things that I had to do was I had to learn how to teach in audio-only format. It was a totally new experience for me. When I was a kindergarten teacher for 15 years, I was very hands-on. Everything was very developmental, which meant kinesthetic learning. So trying to teach without that aspect was hard for me. I had to think about it. This is for ears only. This is audio only. How do you deliver content in this new way?

But over time after delivering this for the last five years, showing up here for you every single day, every single week has been one of the greatest honors of my life, my ultimate pleasure. I love you all so much. Now, look at me getting all emotional. I love you. I love this podcast, and I love my team, and I look forward to the next five years together.

Anyway, as a gift to me, I would really love it if you would share this podcast. Share it with your colleagues, share it on your social media platforms, share it with as many people as possible because this is about the mental and emotional work that is required to be the best versions of ourselves as school leaders. I'm going to jump in and talk about that today.

We're going to talk about asking for the help that you need, and the stigma of asking for help and why we don't do it. So stigma means shame or disgrace. When we think about the stigma associated with asking for help, no wonder nobody wants to ask for help, right? We consider it shameful.

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We consider it a disgrace. There's this societal opinion or somehow we created this norm that it's not okay to ask for help.

So I've been thinking about this. Why don't we want to ask for help? All of you out there who want help desperately, but you're afraid to reach out and ask for coaching or just sign up for coaching or to get the help that you need whether it's through coaching or some other form of help. Why don't we do it? Let's reflect on that together right here right now.

Number one, we believe that we should and can be able to figure things out on our own. I mean, this is me through and through. I think to myself hey, I'm smart enough. I've solved other problems before so why can't I figure this one out? It's true. We are smart. We are capable. We are empowered. We do know how to solve problems, but we're faced against something. We keep beating our head against the wall trying to figure it out on our own simply because we believe that we should be figuring it out on our own.

There are little ways in which I do this. I'm pretty skilled at asking for help. I'm getting better at it, and I see the value in it. Here's how I switched my thoughts on asking for help. I was trying to solve a problem. I'd had it for a while. I was thinking well, I should be able to figure this out. Like what am I missing? It's gotta be somewhere. It's like I was looking through the forest without a flashlight trying to find the solution. You've probably experienced this, I'm sure.

But I thought to myself, wait a minute. Timeout here. What is the cost of not simply asking for the help that I need? Why am I so adamant that I should be able to figure this out on my own? What's this costing me? Because it was going on and on and on. I realized oh my goodness, the cost of not asking for help right here right now.

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It's costing me time, precious time, the one resource in my life that I cannot generate more of or get back. I can't replenish it, and I can't generate more of it. I'm spending it. I'm wasting it trying to solve this on my own. It's also costing me stress, anxiety. It's costing me sleep. I'm thinking about it at night, trying to solve problems at night. Can't go to sleep. It wakes me up. That's the first thing that weighs on me in the morning. Lots and lots of anxiety and stress. So time, energy, stress, everything is being consumed by trying to figure this out on my own.

Then what happens in your mind? The problem gets bigger. It feels deeper, heavier, harder. It feels worse. It causes other issues, mental, psychological, physical issues, right. It starts to impact you and other people around you without you realizing it. Because you're so weighed down by it, now you're in reaction mode. You might be snapping at your teachers or snapping at your spouse or partner or snapping at your own kids or just feeling like you can't take it, can't handle it. You got to take a mental health day, right? That impacts your district.

So what happens when we can't do something on our own? We either have to admit to ourselves that we need help and be willing to feel the experience of needing help and asking for it. Or we just carry on struggling along thinking that eventually we're going to be able to figure it out on our own. It's just fascinating to think and observe ourselves in both of these scenarios.

What does it look like to ask for help? How does it feel to ask for help? What are the actions I would have to take to ask for help? What are the results I gain or receive from asking for help? What are the unintended results that come up when I do ask for help? Or the opposite path. What does it look and feel like to work and have to figure it out on my own? What are the actions that I take? What are the intended actions and unintended

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actions? What are the intended results and unintended results? Just look at both of those paths. Okay.

So that's problem number one. We should ourselves, and we tell ourselves we should be able to figure this out on our own because we're not looking at the cost associated with figuring it out.

Number two, we don't like the way it feels to ask for help. This is kind of a facet of number one, but we think we should figure it out on our own. That's one thought. But the other one is we just don't like the way it feels because it can make us feel inadequate, incompetent, lazy. We feel like we're a failure. We feel like we're being a burden on other people when we ask for help. We don't like the way that it feels.

Look, there's a wide range of what each of us makes asking for help mean about ourselves. A big one I know is shame. We feel shame for having a problem that we don't know how to fix. We feel embarrassed that we don't have an answer or the information or skills we need to solve it on our own. We feel guilty if we've let a problem fester for a little longer than maybe it could have or should have. Have you felt that before? We try to avoid all these feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt.

When we try to avoid them, it further isolates you from other people because you're trying to hide the problem. Then you're trying to hide the feelings that you feel from other people. We make the problem become a bigger problem because we're trying to hide the problem itself and the fact that we can't solve it and the feelings that come with having to ask for help, and then the shame and the guilt and the embarrassment. We stack it upon ourselves, and all of a sudden it's like we're burying ourselves in this problem.

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It's something I've observed myself do multiple times. I've definitely witnessed it in other principals. Look, I've done it in my personal life, my professional life, as a principal, as a business owner. Because the way we do one thing is really the way we do everything. Your decision-making process, the filters through which you make decisions. You use those filters in all the areas of your life.

So if you're resistant to feeling embarrassment personally, you're going to find yourself doing everything possible to avoid it in all areas of your life. Everyone thinks that other people know how to solve problems on their own. Social media has made this thought so pervasive. I want you to notice how this thought does not serve you. If you're on social media or you're in a group with other principals or even thinking about your colleagues and within your district.

If you're thinking that other people have it figured out, and they don't need to ask for help, and they are doing it better than you, how does that make you feel about your capacity to lead, your skill sets? It makes you feel terrible. You feel inadequate, incompetent, maybe even a little ashamed. Think about how you show up, the decisions you make, the actions you take when you're feeling inadequate.

You want to hide. You don't want people to know you're inadequate. So you hide. You don't ask. You don't want people to believe that you're incompetent. You don't want to feel incompetent. But because you are feeling incompetent, you hide that. We hide it, we isolate it, we mask the struggle. That adds additional suffering for ourselves.

Let me tell you this, the people you think who have it all pulled together and solve their own problems, they're doing one of two things. Number one, they're either masking it really well and hiding it just as much as you are, or they're asking for help when they need it. People who have great lives

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aren't living great lives because they have all the answers and they never need any help.

They live great lives because they're willing to ask for the help that they need, and they're willing to experience the emotions that come with asking for help. They're willing to feel all those yucky feelings. They're willing to feel incompetent and ask anyway. They're willing to be embarrassed and ask anyway. They're willing to be humbled and ask anyway.

It's not that they don't experience those emotions while they're asking for help. It's that they're willing to experience the emotions while they're asking for help. I'm also guessing that they're willing to change what they make asking for help mean about themselves. We're going to talk more about that in a second.

So number two is thinking that other people have it all together, and that we don't like the way it feels to ask for help. Number three, we are worried what other people will think about us or say about us, right? We're worried about what they will think.

They're gonna say she's inadequate. She's incompetent, a failure, lazy, selfish. All the things that we're worried about feeling, our biggest fears that other people are going to believe that they're true about us. That we actually are incompetent, we are unable to solve this, we are inadequate, we are being a burden. Like think of how those feel. What if they think this? How will I feel? That's going to compound your feelings of inadequacy and incompetency.

Hey, guys, the truth is this. There are some people out there that might think that. It could happen. There might be a person out in the world who thinks these thoughts about you. But listen, you cannot control what other people think anyway, no more than they can control what you're thinking

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about them. So let's be fully transparent and say hey, it is possible. But it's also equally possible that they are thinking the opposite of all of these things.

The people that care about you, and that matter the most in your life, are making your request for help mean that you're exhibiting intelligence and competency and selflessness. They're making it mean that you're demonstrating leadership and modeling what it looks like to be successful. Not only that, when you ask for help, you're giving other people the opportunity to contribute their support and their advice and their mentoring for you. You're letting them give you the resources you need to keep yourself and your school moving forward.

Number four, sometimes we don't ask for help because of a negative past experience. Sometimes that experience may have felt very traumatic for you. It may be triggering for you when you consider asking for help. Now, I am not a trauma expert. I'm simply speaking from my own experience here.

But my experience personally and my experience of working with other school leaders is that most of us along the way growing up have been explicitly told you should know better. You shouldn't have to ask for help. That's a dumb question. You should be able to figure this out on your own. Somehow, somewhere along the line many people have been shamed for asking for help. Perhaps you were treated harshly or maybe even something really traumatic happened as a result of asking for help.

If that is the case for you, I invite you to reach out and get the support you need. Like, the more traumatic the experience, the more you can benefit from the help of a therapist or a psychologist or a counselor or a coach who can support you and help you through that traumatic or negative experience, and help you uncover why asking for help is valuable and helpful for you. It makes your life easier. Okay.

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For me, I can certainly remember while I was a student, my teachers back in the day, gotta think I grew up in the 70s and 80s. But making fun of kids, subtle fun. Like kind of indirectly, but kids who maybe didn't get it or who couldn't follow along or didn't understand a concept or raise their hand and got the answer wrong. Somehow they might have been ridiculed in some indirect and not-so-indirect way sometimes.

But what I learned as a student was do not ask questions or draw attention to myself for fear of public embarrassment and humiliation. Only raise your hand when you know for sure you have the right answer. Do not risk being wrong. I learned that as a student. When you do get called on and you don't know the answer, come up with the best-sounding BS you can.

There just weren't classroom norms for this kind of thing. Not all teachers did it. I'm not trying to shoot down teachers. If they didn't know they were doing it and it was an unconscious outcome, I forgive them. But we all have had some experience where we were taught it is not acceptable to ask for help, or it's dangerous, or it's not safe to ask for help. Emotionally, mentally, physically, psychologically. There is some level of danger involved with asking for help.

Because when you are so afraid to ask for help, there's a reason. It's your brain going into fight or flight thinking there's real danger here. There's a problem, and we are at risk of being hurt in some capacity. So if you are very risk-averse, and you have a lot of trauma or pain associated with asking for help, find a professional who can explore that with you. Okay.

So actually one more thing I want to say about that that just popped into my head. As a school leader right here right now, we can't change the past, but we can change the future. So I ask you. Do you establish a culture where asking for help is strongly encouraged at your school, for teachers, for staff, for students, for families?

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I think we have a lot of power in our schools to change this narrative about asking for help, and what we make it mean about ourselves and what we think about other people. Really embracing and cultivating a culture that asking for help is a good thing. That we want people to do it whenever they need it and whenever possible, and never shame or make people feel guilty or bad about it. We might coach them on how they can go back to solving it for themselves, but even that level of support is the little boost or help that they need to get back into independence.

I want to point out that I'm not saying we should use asking for help as a first resort. We want people, adults and children alike, to be resourceful and to mind their own brain for answers and solutions to problems. I talk about using your brain to be resourceful on this podcast all the time. You definitely want to build up your resourcefulness muscles as a leader and coach other people to be resourceful, to solve their problems. But understand that part of resourcefulness includes being willing to ask for help when you've come to a point in the road where assistance is needed.

As you come up against a challenge where you want to ask for help but you're afraid, I invite you to assess the cost of not asking for help. I had a client of mine who was dealing with a very challenging parents situation. The parents were considered to be very litigious. As a first-year principal, she felt like she was in over her head. She thought for a hot second about not asking for help because she was a little embarrassed. She wanted to show that she could prove herself.

But then she thought about what are the possible outcomes of not asking for the help? Like what's the cost? What are the consequences that could be possible if I don't get the help that I need right now? She ended up asking for the support. Here's what happened. The superintendent was so thrilled that the principal came and asked for the help because they could come up with a plan and approach to calm these parents and to get them

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on the same page and create a win/win situation where they weren't jumping to litigation.

So there are times and places where it is appropriate to ask for help. Not only that, people around you, including your superiors, want you to ask for their help. Okay.

So what are the benefits of asking for help? It just makes life easier. It helps you solve problems faster. It's more collaborative. It's more fun than going solo. Look. I love coaching so much. We have so much fun together. We laugh about these crazy situations you guys are in. We're collaborative. We brainstorm. It's not me coming in with all the answers. It's me coaching your brain. Sometimes I'm just here to listen and brainstorm with you. okay? It's more fun than going solo.

It creates connections and bonding over that work that you do together and overcoming a challenge together with another person. People want to help. You love to help people. That's why you're in school leadership. Coaches love to help you. It's in our nature as human beings to help one another. So ask yourself what are you making asking for help mean about you? What are you making it mean about others? What else might it mean? What is the benefit of help? How is it better to ask for help?

Really sell yourself on the value of asking for help and dropping the story that it means that you're inadequate, that you're not capable, that you're not a good leader. It's actually the opposite. You are a good leader when you ask for help. You are a competent leader. You are adequate because there's nobody on the planet who can do life and leadership alone 100% of the time. If they are, they're faking it. Call them out.

So keep your ultimate goal in mind. You might not want the experience of asking for help and feeling a little humbled or a little embarrassed or a little

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shy about it, but your future self will thank you. If it requires help, it's worth asking for it. Go ask for help. Get the help you need. Get in here and let's coach. I love you all. Talk to you next week. Take good care. Bye, bye.

If this podcast resonates with you, you have to sign up for the Empowered Principal™ coaching program. It's my exclusive one-to-one coaching and mentorship program for school leaders who believe in possibility. This program is designed for principals who are hungry for the fastest transformation in the industry. If you want to create the best connections, impact, and legacy for yourself and your school, the Empowered Principal™ program was designed for you. Join me at angelakellycoaching.com/work-with-me to learn more. I'd love to support you in becoming an empowered school leader.

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