

Ep #294: Your Decision Lens



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 294.

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, and Happy Tuesday. How are you guys doing today? Wow, I can't believe we're almost at 300 episodes of the *Empowered Principal® Podcast*. This is blowing my mind. I'm so proud of myself showing up every week for this podcast, no questions asked. I do not allow myself to fail at turning in my podcasts on time to my producers. It's just such a happy and amazing part of my day and my business. I love being here with you guys. I love recording this podcast. So wow. 294. We'll have to celebrate and a few more weeks.

Okay, on to the topic, I've got a juicy one for you today because it's very important. It is what determines your success, your accomplishments, what you experience in your life, and what you are able to create and what you're able to contribute. So tune in, listen up, take notes. I want the goal of this podcast to create awareness in your life, personally and professionally so that you can have the experience that you want.

I feel like we are on this planet to create the life experience that we were meant to have and that we want to have, professionally and personally. I know this is a podcast about school leadership, but that is one component of your life. I hope that you are applying all of this content and these tools and strategies to your entire life, any aspect of your life.

So today we're going to talk about your decision lens, and how to create awareness around the lens in which you use to make decisions, how you prioritize that lens, and how you filter your decisions based on the lens that

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you're using. Okay. So I'm going to give you a summary of what I want to cover today. Then I'm going to share with you a story about a client that I've been working with who was recently feeling unclear about her life, her career, and her decisions. Okay?

So the points I want to make is this. When you make a decision, every single decision, no matter how big or how small, you make it through what I call a decision lens. It's like a set of criterias or values or priorities that you use to determine what decision you're going to make. That decision lens is the filter through which you determine the answer to a decision.

Now, I've been working with school leaders for the past seven years, and I have been observing how different people make decisions. It's fascinating to me. I find it curious. I find it interesting. I also observe myself in how I make decisions.

What I've noticed is that the decision lens that people use, including myself, is what we most value in that moment of decision. That's important to recognize because we want to identify why we're making the decisions that we're making, the filter, the lens through which we are making that decision, and what we are choosing to value most or prioritize in that moment.

Because here's what I've noticed with myself, and I've noticed it with clients. The value lens, the value right, that decision lens that you're using. It can shift without your awareness when it's being influenced by emotions. So I noticed that when I'm making a decision, my decision lens can shift based on my emotions, how I'm feeling in the moment.

I'll give you an example. Let's say you're deciding on where you want to go on vacation this summer. Now, I know this is playing in August. So let's backwards plan. Let's say it's May or June, and you're making decisions about how you want to spend your summer, okay?

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You might be looking at your summer plans and base those summer plans on your financial situation, your financial circumstances. You might say to yourself I want to go on vacation, but I'm looking at my finances.

Emotionally, I feel a little nervous to spend \$3,000 on a cruise or \$500 on an airplane ticket. You might be feeling a certain way based on the filter you're using. So the decision lens you're using in that moment is your financial circumstances, and the feelings that come up when you use that filter of those financial circumstances.

Now, another person back in May or June might be deciding I cannot wait for the school year to end. I'm celebrating the year. It's been a great year. I'm going on vacation. They are looking at same financial circumstances. They have no more money than the other person, exact same set of circumstances. But emotionally, they're thinking I've got to get out of here. I can't just sit around at home. I need to celebrate. I deserve a break. I deserve to go have fun.

The decision lens that they're using based on the emotions that they are feeling and what they are prioritizing, which is their fun and celebration, they might be willing to spend the 3k on the cruise or spend \$500 on a plane ticket even though their circumstances financially are exactly the same. One person's basing it on their financial circumstances the other person's thinking what I value most right now is relaxation, celebration vacation. Do you see that?

So what's important to notice is that we always have a filter that we're using to make decisions. That filter can shift based on how we're feeling. We might say screw it. I don't care if I have to put this on my credit card, I'm going. I'll figure it out later. Other people might say oh, I'd love to do that, but I don't want the consequence of having debt or having to put something on my credit card. I'm not going to make that decision. Okay.

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The reason that knowing your decision lens is so important is because how you make decisions, the process and the lens through which you make decisions, directly impacts whether or not you achieve the goals that you set and whether or not you create the experiences that you want to have in your life, personally and professionally. Whether or not you contribute the value that you want to offer to your school, to those who lead, to your contribution in the world.

Decisions determine your impact and your influence as a school leader. You want to choose your decision lens with intention. Now, it's not a problem if the decision lens changes. If you are trying to make a decision and you're deciding what lens to use, what priority to use, you might intentionally prioritize one decision lens over the other as long as you value that decision lens and you love your reasons for changing that lens. Okay.

So let me tell a story about decision lenses and just in the context of one of my clients experiences and use it as an example so you can kind of dig your heels into understanding this content. Okay. I was working with a client recently, and she wasn't feeling clear. She was wondering if the principalship position was for her. Was she cut out for it? Was it the right job for her? She didn't feel in alignment with the job. She was considering a change of employment in terms of changing her position, changing her field altogether. She wasn't feeling confident about making a change but she also didn't feel in alignment with the school leadership position.

So I asked her what leadership value have you been using as the lens through which you're making these decisions, including your decisions about your career? What is the lens you're using to make decisions around your professional accomplishments and contribution?

What she said was she wanted to be the best at her job, the best at her school, and the best leader that she could be. She wanted to excel, her staff and her students and herself to perform at the highest level. She

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wanted to be at the top of her game, and for others to be at the top of their game. She wanted to be the person to help other people be at the top of their game.

For her, this meant that she had to push herself to work until the work was done. This professional drive within her and that leadership value, it served her really well. She loved her reason. She loved that priority. She loved that value. It served her in her career very well. She was very successful. For a period of time, that value and that priority felt very true and the line to her leadership values. She made decisions and took actions through that lens. So for a period of time, my client was completely in alignment with that decision lens.

But more recently, she started to feel some cognitive dissonance, some incongruence. That internal conflict that you feel, she was noticing that. She was noticing that her district leadership was experiencing some inconsistencies and offering some contradicting messages to her and to other school leaders in the district. She was really frustrated by the changes that the whole field of education is facing. You know what I'm talking about. There's a lot of change, and a lot of cognitive dissonance and some incongruence going on in education.

She was questioning her commitment to that position. She felt her work ethic and her drive that she felt in the past, it wasn't creating the same results that they had in the past, and she wasn't feeling recognized or supported by her district leaders.

So when a principal shares these feelings with me, they share that they're feeling this way and they're thinking this way. It tells me that the lens through which they are currently making decisions is not feeling for them as aligned as it has in the past. It's a signal to me that a decision lens has shifted or that a priority has shifted.

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That means, for me as the coach, that it's time to help this client review the lenses through which they're making decisions. So the way I see it, your decision lens is the top priority. It's the leadership value that you value the most in the moment. It's what you currently value, and it's the lens through which you tend to make your decisions. I've said this a million times on the podcast, but I will continue to say it. The way that you make decisions about one thing tends to be the way you make decisions about other things. Because you have one brain, you have the same lenses being applied to different areas of your life.

Now, that is true and it isn't true. Because sometimes we make emotional decisions. I'm going to talk about that a little bit later, but I want to use this as an example. So if what you currently value the most is connection with your staff members.

So I like to go into Facebook groups, the other principal groups. I have one, but I love to go into the other ones just to help all the people. People will say like I just got hired as a new AP, or I just got hired as a new principal. Any suggestions or tips? People love to post that, and they'll get hundreds of responses back. It's pretty fascinating.

Generally, what people will say is build relationships first, relationships first, build connections, listen more than you speak, those kinds of things tend to come up. I totally agree, and I like to remind people to check in with themselves, right? So I'll add my coaching two cents in terms of telling people like what is the experience you want to have? What are the goals you want to accomplish? What would a good first year experience look and feel like for you personally? Get them to tune back into their own opinions and their own values.

Because the first thing we want to do is ask everybody else's opinion. You ask 200 people, you're going to get 200 opinions. Now you're very confused and you're wondering what to do because there will be

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differences of opinion. If you value other people's opinion more than your own, you're going to be very confused and overwhelmed. So I like to bring people back to the truest answer, which is what is it for you? What is the best experience for you? Okay.

So I go in, and I'm noticing how people are making decisions. For example, if what you value as a school leader the most is connection and building relationships. How you make decisions on a daily basis is going to ensure that you are spending your time and energy and attention on connecting with other people and using less of your time to do other things, such as sitting in your office and working on paperwork or whatever million other things you could be doing with your time.

Your brain is going to ensure that you are spending your time and energy connecting. If that is the value lens through which you're using, you're going to be spending your time and energy. All of your resources will go to connection, if that's the value lens, okay. Knowing the decision lens you're making to use all of your decisions is critical for you to know as a leader. You want to know why you're making the decisions you're making and be sure you love your reasons for those decisions.

Making decisions is one of the tasks you will do all day long as a school leader. Decisions impact the results you create. So you want to pay close attention to your decision making process and be intentional with it. So oftentimes when we make decisions we aren't explicit in understanding our reasons behind the decision. We make the decision to have it be done, and we move on, but we don't acknowledge or create awareness around how we made that decision.

What was the lens through which we were deciding and determining that decision? OFTENTIMES, because we're making so many decisions, we can slip into making decisions based on emotion rather than with our values. I feel like we go into emotions versus math, right. When we're making

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decisions based on emotions, we go on autopilot. We kind of numb ourselves. We lose awareness. We drop out of awareness.

So in my client's case, she was contemplating a career change, but she didn't feel that she had clarity. She had been using the lens of professional excellence as that decision filter. It served her for a while, but it impacted every decision she make. From the time she went into work and what she worked on and how she spent her time at work and who she hired and how she mentored them. It impacted her budget decisions. It impacted her site plan and her goals for her school and her school vision. It impacted when she went home in the evening.

Now, she started to feel in limbo. She was loving that priority of professional excellence. She wanted to hold on to that as a priority, but she also felt another priority bubbling up to the surface. It was coming into play for her, and it was creating this conflict. I just want to say, by the way, this is normal. Of course, this happens.

When you're pursuing your professional career. You're going all in on your professional career, you might be willing to get in early and stay late and work nights and weekends. Hustle, as we call it, or really overextend yourself and overwork to create a result you want. It might feel really good for a while.

But eventually, another priority will come in, whether that's you have a child or you get married, or you get divorced, or you move somewhere, or who knows, your mom gets sick. There's endless reasons that circumstances that arise that will shift your priority lens, your decision lens. That's normal. It happens. It's supposed to happen. You're not going to use the same decision lens for the rest of your life.

So know that if you feel that incongruence it's not a problem. It's normal. The priority that you had in your past, that served you well. But if you're

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experiencing a conflict with how you're making decisions and the priorities and the values that you have, they're going to shift from time to time. The way you know they are shifting is when your decisions that used to feel easy now feel challenging or difficult. You feel that internal struggle. That's the signal that saying the priorities and the decision lens that I'm using is shifting. I want to be aware of that.

So I asked my client if you were going to make the decision of what time you were going to leave work for the day because she was saying to me I want to be excellent. I want to get my to do list done. But I also want to be able to go home, and I want to stop working so late. I have other things I need to get done in my life.

I've got two children. I want to be able to work out. I want to be able to get my household chores done. I want to spend time with my family, eat dinner, put my kids to bed. I want to do all of these things. I want to have a life outside of school leadership basically is what she was saying.

So I asked her if you're making this decision of what time you're going to leave work through the lens of professional excellence, what would the decision be? What time would you leave? Her answer was when I get all of my tasks completed. I don't leave until the job is done, basically.

So I asked her okay. Let's just play with these lenses. You know when you go to the optometrist, and they try on different lenses. Some of them are very clear, and some of them are a little bit blurry. Some of them are like I cannot see anything with this lens. We're just clicking down different lenses to see which one creates the most clarity for you. Okay.

So I asked her okay, let's try a different lens. If you asked yourself what time you want to leave work and why you want to leave work at that time, when would you leave and why? She blurted out 4:00 p.m.. It just came

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right out. I asked her why? Why 4:00 p.m.? What's significant about 4:00 p.m.?

She said I could get a workout in before I pick up my kids. I would still have enough time and energy to play with them, make dinner, and get everything done at home. That lens, when we asked her what she wanted and why she wanted it, it became crystal clear. It was very specific. It was very tangible. She was very clear on what she wanted and why she wanted it.

So you can see what's happening here. When you're standing on the outside looking in, it's like oh, it's very clear this is what she wants and why she wants it, but she also had this internal struggle because she had two conflicting priorities, two different decision lenses. It's like she's using on her left eye, one lens of professional excellence, and the right eye, she's using her family and her self-care, right? You can see how those are conflicting internally.

So as you're looking through your own decision lenses, and you're wanting to understand which decision lens to use, you can ask yourself a couple of questions. Number one, is this decision lens the truth? Is a checked off to do list, is it the most important value of your life, personally and professionally?

Is that checked off to do list, does it define professional excellence for you? Can you be professionally excellent and still have some things on your to do list for tomorrow? Could both be true? Look at what else could be true when you're determining the decision lens you're going to use.

Number two, do you want this decision lens to be the driving priority through which you lead your life? Is it creating for you the results that you want? You might be getting professional results, but are you getting personal results? What is the balance for you? For some people working

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12 hours a day is the balance they're looking for. For other people, it's eight hours a day. Decide where on the spectrum is your personal balance.

What is the impact of this decision lens on all the areas of your life? You need to not ignore your physical wellbeing, your mental and emotional wellbeing, your family life, your relationships, your intimate relationships, your friendships, your friendships with family and friends, your spiritual relationship, your personal interconnection with yourself. Think about as a parent, as a spouse, as a partner with your vitality, with your spirituality, emotionally, physically, all of those things need to be taken into consideration when you're looking at the balance of your life, and what decision lenses you are using.

Now the other decision lens and value my client was looking through as she contemplated her value of self-care and the value of being present for her family and having energy to be with them and interact with them, the same questions apply. Number one, is it true? Do you need to work out every day? To be present for your kids and get everything done at home?

Do you need to get everything done at home? You just want to poke holes in what your brain is offering you. What would it look like to do this differently? What has your experience been when you don't use this decision lens as your filter? Do you will like the results the decision lens you've been using is creating? You want to look at both decision lenses and ask yourself what's true about this lens? What's working? What's not? What's the balance I'm trying to create here?

Because what's happening when you have internal conflict, what your brain is really saying I want the best of both worlds, but I'm not sure how to get that. It feels very all or none. I have to be professionally excellent, or I'm going to blow off being professionally excellent and just go take care of myself and my family. I'm inviting you to consider how do you blend the decision lens to be professionally excellent and create a balanced life?

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Look guys, I'm doing this all of the time. How do I be they wonderful, attentive, highly effective coach who's running a company, a multi six-figure company, and how do I not be consumed by my love and passion for coaching? How do I balance myself, my self-care, my rest, my rejuvenation, my travel time, my fun, pleasure, and the rest of my life? How can I be a successful CEO and have a robust life?

So I feel like it's the question of the hour in education. We do want to find that balance. That's what these decision lenses are all about. How can we get the right combination? It's just like when you go to the eye doctor. How do you get the right combination of lenses that gives you the most clarity to make the best decision for yourself and your life?

Now, I want to quickly end on a conversation around emotional decision making. Making decisions based on how you feel in the moment versus using your values and priorities as the lens through which you make decisions can get you in a pickle. Here's why.

If you're trying to make decisions based on the way that you feel in this moment, it's going to be much more difficult because your brain doesn't want to feel any kind of discomfort. It is wired to make things as easy as possible, make sure that you're safe, make everything comfortable, make it as comfortable, easy, safe as possible.

It doesn't want to do something that feels hard or feels challenging or is uncomfortable or requires effort, right. So it's helpful to use a decision lens to make your decisions ahead of time. Because then in that moment when your brain throws a little tantrum, and it doesn't want to get up and go for a walk or go to the gym, or it doesn't want to leave at 4:00 p.m. so that you can go be with your kids because it thinks it needs to get the to do list done to be professionally excellent.

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It is much more difficult to make decisions in the moment emotionally versus using your decision lens, the value that you want to create for yourself ahead of time.

The way that I tell my clients is that it's easier to make a decision in a moment when you've already decided what you're going to do. So if I decide today, right now that tomorrow, I'm going to get up at 6:00 a.m., put on my walking shoes, and go for my hour walk, I don't have to redecide that. I just get up and do it. My body still doesn't want to get up. I still have the chatter in my head about I'm tired. I want to sleep, or it's a little bit cold out.

But if the decision is already made and done, and I've made that through the decision lens of I'm a person who moves my body every day. I love to connect and get outside and breathe in fresh air and see nature and green trees and grass so I don't get locked up in my office all day. Because once I get going, it's much harder to pull myself out and take that walk. I do it first thing in the morning.

There's no more decision to be made. It's already done through the decision lens of I take care of my body, and I get out and move every single day. Because what happens is you want to make your decision lens through the priorities that you have and the outcomes you're trying to create that provide you a net positive outcome.

Little decisions add up. Getting up on time, deciding what you're going to eat a day in advance, planning out your lunch and snacks before you go into work so that you know you have something to eat midday, and that you don't blow through lunch. I know a lot of you do this. But taking five minutes to make a sandwich or to throw a cup of soup or salad into your lunch bag and throw it in the fridge so you can grab and go in the morning. You don't want to do that at night because you're tired, but the net result of that is positive. Those little decisions add up.

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Mapping out your week, creating a three month plan, having that difficult conversation, following up with your teachers going into that, contentious IEP meeting, asking your PTA to fundraise for you, leaving your to do list the night before so you can self-care and be present for your family, right?

None of us want to do those tasks in the moment. We want to get five more minutes asleep. We don't want to slow down and plan. We don't want to do the uncomfortable conversation. I get it. We don't want to take up lots of time or do things that are awkward. We never want to do it, but we do want the result. We want the result that's generated from making those decisions through the decision lens, being intentional about that lens, okay.

When deciding the lens you want to apply to your decisions, choose the lens based on the results and the outcomes that it creates for you. I also like to think about how do I want to feel about those results and outcomes? What is the feeling or the emotion I'm attempting to create based on those results? Deciding from that emotion how I'm going to feel when I do take that walk or when I do write that podcast or when I do sign three clients this month.

When I go to work to make those results happen, I think about the emotion I will experience then, which generates the momentum. It lets me use that filter with intention to take the action that my brain is offering that I don't want to take right? To do that hard thing. Make your decisions based on the emotions you want to feel instead of trying to avoid the emotions you don't want to feel.

Because here's the truth. Your decisions determine your results every single time. From the micro, small decisions to the bigger, more significant ones, your decisions are that initial momentum towards your goals. So you want to create awareness as to how you're making those decisions.

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So I invite you this week, notice when you have a decision to make, and just create awareness around the lens that you are using to make that decision. Let me know how it goes. Show me in the Facebook group. Send me an email. I want to hear how it's going, how you're making decisions, where you're struggling.

Hey, get into our Empowered Principal® Collaborative group. We need you there. We want you there. You're going to learn how to make powerful decisions that get you the results you want every single time. I can't wait to have you there. Talk to you guys next week. Take good 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.

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.

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