

Ep #283: The Skill of Self-Forgiveness



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #283: The Skill of Self-Forgiveness

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 283.

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. Welcome to the podcast. Welcome to the end of May. Happy Memorial Day. You guys, you are almost across the finish line. Maybe some of you already are. It's the end of May 2023. You guys have done it. Congratulations. I'm so proud of you. I'm so happy for you. This is such a wonderful time of year.

Now I know you might be exhausted because you've been running, going everywhere, burning the candle at both ends, but you've done it. Give yourself a pat on the back. Truly acknowledge yourself. I just before this podcast was telling myself, Angela, you're amazing. I can't believe how much I got done this week.

Because guess what, guys? I got a last minute invitation to Hawaii. What is happening? This is what I love so much about my life. I create so much space in my work week that I have the flexibility to go on a last minute trip to Hawaii. I have friends who have a timeshare. They're going for two weeks, and they said you should come. Just come for as many days as you can. Let's go have fun, get some sun, let's relax. Don't bring your computer.

I thought I'm gonna do it. The tickets were really reasonable. I just bought them a few days ago, and I'm leaving today. I'm recording this podcast, and I'm leaving today. I'm going to be gone for four nights in Kauai, and I just feel so amazing. I signed two clients. I recorded five podcasts. I'm good to go.

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Okay, today we're going to talk about forgiving yourself. This is a skill and an art that we're not teaching ourselves. We haven't been taught as children or adults. We're not teaching it in our schools. I just think it's a skill that is so necessary.

So I'm gonna talk about it because here's the truth. Sometimes we do mess up. Sometimes we react out of our emotions. We say the wrong thing, we use the wrong tone, or maybe a decision we made took an unexpected turn, didn't go as planned. We didn't reach our goals. Teachers get upset, parents get mad, go to the superintendent. We failed to get results. Like we have failures. We have missteps. We react out of emotion versus intention.

I have noticed that this time of year, as we're wrapping up the school year, tends to be where our brain really wants to spin out and default to what didn't work thinking. It wants to focus on what you didn't get done, where you failed, where you should have done things differently. I was just coaching a client on this the other day. He was spinning out on not accomplishing everything he set out to accomplish this school year.

I'm going to talk to you about how to coach yourself through that. But what the brain is offering to you is you're running out of time. You feel discouraged because you're looking at how you should have done it differently, or you should have focused on this, or you said you were going to do that and you didn't. I feel like the end of the year brings up all of our mind drama around what didn't work, what didn't happen, where we failed.

What we do to kind of buffer and avoid that feeling is we rush. We rush around. We try to feel busy, and we try to accomplish more because we're thinking we haven't done enough or we failed or we should have done this differently or that should have gone differently or this should have been done, and it wasn't.

So this time of year you're rushing with the thought that if I rush, I will accomplish more and feel better about myself as a leader. Yet many times

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in that rushing and overworking and overscheduling, we exhaust ourselves. When we're exhausted, we're much more likely to react out of emotion versus out of intention. Then we feel regret about what we said or what we did or what we decided. We beat ourselves up for it.

I want to address how to forgive yourself because I see this skill as something we need to study and practice as leaders. It's not explicitly taught. So I want to really sell you on the value of forgiving yourself because it is such a desperate need in order for you to be a better leader. In order for you to expand the quality of your life and your leadership experience, you must learn the skill of forgiving yourself.

And forgiving others, we'll talk about that on a separate podcast. I'll touch on it a little bit today, but this is really focusing on the type of person who tends to beat themselves up, or they don't let themselves off the hook. Or you're constantly pushing yourself, telling yourself you should be better. You should do this. You should do more. You're not enough.

The reason I'm sharing this is because I am a student of my own work on self-forgiveness. It does not come easy to me. I'm the firstborn child. I was raised like many of you. We were taught to be A plus students, A plus children, A plus behavior, do all of the things, accomplish all the things, go get a college degree, make a lot of money, be the perfect wife, be the perfect teacher, be the perfect mother, whatever, right? All the things.

So if you're like me, and you have a hard time really loving yourself and forgiving yourself, I'm speaking directly to you, okay? Because I'm guessing there's a lot of you out there like me. You're very driven. You excel, and you kind of chase that high of accomplishment. You know the dopamine rush we get when we accomplish something, and we're very productive, and we've achieved?

If you're allergic to failing like I am, then you might have experienced the difficulty of forgiving yourself, and the self-induced pain that comes along

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with non-forgiving ourselves and the pain we inflict upon ourselves. So painful, and it holds us back.

So briefly, let me talk about what is forgiveness. So if you look it up in the Googles, in the dictionary, forgiveness is to grant pardon, to excuse someone or yourself from blame or responsibility or further persecution. It is to release resentment and liability.

When you forgive yourself, you are releasing resentment and liability against yourself. You are pardoning yourself. You are fully letting go of the thoughts that condemn you, and hold blame against you. Okay. I like to think of self-forgiveness as releasing myself from emotional prison. Because not forgiving yourself really is a form of imprisonment, emotional and mental anguish and imprisonment, holding yourself back. It's a way that we try to make ourselves pay for being human, for our humanness, for the mistakes we make inevitably as a part of being a human being.

Here's what I've learned personally. You can keep yourself and your progress behind bars for as long or as little as you want. You hear me on that? When you do not forgive yourself, you are holding yourself back. You're holding yourself back from your dreams, your goals, the lifestyle you want, the experiences you want to have, the goals you want to accomplish. You're putting yourself behind bars, and you're creating space between the life you want and the life you're living now.

Living in hell, in prison, in your mind and in your heart telling yourself all of the ways and reasons why you can't be set free, why you can't go forward with the life you want. I want you to notice that when you're doing this and you're not forgiving yourself, you are the only thing holding yourself back.

When I'm coaching principals, I will ask them what are the obstacles that you feel are in the way of achieving this goal or creating this outcome or having this experience or feeling the way you want to feel? What's in the way of that? Do you know what gets in the way every single time?

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Thoughts. Sentences in our mind. Thoughts about themselves, thoughts about other people, thoughts about the situation.

What happens is the brain either blames situation, like the circumstances of your situation, it blames other people, or most often, we blame ourselves. My clients will hold themselves back because they've told themselves over and over again that they aren't capable. Now is not the time to do this. They failed in the past. So they're just going to fail again. They don't know how. They've never done it before. It's too hard. It's too stressful. It's too whatever, fill in the blank.

They imprison themselves with their thoughts. Even when you blame external circumstances, when your brain's like well, it's not us. It's not me. It's them. It's the other people. They are the reason I can't achieve X. This situation is the reason I can't achieve X. Even when you blame them, that thought it's because of them or it's because of this circumstance, it's still your thought holding you back. It's still a thought coming from your brain that's holding you back from doing the things you need to do and want to do to achieve a certain goal or a way of feeling or to experience the outcomes you want.

So even when you think it's other people that are the reason, the obstacle in the way of you having what you want, it's still your brain creating that imprisonment. So fascinating, right? Hey, I'm only giggling here because my brain does this all the time.

My sister and I just had a little difference of opinion, a little conversation. I wanted to blame her so bad, and she was blaming me so bad. I was like okay, we're both life coaches here. Here we are caught up in not forgiving one another, but not forgiving ourselves. I was watching it in real time. So my brain does this too.

I want to use the example that I had recently with myself. It's nice. The weather is getting warm. It's finally stopped raining here in California. I was

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just so excited to get back out and start working out. Now I need to tell you, back in my 20s and 30s and even into my 40s, I was a huge runner. I used to run or workout every single day. I ran races. I loved running. I loved it so much. I was really in shape. Even my son will say, "Mom, I look back at pictures of you like dang. You had an eight-pack, girl." I'm like well, maybe not an eight-pack, but I was fit.

Now, I'm in my early 50s. My body doesn't look the same. It doesn't respond the same. It doesn't react the same. It's not at the same fitness level that it was. My knees hurt from all those years of running. I have lower back issues. My shoulders are tight. It's just, I have a different body than I had back in my 20s and 30s.

Now, what I noticed was my brain telling me well comparing myself to my 20 year old self, 30 year old self and saying well, why would you even bother trying to get fit now in your 50s? Like, I think COVID got me a little soft. Now I'm like I'm ready to get at least healthy and shape. I just want to feel my best so I can be my best for you. I know the mind-body connection. I know that.

So I was talking to myself, but I found myself comparing and despairing, not with other people but myself. I was beating myself up for not being the version of me that I was back then instead of focusing on like loving myself, and a little bit of forgiving myself for being so hard on my body back then. Because now I have to manage some of that pain and some of the, not damage, but some of just like things that built up with your joints and whatnot and your back over time.

I was focusing on beating myself up versus what I can do now? What feels good now? How can I be fit now? What does that look like? What's the new definition? How can I just allow myself to be 52 and allow my body to exercise in a way that's appropriate for my body at 52? First, I had to catch myself and then notice what I was saying to myself.

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You know what's so funny is here I was trying to inspire myself into action, but I was really self-deprecating and self-scolding. It made me want to stop thinking about fitness altogether, physical fitness. Just I was tired of the chatter in my brain. I was tired of being mean to myself.

So I stopped everything. I just like didn't want to do anything. It's not inspiring to beat yourself up. It's not inspiring to scold yourself and to hold yourself accountable forever. Okay. So in order to forgive yourself, the first thing you need to do acknowledge yourself. You need to be honest with yourself about the facts of the situation.

Now, this honesty goes in both directions. You need to be honest about what happened and be factual about it, but also honesty about what didn't happen. Because here's what your brain is going to do. When it's not forgiving you and holding you accountable and spinning out and berating you and keeping you in the mental and emotional prison of non-forgiveness.

What's happening is there are the facts of what happened, the truth, the facts, and then there's the story that your brain has created. It kind of fills in the gaps. It makes it juicier. It makes it more, I don't know, dramatic in your mind. We want to extract out the story, which are the opinions, or the fluffiness that we add to the facts. Just be honest about what happened and what didn't happen.

So let's use this example. It's your first principalship at this particular school, at Sunnyside school, okay. You go in and everyone's like oh, you've got Mrs. Johnson, and she's a really tough teacher. She's crabby. She's old. She doesn't do anything. She doesn't like change. She's just kind of awful to work with. They plant that seed in your brain. You're like nope, I'm gonna give her a fresh shot, do the best I can.

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Over time, you start to see oh, there might be some truth behind what people told me. You're trying to coach her and mentor her and build a relationship with her, and she's not having it. You're getting frustrated.

You see that there are things that she can do to improve her experience of teaching and her experience of getting children to learn. Maybe it's classroom management, or it's her delivery style, or the technique she's using. You're like oh, I know I could help her, but she's not receiving the help. You're getting frustrated. Okay. She's snappy at you. You start to just feel yucky being around her. Ever had this?

So what tends to happen when we go unaware is throughout the year, we get very busy, and there's other people to focus on. We have other goals besides Mrs. Johnson to worry about. So subconsciously, our brain's like I don't like being around her. It doesn't feel good to be around her. It's frustrating. I'm not getting anywhere with her. I'm kind of failing as her leader. We subconsciously maybe step back a little bit. We don't go in and observe as much. We kind of just do other things.

Then it's the end of the year, and you're having these like summative evaluation conversations, and you realized uh-oh, I've kind of avoided her. I don't have enough concrete evidence to put her on an improvement plan because I subconsciously avoided her. Now I don't have the actual evidence I need to put her on a plan.

Then you're like oh, it's all her fault. If she would just this, she would just that. First your brain is going to blame her. Then maybe it's going to be like, well, I get it. I should have done more, but my schedule this and the time that and I tried this. I tried that. It's going to blame externally, like the schedule, the calendar, the other busyness.

Then eventually you're gonna be like well, now I blame myself. I'm so mad at myself. I should have done more. I should have been in there. I should have documented this. I should have been able to put her on a plan this

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year. Now I've got to deal with her all of next year, and you're just spinning out, right?

Okay, here's what you do. Step one, you get honest with yourself. Be factual. Here's what I want to offer. Your brain is going to tell you all the things that you didn't do that you should have, or the things that you did do that you shouldn't. That's not a problem. You can do that. But what I want you to do first is what did you try? What did you do? What worked? Find something you did that worked.

Give yourself credit where credit is due because self-forgiveness needs to anchor yourself in the 50/50, in the humaneness of doing it wrong and in the humaneness of doing it right. In order to be able to self-forgive you have to look at what you did right and what you did try and what you did do. Because when you don't self-forgive, like when you're self-scolding and self-berating and keeping yourself in that emotional imprisonment, it thrives on you not focusing on what you did right. It loves that.

That's how it lives and breathes. You're feeding the beast, right? When you're like, I'm only going to focus on how I screwed up, how I did it wrong, why it's all my fault. You get into that spin cycle, right? So step one has to be what did you do? What did you try?

Then you can go into okay, once you've captured what you did do, let yourself brain drain on all the things that you didn't do that you thought you should have, or that you did do that you think you shouldn't have. Just write them all out and just notice them.

Now what's going to come up, you're going to blame the situation part of the time, you're going to blame the other person some of the time, and you're going to blame yourself. There's going to be lots of blame and judgment rushing out of your brain. It's okay. What you're going to do with that is you're just going to look at the sentences on the page or in your journal, and process them.

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Like what feels most true? It's like yeah, I didn't do that. Yeah, she did do this. Or oh, the situation was this. Acknowledge where you failed. Feel the feels. Acknowledge where you didn't fail, notice both.

Allow yourself to feel the burn. Don't try to escape failure. We can't go around it. We can't circumvent failure. We try. We try to avoid it as much as possible. When we do fail, we try to buffer the emotion, which means we try to distract ourselves, or we try to push it down. We try to avoid it. We resist it at all cost because it feels terrible. Invite it up. Let it come to the surface. Don't try to escape it. Sit with the vibration.

I like to describe it. This is how it feels in my body. This is what disappointment feels like. I'm feeling disappointed. Here's how it's vibrating in my body. Here's where it's vibrating in my body. Maybe you are having the thought like this is what failing feels like, or this is what regret feels like. So feel the feels.

So step one is to look at what you did do and to acknowledge what did work and what didn't work. Step two process those emotions that come with the truth. Step three, you've got to ask yourself okay, I made that decision, or I took those actions for a reason. Why did I decide to do what I did in that moment?

Let's look back at the version of you, that past self of you who made that decision. There's a reason that you decided not to go in and observe her classroom. Maybe she was just being too harsh, or maybe you didn't have the emotional bandwidth, or maybe you didn't have the like time bandwidth to take her on and deal with her.

Acknowledge why you decided what you did in the moment because this gives you perspective. It allows you to understand your thought process and your decision making process. It helps you better understand yourself. The better you understand yourself, the easier it is to lean into self-forgiveness.

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So acknowledge this is why I did that. In the moment, this is what I was thinking. It seemed like the best idea at the time. Even if it was a subconscious decision, that's okay. Step three is what gives you that space and grace to have the capacity to forgive yourself and to see it oh, this is what I was thinking back then. Now that I'm here at the end of the year, now, here's what I'm thinking. This is why I did it. I understand that. I can see that. I can give myself credit for that. But here's how I want to adjust moving forward. Okay.

Step four is what else is true? What else is true? So when you have that list of all the things you shouldn't have done, or should have done, or didn't do, and you're self-berating all the things, what else is true? Our brains want to go into all or none thinking. It's all good or all bad. We did it all right or all wrong. But what we want to ask ourselves is what else is true?

What else is true, the answer to what else is true, allows you to see that you are 50/50. You're not a bad human. You made a human decision. You took a human action. You made a human miscalculation. You reacted emotionally in a human way.

Then step five, you want to sell yourself on why forgiving yourself is better than not forgiving yourself. Okay? What's the benefit of self-forgiveness? Why is it better? One, it just feels better. But number two, when you forgive yourself, and you are loving on yourself, and you can forgive yourself, that's the capacity to which you can forgive other people. You want to be able to acknowledge it, to feel it, and then to let it go.

A lot of times, we don't let things go because we're like I never want to do that again. I never want to make that mistake again. So I'm going to keep reminding myself what a bad decision that was or how horribly I acted here. This thing I did wrong here. You can acknowledge it, and let it go. You can learn from it, and let it go.

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You've got to sell yourself on why letting it go is better because when you let something go that invites space into your mind, into your heart energetically, just mentally, physically, emotionally, it creates space to do it right the next time. It invites you to be that better, bigger version of yourself.

Look, one final thing. I don't want to say that we are abdicating responsibility. Self-forgiveness is not an abdication of ownership and responsibility for our mistakes. It's the opposite. We do acknowledge our mistakes, and we own them. We apply apologize to other people when needed and to ourselves when needed. We don't hold it against ourselves forever.

When you're holding something against yourself, you're consumed by that. It's holding space. You're not cleansed. You can't lead from a clean space mentally or emotionally. You don't have the capacity to take on situations mentally and emotionally. Because you're full. You're full of self-hating. You're full of refusing to forgive yourself. You're holding on energetically.

Your ability to forgive yourself is the capacity to which you can forgive others. If you think that it's easy to forgive other people but not yourself, I want you to check in closely and see if that's true. Maybe it is. I find that when I'm not in a forgiving space for myself, I'm not as forgiving with other people.

But let's say you are. Let's say it's easy to forgive others, but not yourself. I'd ask myself why? What thoughts hold me back from forgiving myself? Why is it easier to forgive somebody else and harder to forgive myself? Why do other people deserve forgiveness, but not me? Those are the questions I would ask myself if I found it easier to forgive others than myself.

What you're going to discover are thoughts that continue to imprison you and separate you from having what you want and being the empowered

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version of yourself that you want and having the experience that you want professionally and personally.

I believe that the art of self-forgiveness it's a lost art and skill. It's not something we're teaching. Can you imagine if we could teach this to kids in school at a young age and how to go through the process of genuinely forgiving themselves and teaching them how to forgive others? We can talk about that on a future podcast. There is an art to this.

Forgiveness is about healing and creating space for growth and an invitation to invite in what we do want into our lives versus negativity and self-condemnation. So this week, practice this. Practice these steps, do the five steps, and see how it feels to genuinely feel the emotions of the truth, own the mistakes, but also own the wins. Then ask yourself what else is true, and why is it better to let go? Okay, have an amazing week. I'm off to Hawaii. Talk to you guys next week. Love you. Take good care. Bye.

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