

## Ep #269: Working with Negative Teachers



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With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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## Ep #269: Working with Negative Teachers

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 269.

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 and Happy Tuesday. For those of you who are new, welcome to the podcast. We are thrilled you're here. I can't believe it's February. As I say every February, it's my birthday month. I'm having the best time. I celebrate all month long. I find little ways and big ways to celebrate myself. Actually, one of the things that I shared in the mid-year reboot was my new practice in the morning.

So one of the things I am doing is I found my brain waking up very negative and very kind of heavy. Just like heavy with anxiety, heavy with worry, heavy with doubt, and a little bit of I'm not good enough. Just like I'll never be good enough. I found myself being weighed down by that. My husband was going through some health issues in November and December. Then January, I have just been up and at it because I have rebooted, and we are just in a new energy because my business is exploding. I'm super excited. I just have all these ideas pouring out of my head.

But one of the reasons I've been able to do that was this little practice. So this is totally a side note from what we're talking about today. Actually, you could apply it to this content today. But I want to share with you something that's been very helpful for me. Our brains default to the negative. They default to the negative about school, about our families, about our relationships, but especially about ourselves.

So many people call me and they say the reason I'm calling you is because I lack confidence, or I am so struck, almost paralyzed in fear of what other

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people will think or what other people are thinking. They're scared of judgment. They're scared of self-criticism. They have been berating themselves and they've been so mean to themselves for so long that they're almost paralyzed in fear. They just don't feel confident. They don't feel certainty. They don't feel secure. It's weighing them down more and more and more.

I noticed myself getting into a little bit of this slip in like November/December. So I started practicing what I teach, basically. One of the things I teach is equal airtime for your brain. If your brain is going to default to all the things that are going wrong and how you're not good enough and what people are thinking and the judgment and how you're failing and nothing's working, fine.

Don't fight it. Just let it go there. Spend five minutes dumping it all out onto paper. Just let it go. I get a notebook, like a spiral bound notebook, and I dump it all out. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Okay. I let it go. Say all the things.

But then, however many minutes I spent writing down all the blah blahs, I have to also ask myself what is working? What do you love about yourself? What are you proud of yourself for? What are you happy about today? What is working right now today? What can you be happy about? When I ask myself these prompts, I've been doing them every day. What I found is that it literally shifts the energy in my body.

Even if it's the same thing every single day. Like I'm still proud of the same things today that I was yesterday. Or maybe I did something yesterday that I can be proud of this morning, right? But most of it's kind of the same over and over, but it's reaffirming that yeah, my brain wants to tell me this isn't working. I'm not doing well, and I should be better here, and I should be further along here.

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You know. You guys know. Your brain is doing it too. You should be a better mom. You should be a better wife. You should be a better partner. You should be a better friend. You should be a better daughter or son. You should be getting more done at school. Your kids should be better. Your teachers should be better behaved. Right? Whatever it is.

I get it. Don't fight the part of your brain that just wants to mah, mah, mah. Let it go. But you have to ask it to balance with what is working, what is beautiful? What is fun about today? What is happy about today? What are you proud of? Try it and see if it works. I feel like it's been a game changer for me. Okay. Something simple takes me five to 10 minutes at most, and I'm on with my day, but the energy shift is pretty phenomenal. Give it a try.

Okay, so now we're going to talk about speaking of 50/50 and negativity, we're going to talk about working with negative teachers. So I was working with a client. She actually is a district administrator. She is overseeing all of the school counselors. So she's a counselor. She was a school counselor. Through the years, she's been mentoring them and working with them. Now she's promoted into a new district, and she is the coordinator or the director of these counselors. I'm not sure her exact title.

So we've been working on their mindset. It's interesting. I find it funny because they're counselors, right? Because I guess I had the thought that counselors, kind of like coaches, have some tools to maybe catch themselves or help themselves or self-coach themselves. So I was asking my client about this. I said do counselors have these tools? She said, just like coaches, just like leaders, some of them do and apply them and some of them don't. Right? We're humans. We can't see all of our blind spots.

So these are people on the planet doing the best they can. They're counselors are working hard. They're under a lot of stress. They're trying to get kids off to college. They're trying to help them with their academics and their social activity and getting into college. All of the things that middle and

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high school counselors do, and then the elementary counselors are doing a little more like social-emotional development. Okay.

So we were talking about how do we approach that one or two or handful of teachers on your campus that tend to be exceptionally grumpy or negative or just resistant? Okay. One of the things we talked about when I was asking her questions about increasing the effectiveness of the counseling services offered in her district, and what were her thoughts about what's working and what's not.

One of the things that came up as she's like, "Well, there's this group and there's this group." I lovingly reminded her that our brain wants to put people into categories. We are wired to judge, you guys. So I don't want you to judge yourself for judging because every human brain is wired to judge. We have to.

Judgment is how we decipher what works for us and what doesn't. It helps us decipher who our friends are going to be. It helps us decipher our partner and our career. Like our brain has to have the ability to judge things and decipher for itself what's going to work for us, right? So judgment's just a part of the package that comes with being human. So don't feel bad about judgment. Judgment isn't a problem unless we make assumptions with our judgments.

So it can be easy to label a person and make an assumption and maybe come to some judgment about them, or some conclusions is another way to say that, about them based on what you think is happening and why you think they're being negative. So just be cautious about that. When your brain offers you like well, what's going on with that person? It's like well, that person's an upper grade teacher. They've been here forever, and they got trained at this school.

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When your brain starts offering that, just notice that it's categorizing, and it's trying to come to a conclusion, which could be true, but we don't want to assume that it's true. It's not the 6:00 news. It's not facts, okay? It's what your brain thinks is happening. We want to be very careful about thoughts and opinions versus circumstances and facts, okay?

Because what ends up happening is when we talk about negative teachers as principals, let's be honest, we get very negative about our negative teachers. Right? We end up being negative about them being negative. So I don't want us to jump in the pool with the negative teachers and become more negative, right? We want to separate ourselves from the negativity.

So when a teacher is being negative, when they're complaining, whining, venting, gossiping, whatever they're doing, I want you to notice your reaction to their behavior. Is your reaction negative? Mine was. I'm just putting it out there. Like, my brain was like what are they doing? How can they talk like that? They're still complaining and whining, blah, blah. I was doing what they were doing. Oh, I hate catching myself in that.

But notice do you have judgments about their behavior? Your brain is gonna say like well, they shouldn't be so negative. They shouldn't talk like that. They shouldn't say those things. They should be more positive. They're sucking our school culture down. They're ruining us with their negativity. Notice how your mind is getting sucked into the negativity. Just be aware, okay?

It's not wrong. It's not a problem. It's called being human. Give yourself permission to be like oh, I see it. Because when you're focused on their negativity, your brain is going to pick that up and soak it in and just be like yeah, they are being negative. So notice that right?

Then, you're going to separate your thoughts and opinions from the teacher's behavior and actions. I speak to this very specifically in the

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podcast episode on handling your staff emotions. I think I did a podcast on that after I presented at the ASCD conference in November. I did a podcast for you specifically on that for those of you who weren't able to attend live.

So go back and listen to that episode. You need to be able to separate your thoughts and opinions and your feelings from the teacher's behavior and actions. So what are they doing? Then what are your thoughts and feelings about it? Two separate things, two separate STEER cycles. Being able to do this is everything because it's going to help you approach them in a more neutral fashion.

Because hey, if they are out there spewing negativity, you're not just going to let it happen, but you have to set aside your negativity, your thoughts about it just for a second. You can call me and complain or call your friends and complain or go home, but you want to put it aside when you're going to address it because you don't want negativity to beget negativity. Okay.

One of the things I always invite my clients to consider is to never assume that we know why they're behaving the way they are. It can seem obvious when somebody's whining and complaining and venting, but unless they've told us directly how they're thinking, how they're feeling, and why they're behaving the way they are, do not assume that based on their behavior you know what's going on.

We can never know what's driving a person's actions unless we ask them to share with us directly. Even then, if they don't trust us, and a lot of times they don't because we're their boss, they might not tell you the truth of what they're honestly thinking. So we can never assume that we have all of the information. We're not in their brain. We don't really know. They might tell us the truth, but just don't assume.

So if you're going to coach somebody, if you're going to bring up their negativity, you've noticed this behavior, you need to ask them what they



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think and feel and why. You can't coach them or ask them to change unless you first have asked them why? Why are they doing this? What are their feelings? What are their thoughts? You can't know how to coach their thoughts unless you ask them. You've got to always ask. That's super important, okay?

Then you want to be in check with yourself. What is your intention for this conversation? If you've got a teacher who's being negative, or a group of teachers who are being negative in your opinion, and maybe other people have come to you and said, "Look, this is going on. I just want you to be aware."

Hey, address it. I want you to address it, but I want you to think through why you're addressing it and how you're going to address it because you want to address them with compassion and honesty and curiosity versus assumptions and blasting them and not asking them. Just assuming and just going in there and saying hey, cut it out. Don't be like this. Stop it without ever wondering why it's happening in the first place. Right?

The behavior is a symptom of how they're feeling and thinking. You want to understand that so you can address their thoughts. Because the behavior will not change if the thought doesn't change. Never. They'll just go do it somewhere else, or they will do it in a different way. So what is your intention? What is the outcome you want? You want to lead this conversation with genuine curiosity.

When somebody is unhappy, or somebody is resistant, or they're closed off, if there's some kind of behavior that is not allowing you to connect with them, the goal is to establish trust and personal connection with them. That's the outcome you really want as you're approaching these teachers.

The outcome is not to fix them or solve their problem or even to try and help them feel better. We're not placating people. We're not fixing them.



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The outcome you're trying to create is to build a relationship with them that is trusting enough where they can feel seen, and they can feel heard. They have the thought like for once, somebody's not trying to fix me or tell me what I'm doing wrong or pushing me to change or telling me to be more positive. You want to invite them to be honest with you and give them a space to share why they're being negative and why they feel the way they do.

There might be something happening behind the scenes you have no idea. That's usually the case. We want to understand why they're being negative versus telling them to stop being negative, or that they shouldn't be negative. We don't know. Maybe they should be negative. Maybe there's something going on that is a valid reason for them to feel negative. We just simply can't know, and it's not our job to tell them how to feel, and what is and isn't valid for them.

If they have negative emotions, that negative emotion isn't the problem. How we process that negative emotion or how we exhibit it or express it we might want to adjust, but having negative emotion is part of the package. Right? So the goal isn't to fix the teacher's negative attitude or thinking. The goal for you, as the leader, is to understand why that person is feeling the way they do and what's driving their actions. Because once you do this, then you can ask them what they want and why.

I love to do this. What do you think the problem is? That's interesting. What do you think the solution is? Ah, what are the obstacles in your way? Why can't you solve this? Or what do you think would make this better? How do you want to feel? What would that take? What would have to happen for you to feel better or for you to like this better or for that problem to be solved? What do you think is in the way of that? Let's see if we can figure this out.

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What you're really doing is just identifying what thoughts they're thinking because they have to see that it's their thinking creating the feeling, not the situation. Most people don't see that there's a T line in there. There's a little thought, a little sentence that comes across the brain that happens when a situation is going on in their classroom or with a parent or in an IEP meeting that they have a thought, a sentence, an opinion about what they're making that situation mean. Okay. You want to help them identify what that is.

It's not about us coming in and saying hey, here's the problem. Here's the solution. It's more about you asking what do you think the problem is? What do you think the solution is? What obstacles do you think are in the way from you enjoying teaching? You ask, you listen, you invite them to think and share and problem solve. You can offer an alternate perspective for them to consider, but it's up to them to try and consider it.

We can't force people to think a certain way and feel a certain way or behave a certain way. We can guide them, we can coach them, we can ask them questions, we can mentor them, and we can coach them up, or we can coach them out from a loving, compassionate place full of honesty and transparency.

But what we can't do, or what we ideally don't want to do, is to assume and then to try and force somebody to change. Because if we could do that, life would be really easy for us. But then they would be in control of us, and we don't want that either. So give it a try. Let me know how it goes. Have a wonderful week, and I'll talk to you guys next week. Take good care. Bye.

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