

Ep #291: Your Most Powerful Leadership Strategy (Back to Basics)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 291.

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. Have you guys been following the MVPs throughout the month of July? Yes, they're great. So as you know throughout the month of July, I'm highlighting the most popular and valuable episodes of the *Empowered Principal® Podcast* to date. So do not dismiss them. If you have already listened to them, listen to them again. Hear them in a new evolved way. Take more information out of them. They are so valuable and they are worth listening to again. All right.

So this week, we are sharing the second most popular episode to date of the *Empowered Principal® Podcast* titled Your Most Powerful Leadership Strategy. In this episode, I share a strategy that gives you an incredible amount of leverage as a leader, and it's not what you think, unless you've listened.

Our brains are so focused on the actions that we take as school leaders. We're very focused on our to-do list. We ask what we should do with our time and our energy and our focus. I don't think that question is as effective as asking ourselves who we need to become, who we need to be as leaders with our time and our energy and our focus. Who do we have to become to create the results we want? What creates the most impact, and why? What do we value? What is the experience we want to have as school leaders?

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These questions require us to reflect and dig deep and come up with our own solutions and answers. That exercise is what makes us a more valuable and more effective school leader. The leadership strategy I share in this podcast is what makes the Empowered Principal® program different than any other school leadership program. It's what makes it the most successful.

So for those of you who sign up for the Empowered Principal® Collaborative this year, enrollment is open, and it will not be open forever. So take the opportunity to sign up now. You're going to work with the best of the best school leaders and have so much fun creating an exceptional school leadership experience, and creating exceptional results for your school.

Join the Empowered Principal® Collaborative and spend the year applying all of these tools to experience your most successful year in school leadership to date. These tools are proven year after year, time after time with client after client to help you at any level of school leadership, leading any type of school. Be sure to join this coming week to secure your spot, or you'll miss out, and I would hate for you to miss out. I can't wait to see you there.

So many times in school leadership we feel like we lose ourselves. The job is really busy. It's hard. We get lost in all that's going on. I know for me, I felt like I lost who I was, what I enjoyed, who I was as a person. I felt like I became robotic and numb because I was trying to mask the pain I was in, the overwhelm I was in, the emotions that I was in. We feel like the job is happening to us.

We get caught up in what I call the overwhelm cycle. It feels like you can't get out. We start overworking and letting the job dictate who we are and how we feel and when we work and when we wake up. Suddenly one day

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you realize, what am I doing this for? What's happening? Where have I gone? Who am I? Where are my thoughts, my opinions? What do I value? What do I love? When is there time for me, right?

Trust me, I've had all of these moments to myself. There's one thing I know for sure. Even when it feels like there is no solution and that the stress and exhaustion feel like they are never going away, they're never going to end. I want you to know, I want you to trust that there are solutions out there.

You can learn this skill set. Any one of you can learn this. I will teach it to you. It's the most powerful skill set in leadership. It will set you free from you believing that the job is in control, and the impact that that job, the career, has on your life, on your wellness, on your happiness.

So what is this magical skill set I'm talking about? Well, I can tell you this. It's not fancy, glamorous, or high tech. It's as simple as it gets. But I have to warn you, your brain might resist it, or it might turn away. There are plenty of people who don't buy into this. They don't want to deal with it. They don't like the idea. It's uncomfortable. They don't want to have to try and learn the skill set. That's okay. This isn't for them.

I'm talking to you, the person who wants to figure this out, who is intrigued by this concept, and who wants to understand what makes a good leader, what makes an impactful leader, an influential leader, and how to create a legacy while maintaining your sustainability as a leader. You want to thrive and says be sustainable. You don't want to be in burnout, right?

It's gonna feel too good to be true. Also, it's going to sound like it can't be true. I promise you it is. I've studied this for over a decade. I have done this work myself. It works every single time. Now for the last five years, I've been teaching principals just like you how to do this. So I'm going to share

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it with you today. I'm going to break it down so you can see how it works. But I cannot emphasize its importance enough. Are you ready?

So what is this? It is the understanding of emotion as a leadership tool. Emotion is your most powerful leadership strategy. It's the most highly undervalued strategy. Yet, it's the highest leverage strategy. When you understand it and you can apply it with the tools that I teach you as a client, you will be amazed at the progress you make. Because you will be able to approach any situation and understand what's happening with yourself and with others.

So why is emotion as a leadership strategy so valuable? Why is it so important? Why is it so high leverage? It's very simple. Emotion drives all human behavior. We are either taking action in pursuit of an emotion we want to feel, or we're taking action to avoid an emotion we don't want to feel. That is the human experience. Our brain is wired to seek pleasure, avoid pain, and make things as easy as possible.

We do that because we're trying to avoid the pain that comes when something feels difficult, or our brain perceives it to be difficult. When we think something's gonna be hard, we try to avoid it. We procrastinate. We try to go around it. We don't want to do it, right?

All of our actions are driven by emotion. It's either happening consciously and intentionally or subconsciously and unintentionally. Most people on the planet most of the time, including myself, we are acting subconsciously, at a subconscious level. I mean by that we're not making decisions about our actions from a conscious, intentional place. What coaching offers is to invite us into that awareness, to create that space and that awareness to pause.

Before we react to our emotions, we want to pause and take a peeky at what's going on. We want to consciously decide here's how I'm feeling.

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Here's how I want to react. Is that the reaction I want to make? Will this serve me? Is this in my best intention? Does this create the result I'm looking for?

So for most people, they're just reacting, chronically reacting to how they feel. They're either reacting to how they feel, or they are in pursuit of a feeling. Kids are the perfect example. You guys work with kids all the time.

When kids are bored in class, most of them are going to react to that boredom. They're going to zone out and daydream. They're gonna play around in their desk or with their materials on their desks, whatever. They're going to look at other people, talk to other people, get distracted. They're going to get up out of their seat, go to the bathroom, wiggle around, try to get a drink. Or if they're mad, right, they might yell or cry or hit somebody or throw things or refuse to participate in class, right? They're going to react to those emotions.

When they're happy, they might smile or skip. I see a lot of kids skipping down the hall, right. But they're going to be more engaged. When they're feeling happy and their content, they're feeling safe. When they're feeling all the good feels, they're going to be much more engaged and happy, skipping around, dancing. You know, they're going to do all of those little happy movements, right?

Adults are also the perfect example. Because adults are just as human as children. Many of my clients have very different thoughts about children than they do adults. Nothing about adults is different than children. Nothing has changed except their height and maybe their weight and the number of years they've been on the planet. Adults still have human brains that produce thoughts which trigger emotions, and those emotions influence their decisions and actions.

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As school leaders, we have different thoughts about those adults than we do with children. With kids we're often thinking things like they're still learning. They haven't developed the skill set yet. It's our job to help them. It's our job to teach them.

So what we do with those thoughts, we feel much more compassionate and much more patient and understanding. In response to those feelings, we hold space for kids. We allow kids to have emotional reactions. We give them permission to be emotional beings in the world, and to make mistakes in how they handle themselves. We grant them grace because they're children.

I get it. I understand. Adults have had more time, number of years on the planet, to practice this, but we haven't been teaching it. How do we know? Adults don't have the skill set. There are people out there who have them who have been taught. Many of us haven't. It's not your fault if you haven't been taught how to manage emotions, how to regulate your emotions, and how to step into maturity as an adult as it relates to your emotions.

It's not something we talk about in school. It's not something we teach directly and we model and we give space and grace for, both for children and for adults, right.

On the other hand, here's what we're thinking about adults versus children. We think adults should know better. That they should be professional. That they should regulate themselves emotionally at all times. We want adults to behave themselves as adults, and that they shouldn't react to their emotions. They shouldn't have emotional reactions.

So we, as the school leader, what's funny about it is that we have teachers or parents, as adults, who are having reactions to their emotions. Then we have thoughts about their reactions to their emotions, and then we have an

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emotional reaction. We get frustrated or we get upset when other people are having emotional reactions. We're mirroring that.

We are also a human adults with emotions, and we react to those emotions. Whether we get frustrated or we get mad or we get exasperated, whatever it is that you're thinking that adults shouldn't be handling life this way, their emotions this way, but it's okay for kids. Or sometimes we even get frustrated with the kids, right?

It's hard when people are experiencing a lot of emotion, and they're not sure what to do with it because emotion is energy. So that energy comes into our space and impacts our emotional energy. What I want to offer you as a school leader is this.

When you understand that emotions are the driving force behind every single person's actions, that how they feel determines how they approach a situation, you are going to see the value in understanding how emotions work, and how you can use your understanding of emotions to number one, process your own emotions to help you consciously make decisions, and take the actions you want to take to produce the results you want to produce.

Two, you can help other people process their emotions by teaching them and showing them and holding space for them. Three, you use your understanding of emotions to plan out your leadership approach. This is how empowered leadership works.

The best of the best leaders understand what drives human behavior, which is emotion, and they implement strategies that tap into the emotions that drive inspired actions out of themselves and other people to achieve something much greater than they originally thought possible. I want to say this is not about attempting to manipulate a person emotionally. We're not

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talking about exploitation. What I'm referring to are tools that help you understand your own emotions and understand the emotions of others to make your job feel easier for you and less stressful.

When you understand emotion, what it does is take the intensity out of it. It provides a sense of perspective and context. Most importantly, it helps you see the separation between emotion and the person and the thoughts that person is having that are triggering their emotion. There is a separation between the human, their thoughts, and their emotional reaction. I know that feels hard to grasp.

I want to say in all honesty, I got coached just this morning. I was having a big emotional reaction to something happening in my business. I got coached on it. I really saw the separation. I really felt the separation between what had happened, myself as a human, my thoughts about what happened, and then my emotions that were triggered as a result of what I was thinking. I saw each of those components as separate.

What that helped me do was not to make it mean that even though I was experiencing anxiety and stress and some negative emotion. That negative emotion, I did not make it mean something had gone wrong, something wrong with me. That the business wasn't doing its job, or the business was failing, or I failed the business. I didn't go into this shame spiral and this doom and gloom about feeling anxious, about feeling stressed. I didn't go there.

I saw the separateness between myself, the business, the situation, my thoughts about it, and that it was okay for me to feel stress and anxiety. It didn't have to mean anything negative was happening, or that anything was wrong with me as a business owner. Things just happened. It's okay that I felt that way. I didn't spend the whole day spinning out thinking about I'm broken. I've got to fix me. I've got to fix the business. Something's wrong

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with the business. The business is broken. No, I want you to hear this. It's very separate.

For example, when a parent comes in and is hot about a situation. Like a typical scenario is that a student hits another student. So the parent whose child was hit hears about it, either you call them or somebody from the school calls them to let them know and inform them, or you don't know about it. Child goes home, child tells parent, or they hear it from the parent gossip group. Goodness gracious knows every school has one of those where the parents are on the prowl. They're in the know. They're in the talking groups. They're gossiping, and they find out from a friend.

So they find out somehow. Doesn't matter how, but they explode with emotion. They're mad. They're upset. They're worried. They're frustrated. They have this flood of emotions because they're having a flood of thoughts.

They're thinking, "This shouldn't have happened. This should have been prevented. My child should be protected. This school is not safe. You, as the principal, need to stop this immediately. The teacher's at fault. The principal's at fault. The yard duty is at fault. I want justice. I want consequences. It's your fault this happened. You aren't a good school leader. This isn't a safe school. You don't have systems. You don't have policies. Rules aren't upheld."

They're gonna come at you sideways with all of their thoughts, on and on. Their brain is just offering them a big old story, thought after thought after thought, and the thoughts are flooding the brain. Then the emotions are flooding the body, right? They're having an intense, emotional reaction that's triggered based on those thoughts.

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In that reaction to their that emotion, what they decide to do in response, in reaction to those emotions are get in the car. Probably phone you, email you, and then get in the car and drive to school and march into the office and scream at your secretary and demand a meeting with you. Then sit down with you and then scream and yell and blame and tell you what to do and how to solve it. All of the things, right?

We've all had that experience. That is the universal principal experience, I promise you. If you haven't had it yet, it's coming. I will help you with it. Join the Facebook group. We'll talk about it there. But for now, just know this is a very common experience that all school leaders face.

In that moment, I want you to practice being able to see that there is a separation from the human that standing in front of you. There's separation between the person and their thoughts about what happened, the emotions they are experiencing in that moment in reaction to those thoughts, and the approach they decided to take. Their approach is just their decisions and their actions, their reactions to those emotions.

So when someone comes in hot and you understand that their emotional reaction has been triggered by a flood of thoughts that entered their mind upon hearing what happened, you, as the leader, are going to be less likely to go into fight or flight yourself right? They're in fight or flight. They're defending their child. Mama bear's coming out or papa bear's coming out.

When you understand what's happening in them, you are going to be less likely to go into fight or flight or yourself. You're going to feel scared or defensive, but you can understand it.

Because when you feel scared and defensive, that's going to have you reacting to that fear and making decisions from that place about how to approach this parent based on your fear. That you've got to defend yourself

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and protect yourself and they're attacking you. They're blaming you unfairly. They don't know what really happened. They're not allowing you to justify, right? You get into this fight or flight right with them, and that gets into gridlock.

Because when you understand what's going on for them, it's not to say you'll have no reaction. You still are going to feel the shock and the distress and the discomfort that comes with an angry parent barging in and demanding to talk with you. That physical reaction is still going to take place in the body. But the difference is when you understand what's happening in your body and you know that that thoughts are creating your emotional reaction, you are also going to be able to understand that the same thing is happening with this parent.

In that understanding, you can feel calmer and drop into curiosity about what specific thoughts are happening in this parents brain. It's different for every parent. But what's happening in this parents brain that's creating the intense reaction?

This is key for stepping into your empowerment as a school leader, to understand the emotional reaction happening in each of you. Because here's what it does. It allows you to first check your own thoughts. Now, you might not be able to do this in real time, especially if you're new.

If you're new to school leadership, your first year, your second year, even your third year, you will have to start by feeling scared and redirecting yourself back to this thought. What thoughts are they having that's triggering their emotion, right?

When it first happens to you, you're going to be in your own head. When you're new or you dislike conflict, you avoid conflict or confrontation at all costs, and someone approaches you and confronts you, you're not just

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going to slip into calm confidence and handle that parent with a bunch of grace and ease like it's no big deal. You have to first be willing to be new, to not know how, to not handle it in the way you believe you should, to get it wrong. You have to be willing to let the fear be present and handle the situation as best you can.

When we're a school leader, even as veterans, we sometimes get it wrong. We react to our emotions sometimes. We snap back or we judge or we accuse or we get defensive or we make assumptions about people that aren't true. We are human too.

So when you're new, you might clam up and give into the parent's demands or say something just to placate them just to get out of that uncomfortable situation as soon as possible. It's going to happen. You're going to say things that you wish you hadn't said or you wish you'd handled it differently, or you're going to get defensive and snap. Like all of us do that. It's a part of school leadership. Being a veteran does not exempt you from that.

So I'm sure all the veteran listeners out here are nodding their heads in agreement. Time and experience doesn't exempt you from uncomfortable emotions. Yes, many of the tasks can get easier with experience and practice. The more times you handle something, the more comfortable you get handling it.

But as a human, you never will escape negative emotion. So if you're thinking that time and experience equals no negative emotion, not having to ever feel bad, not having to ever process either fear or anger or pain, you're going to be sad because that is not what happens. It's what we signed up for when we were born as humans.

So through coaching, you learn to stop trying to avoid feeling bad. That's not the goal. The goal is to learn how to allow it and to process it and to

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show up even when you're feeling doubtful or fear or stress or defeated. You will learn how to study yourself and your emotions and how to use your emotions to learn and grow so that eventually things that once felt new and awkward and uncomfortable are now really easy and simple. They're no longer a problem for you.

It's like when you were a kid and you were learning how to ride your bike, you would see the bike. You know you had your tricycle. You felt safe and comfortable on the trike, and then you maybe had training wheels. But you would look at the people riding the two wheelers and you're like, "I want to do that. That looks hard. I'm never gonna be able to do it." It felt awkward and hard and fall and painful and people might laugh or you might get left behind because you can't ride the two wheeler.

But eventually you get up and you try and you're willing to like be scared and try anyway and you fall down. Over that time of practice, eventually you learn how to ride, and it's no longer a problem. You just jump on your bike and go. What's cool about this is even if you don't ride your bike for a month, you still get back on that bike and you know how to ride it. You might wobble a few times, but you get going much faster. But you have to go through the process of learning the how. Right?

Same is true for handling emotions. We just have to get on the bike and ride. Let ourselves crash and burn. Let ourselves get a scraped knee. Let ourselves be sad and take a break from the bike for a while and then jump on and try again.

I have a thought about building this business and bringing coaching to school leaders. It's taken me years. I'm not at where I want to be. I want to be working with hundreds of school leaders per year, not dozens. Whenever I feel discouragement or whenever my brain is like, "This is taking forever, and I want to help more people."

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I get into this real like feeling terrible about not getting this content into the hands of every school leader, I think to myself I will never give up trying. I will never give up offering. I will never give up supporting. I will never give up on myself, on my business, on these concepts, on you. I will never stop offering support for school leaders.

I will never stop preaching it on the podcast, never stopped sharing it on social media. I will always be committed to this work. Even when I fail, even when I don't hit my goals, even when I don't, you know, get that consult to be a yes. I will never stop trying.

Yeah, I'm up here. I'm failing. I'm scraping my knees. I'm falling off the bike. But here's what I learned today. It's okay to slow down. Give yourself a day to process the emotion, dust yourself off, see where the learning is, and then get back on the bike. Okay.

Imagine thinking that unhappy parents aren't a problem. That you don't get caught up in their emotions. That their emotions don't penetrate your self-concept. It doesn't make you start to doubt or question yourself. You don't get wrapped up in their emotions where you're both in the pool, and you're all swimming around in the emotions. You don't go into deflection or defensiveness.

In fact, when parents being upset is not a problem, you actually can get up close and personal with them because you know, it's not about you. It's about them. It's nothing about you. Then you can get yourself into a place where you can feel genuine interest in what they're saying, how they're feeling, what they think they need, what they believe they need to feel better, and what you know you can offer. What solution you can offer, how you can comfort them, how you can support them.

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Or sometimes you can see that the person doesn't really want a solution. They just want to be heard. Sometimes people come in and they vent. You ask them what would be a solution to this? What in your eyes would make this better for you? What would resolve this? They can't really come up with something. It's because their brain just wants to be in drama and wants to fight and wants to cause a scene.

Just in knowing that you can be like, "Okay, I'm here. I'll listen, and I'm here for solutions. I'm here to help you resolve this. When you're ready to resolve this, let's talk." It helps you stay in curiosity and compassion versus getting stuck in your own head and worrying about if you're doing it right or wrong.

I teach my clients a concept called the emotional triad. It's really an emotional Venn diagram. It goes like this. There's a STEAR cycle happening in your brain, in your body, what you're thinking, what you're feeling, and how you're approaching a situation. So there's your STEAR cycle in one sphere.

Then there's the other person, the parent, the teacher, the student, community member, whoever you're dealing with, and then there's their STEAR cycle in another sphere, where they are having thoughts and emotions and are reacting to those thoughts and emotions in their sphere. Then there is the overlap. There's what you're thinking and feeling about their emotional reaction, and there's what they are thinking and feeling about your emotional reaction.

I help principals see this difference between the three little spheres going on, the two separate ones and then the overlap. So that you can then separate them in your mind. That helps you approach the situation with intentional actions versus reacting or avoiding.

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Real quick, there are three ways that you can respond to emotions. You either are unintentionally react, or you avoid, suppress, resist, try to dodge emotions. You know they're there, but you try to go around them at any cost. Or you lean in and intentionally decide how to act.

The goal is to create awareness with these emotional tools to move you from either avoiding negative emotions, or reacting to them and feeling completely out of control, like you're at the whim of your emotions and other people's emotions, and move you towards making those intentional decisions and actions from a place of consciousness and intention. You learn how to understand yourself and how to stand other people.

When you understand this concept, this is the best part, and you apply the tools that I teach you, then you learn how to create influence through emotional momentum. Emotions are simply energy. When we stay focused on emotions, what we're doing is studying how to generate energy from other people, energy that converts into actions.

So we understand what thoughts are shifting our emotions, our own emotions, and creating momentum for us. What thoughts trigger momentum that get you into inspired actions? You have to know that about yourself first. You have to study yourself and study the thoughts that motivate other people. Because oftentimes, what motivates us motivates other people, right.

So schedule power thinking sessions into your work week, or even on your weekends, wherever you find the space and time to luxuriate in exploring how you can create an environment, a culture of communal energy. What thoughts do other people have to think and to believe in, in order to follow your vision? To create a shared vision where everybody on board believes in the vision and wants the vision? Then how can you plant seeds for other

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people, for the people you lead, to consider these thoughts and believe them to be true?

For example, one of the most culture building thoughts I share with my clients is the thought we're on the same team. When people believe that you're on their team, and they're on your team, that you're on the same team. That they're on the same team with their colleagues and with parents and with teachers and with district administration, teachers are so much more likely to interpret other people's actions from a place of positive assumption.

When someone's on your team, they're acting in the best interest of the team, which is you. When people believe that you, as the leader, are acting in their best interest, which is also your own best interest because you're on the same team, they will trust you. I could do an entire podcast on creating influence and building an environment where everyone believes you're all on the same team, but I'm going to leave you with this.

I've given you so much to think about today. So I want to end this by saying your ability to lead others depends on your capacity to understand, process, and believe in the value that emotion plays in our lives. It is everything. We tend to downplay it. We tend to ignore it or push it aside. We say it's soft. That it's not as important as hard skills.

It's everything because it determines the actions we take towards the hard skills. It's how we apply hard skills, right? Your willingness to get comfortable with talking about, studying, understanding, expressing, and processing emotions, especially the uncomfortable ones, is how you build a team. It's how you inspire your team to achieve a greatness as a whole group and as individuals. It's how you rebuild as people come and go in and out of your school. It's how you grow your demand as a school leader. It's how you influence students to see the value in what they are learning.

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When you understand emotions and how to tap into kid's emotions in a way that keeps them learning and keeps learning intriguing for them and interesting and compelling and exciting and fun, you're going to make a very big impact in the field of education and on the world.

If this concept resonates with you, I invite you to coach with me. I will have your back. I will show you every step of the way. You will always have me in your corner. I'm going to help you process and approach any situation that comes your way, even the hard ones. Especially the hard ones.

If everything about life was supposed to feel easy and we were only supposed to like swim on the emotional spectrum, that is the fun stuff. The easy, the fun, delightful, happy, good, light, easy, all of those feelings, everybody would be performing at peak all of the time if that's what it took.

What makes great leaders great, what makes you an empowered leader, is your willingness and your ability to understand and process the hard emotions, the negative emotions, the ones that make your body vibrate and your skin crawl. The ones that feel heavy and exhausting. When you understand what is happening inside of your body, that it's a reaction to your thoughts and that it's separate from who you are and your self-concept. That is when you step into your empowerment.

Talk to you guys soon. I love you all so very much. Be well, stay safe, and be empowered. I'll talk to you next week. Take care, bye.

Hey there empowered principal. If you enjoyed the content in this podcast, I invite you to join the Empowered Principal® Collaborative. It's my latest offer for aspiring and current school leaders who want to experience exceptional impact and enjoy the school leadership experience.

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Look, you don't have to overwork and overexert to be a successful school leader. You'll be mentored weekly and surrounded by supportive like minded colleagues who truly understand what it means to be a school leader. So join us today and become a member of the only certified life and leadership coaching program for school leaders in the country. Just head on over to angelakellycoaching.com/work-with-me to learn more and join. I'll see you inside of the Empowered Principal® Collaborative.

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.