

Ep #285: Making Mistakes



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 285.

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. Happy Tuesday. Happy Summer. Happy June. Happy everything. Doesn't life feel better in the summer? I think so too. I hope most of you are across the finish line. I wish you well. I wish you a happy summer vacation. Be sure to plan your summers and make sure you're getting the most out of them. Meaning, do what you want to do.

If you want to rest, rest. If you want to relax, relax. If you want to go on vacation, go on vacation. Make sure you take care of you, prioritize what you value most, whether that's yourself, your friends, your family, your kids, travel, not travel, all of the things. Be intentional with your time. It's one of your greatest resources. You can't get it back. It's the most precious asset you have. I want you to spend it exactly in the way that you want to spend it. Okay. So happy summer.

Okay, on to the topic. We're gonna talk about making mistakes today. Oh, God. I've been having some juicy topics here. Not very fun topics, but very relevant and very coachable topics. So I was talking to a client the other day, and she was telling me a story about how she handled a particular disciplinary situation. She was saying, "One of the things I like to tell my students is that it's okay to make mistakes."

We got into a side conversation about making mistakes, and telling children that it's okay to make a mistake. What I said to her was we tell children it's okay to make a mistake, but we're actually lying to them. She's like what? It is okay for them to make a mistake. I said but we don't believe that it's okay

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

for us to make a mistake. We're telling them it's okay for them to make mistakes, but it's not okay for us to make a mistake.

They know that we are incongruent with our message. Kids know that. They know we're saying it's okay, but they know that we don't believe that it's really okay for us to make a mistake. The truth is that there are times when kids make mistakes that it's not okay. What I mean by that is, we tell kids it's okay. Make lots of mistakes. Mistakes are how you learn. Failure is the path to success. We have all these quotes and all these sayings.

But when kids do make mistakes, sometimes they get a very harsh response and reaction. Maybe they get punished. Maybe they get verbal lecture, or maybe they get physically punished. Maybe they get emotionally berated, or socially embarrassed. There are lots of negative outcomes from making mistakes.

So what happens is when you're a child and you hear an adult say oh, it's okay to make mistakes. The child, at first, believes you until they're reprimanded or punished in some way. That experience leads them to believe no, no. It actually isn't okay to make a mistake. It's not actually safe to make mistakes. The truth is, we don't think it's safe to make mistakes. So when we're saying it to children, they can sense the incongruence in our message.

So we want to talk about mistakes. What are they? Why are we so afraid of them? Why is that a problem? Okay. The truth is that if you ask anybody, is it okay to make a mistake on the surface? They're going to say well, yeah, it's okay. But when you ask them name a time you've made a mistake, people get very uncomfortable. They talk about the mistake, but then they try to cover up about what they learned and how they fixed it and made it better so that it wasn't a mistake. They learned and grew from it.

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

There's so much drama and so much fear in association with what we label as a mistake. We spend so much time and energy over thinking to ensure that we don't make a mistake because of our fear of what we make that mistake mean about ourselves and others and what could happen, the potential outcomes that could happen.

We learn along the way that it's not okay. It's not safe to make mistakes. People tell you that, but it's not really true. So don't listen to what we're saying, watch what we're doing. Which is we, as adults, are spending our entire lives trying to avoid making mistakes because of what we make them mean.

So if you're like me, my definition of mistake was don't do it because the result of making a mistake is so painful that I'm willing to do whatever it takes to avoid that pain. Because our brains are wired to protect us, keep us alive, keep us safe, keep us happy. Making mistakes is not safe or happy. They almost feel fatal.

So of course, I went to the dictionary again, and I defined what is the mistake? This is what the dictionary has to say. A mistake, I think of it as a mistake, right? It's an error. We have thoughts around errors. It's a misunderstanding. That word feels a little softer, a little more gentle. We can agree that it's okay to have a misunderstanding as long as it gets fixed right. An inaccuracy. Again, not ideal, but we can handle inaccuracies. They're a part of life. As long as they get fixed, right, then it's not a problem anymore, and it's not a mistake anymore.

Another one is misinterpret. So error, misunderstanding, inaccuracy, misinterpret. Then there was a second definition. It said an error in calculation, an error in action, an opinion or judgment caused by poor reasoning, carelessness, insufficient knowledge. I laughed out loud when I read this because even the dictionary is judging us.

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

I mean the people writing the dictionary. The authors of the dictionary are adding judgment to the meaning of mistake. I get it. It's hard to define without adding the judgment. Because if there were no mistakes then there would be no judgment of them. It would be this is just what is right.

So when you think of the definition of mistake, an error in judgment, an error, a calculation, an error in action caused by your poor reasoning, your carelessness, or your insufficient knowledge. Of course, you're going to make the word mistake mean something negative about you and your capacity and your abilities, right.

I just think about the weight of what we make mistakes mean. What we make it mean about ourselves, what we make it mean about other people when they make mistakes, or what we make it mean when we make a mistake and their thoughts and judgments about us. Then what a mistake will cost.

If we miss calculate that or we miss speak here, what's the ramification of a mistake. It feels so big that we think we can't handle a mistake. So we don't want to ever make one. But if you explore the impact of this story, that mistakes are basically fatal.

They're so bad that we should put all of our resources, our time, our energy, our focus, attention into trying to not make a mistake and trying to avoid a mistake at all costs, you're going to see how that holds us back from making progress, from actually being successful. We're more afraid of making the mistake than we are willing to go for it and be willing to make the mistake in order to achieve the success or achieve the goal we want to achieve. Okay?

So when you think about making a mistake, what does that mean to you? How awful would it be if you made a mistake? When you've made a mistake in the past, what's happened? Did you die? Did you feel like you

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

were going to die? The reason we don't want to make mistakes is not that we can't handle making a mistake. It's not that we can't fix the mistake. It's that there are negative emotion that come with making a mistake.

We are our own harshest critic. When we make a mistake, we are the first people to self-criticize self-judge, self-blame, self-deprecate. That harshness is one of the reasons our brain's like well, I can't be making mistakes because of what I'm going to make myself do to myself if I make a mistake.

Then we torture ourselves with what other people are thinking. We're guessing that they must think we're incompetent. They must think we're terrible. They must think we don't know what we're doing. That we're incapable. They must think we're knuckleheads or whatever.

Then we spend time thinking about the impact of a mistake. Well, if I make this decision and it's a mistake, then it's going to impact students and staff and the school, it blows up in your mind. The mistake feels so monumental that the cost of making it is just too great in your mind. But I want you to play this out in a STEAR cycle.

Let's just say the situation is that you're in a school leadership position. Your thought is I can't make a mistake. Mistakes are bad. They're dangerous and unsafe. Pain happens to me when I make a mistake. Mistakes are not okay. Even though we tell other people they're okay, they're not okay for us. Why? Because they feel terrible because of what we make them mean, because of what the dictionary makes them mean.

So, here we are. We've made a mistake. I can't make this. It's terrible. Bad things happen. Think about the emotions that come up when you think about yourself making a mistake. Notice it in your body, that pit in your stomach, your head tightens, your chest tightens, your throat closes up. You might feel heavy, or you might feel like running.

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

You go into full fight or flight mode when you've made a mistake because of what other people are going to think and what you're going to have to deal with and how you're feeling about yourself and how they're feeling about you. Your brain makes up this huge story about how awful mistakes are to experience. You do not want to have that experience happen to you at all.

In an attempt to avoid a mistake, you're going to overthink. You're going to procrastinate decisions and actions and spin out in overthinking, over analyzing, indecision because you don't want to make a mistake. Then when you do make that decision, you're going to second guess yourself. You're going to doubt. You're going to be in chronic worry and anxiety about what happens when I make a mistake.

Your brain wants to prepare for mistakes ahead of time, and prepare to not make the mistake. So we're doing both. We're trying to prepare to not make the mistake, but we're also trying to prepare for the event that we do make a mistake. How are we going to protect ourselves and fix it as soon as possible? We tend to change our mind a lot more. We don't trust our decisions and actions. What we do is take the safe route because we're telling ourselves it's not safe to make a mistake.

But the result you're creating when you think that mistakes are a big problem that you can't handle and that you can't overcome is that you don't achieve goals. You live a very safe life. That might be okay. You might be happy with that. You might choose that. You might want to live your life attempting to control every variable in your life so that you don't make a mistake.

But the human experience is 50/50. No matter how hard you try and how much you control and how many times you get out of your lane and swim in other people's lanes to try and get them to do the right thing so that you don't make a mistake or look like you've made a mistake, or they don't have a judgment of what they identify you as having made a mistake.

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

When you're trying to handle all of that, the truth is that you're making mistake after mistake after mistake. You're just not acknowledging it or noticing it. You don't accomplish what you want. There is a cost associated with avoiding mistakes. So you can choose to go down the path of avoiding mistakes, and I want you just to play that out.

Where does it get you when you spend your time and energy from the mindset of I can't make a mistake? Mistakes are bad. I can't handle them. I have to avoid them at all costs. So what is the cost of spending your time that way? Then go down other path. What happens when I allow mistakes? When mistakes really aren't a problem? When I don't beat myself up when I do make a mistake?

How do I even define a mistake? Nobody makes mistakes on purpose. You do the best you can with what you know at the time. Once you get more information like oh, now that I've had this outcome, that was, in hindsight, a mistake.

Or even if you're in the middle of the decision, and you're like I know information, but I'm not using that information. I'm going to take the easy route right now, even though you did know that. Then you look back, and you're like why did I make that mistake? I knew, I just chose to go this other route.

Okay. But that doesn't have to be a problem. You can fix it. You can change it. You can adjust for next time. It's what we make mistakes mean about ourselves. The reason we do this is because of the pain associated, usually from our childhood, that when we did make a mistake, somebody out there could not tolerate it. They punished us, or they expressed and created a situation for us that was highly uncomfortable.

I want you to think about the value of mistakes. What we make them mean. How do you define mistake? What is the value of making mistakes? Why

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

are mistakes never ever, ever a problem? Truly lean in to the idea that it's okay to make a mistake as a human on the planet. How would it feel to lead your school when you believe like it's okay if I make mistakes? It's not that big of a deal. I'll fix it. I'll adjust. People will be okay.

If you can model that it's really okay to make mistakes, and mistakes aren't a permanent problem that results in like permanent pain. You think about it, there are mistakes that we've made in our lives that we still hold ourselves accountable to. We still feel bad about. We still beat ourselves up over that mistake, in air quotes.

Notice this. Notice what we're teaching children. Notice the incongruence of what we're saying to them and how we're treating them and how we're treating mistakes when we make a mistake, when other people make a mistake. What are you making mistakes mean? What are they making it mean? This is a very fruitful conversation.

Last week, we talked about disrespect and what we make that mean. This week I'm asking you to consider what you make mistakes mean. I want to make mistakes. I want to learn to embrace them. I've had to really unwind this and unravel this because there was no room for mistakes growing up for me. It didn't feel that way as a child.

In my childhood perception of my life, I didn't feel like I had any room for error to make a mistake. If I did, that were severe consequences. So I spent my life trying to be perfect. Get the perfect grades, be the perfect student, be the perfect daughter, perfect sister. You know how that ends. For those of you who are perfectionist, you know that.

Mistakes are not a problem. They aren't even really a thing. We just made up a word. It's just made up. There are no mistakes. If any of you follow Byron Katie, she tells a story of she was going through a yoga class I think it was or a meditation or something. At the end of the yoga class, they said

Ep #285: Making Mistakes

namaste. She thought they said no mistakes. That is one of her mantras, no mistakes.

There are no mistakes. There is just what is. Children behave in certain ways. We want to get curious, why did they behave in that way? What were they thinking? How were they feeling? What might they be able to do differently? How can we guide them, instruct them, nurture them, coach them, love on them?

When kids are being disrespectful or kids are making mistakes, there's a reason that they're making those mistakes. When teachers do that, when you do that, you're not trying to make mistakes. You're doing the best with what you know at the time. So consider being gentle and loving and nurturing to yourself and allowing yourself to make mistakes in however you define that, knowing it isn't truly a mistake. It just is. Have a beautiful week. I'll talk to you next week. Take good care. 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.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit angelakellycoaching.com where you can sign up for weekly updates and learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.