

Ep #297: Mastering Your Time: Attending Meetings and Scheduling Substitutes



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 297.

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.

Holy moly, 297. That just hit me. I can't believe we're three away from 300 episodes of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. That just blew my mind all of a sudden. Whoa. Well, happy Tuesday, my empowered leaders. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I digressed very quickly here, but that really just caught me off guard saying it out loud. This is really a testament to what it looks like to show up for 30 minutes every single week without fail for the last five and a half years. You create a podcast with 300 episodes. That is amazing. I love it.

It just goes to show that with a little bit of effort for 30 or 40 minutes a week I jump on my mic and my computer, record this podcast, send it in to my producers, and without fail I have done that consistently for the last five and a half years. I'm just amazed at the result that it produces. Compound results. So fun.

Okay, well, for those of you who are new, welcome. Today we're going to talk about managing your thoughts around time. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. That should probably be the title. Don't do what you don't want to do. I don't know the right title for this, but I'm going to tell you. I am coaching in the Empowered Principal® Facebook group. I do something called quick clip.

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So I will ask a question. I have people respond, and then I jump on a live, and I respond with my coaching brain to give you some coaching and ideas and alternative approaches to the problem that you feel you're facing. Today I'm going to talk about thoughts around excessive meetings and having to find substitutes and not wanting to find them.

So what I did was I posted a question in the Facebook, like what do you feel you're going to lose when you go back to school. Because I know that you're 12 month employees, some of you are 11 month, but there is a different rhythm in the summer to your work schedule and your work routines and your personal habits and routines than when you are in full swing and school is up and running, and it's back in session.

So I was asking the school leaders in that group what's going to change as a result of the school year going back into session? What do you feel like you're going to lose out on when you go back? Most people said time. We're going to talk about time. It's just so interesting. We're so wrapped up when it comes to the resource of time. We think we're losing time.

I said to one of the gals in the group, you actually can't lose time. It's a mental construct. It doesn't go anywhere. You can't lose it. It's just right here in front of us. So what are you doing with your time might shift and how you're spending your time might shift. So what is it you're losing in terms of the experience of how you're spending your time? What aren't you doing with your time that you were doing or that you want to be doing?

So it isn't time that you're worried about losing. It's what you do or don't do with that time that you're anxious about. Okay, just to clarify. So I'm going to talk about excessive meetings and subs. Now. I just want to be honest, right now.

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We, in school leadership, are in a world of meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings. Meetings with teachers, meeting with paras, meeting with interviews, meetings with IEPs, 504s, parent meetings, community meetings, stakeholder meetings, district meetings, curriculum meetings, PLCs, leadership team meetings, executive team meetings, meetings, meetings, meetings. We're acknowledging it. It is a world of meetings. Some of those meetings we deem important and valuable and productive, and other meetings we think are not productive or not valuable or not important at all.

But I want you to see that when we label meetings as being excessive, particularly at the beginning of the year, it's a subjective thought. It's an opinion that we have about the number of meetings, the amount of time we're spending in meetings, and the things we're losing out on when we're in these meetings. Okay?

So our work as an Empowered Principal® is to examine our thoughts about these meetings so that we can step into a more empowered mindset around that. So first, I'm going to talk about meetings out of your control, meaning they are scheduled by somebody else. Your district or somebody else outside of you scheduled the meeting, planned the meeting. They determined the agenda, the content, the time, the date, location, whatever. You do not have the authority to change it or to cancel it. Okay?

These are meetings that we feel most annoyed by because we don't have the authority to change them into what we think would be most productive, which sometimes means canceling, other times means adjusting the agenda. Other times means change of date, duration, or location. Okay.

Here's what I do and here's what my clients do when they're having thoughts about meetings being excessive. Break it down to each individual meeting. Why are you attending this meeting? Why are you actually going?

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Answer the question. Notice the answers you give. Are you saying, this is what I hear lots of times, because I have to. Because I'm required to. Because it's my job. Because they make us go. My boss said so. We have to be there. Okay.

Notice how those thoughts feel. They're very constricting. They do not promote any feelings of autonomy, independence, freedom, empowerment. They feel very restrictive, very judgmental, very controlling, versus why are you attending the meeting? I'm choosing to attend. I want to attend. It's my job to attend. I'm good with that.

I make me go to the meeting. When my boss invites me to come to a meeting, I make me go, even when I don't want to. Kind of like I make my family eat healthy dinners or go to school or go to sleep by a certain time. I make me because I'm responsible for me, and I take ownership for me. I make me go to meetings I don't want to go to. I'm in control of my brain. My boss, meaning me, said we were doing this so I'm going to do it.

So if your boss said so, you are the boss. Not your superintendent or your superior. They aren't your boss of your body and your mind. They're not puppeteers. You are choosing to go to that meeting, you, the boss inside of you, said you were going to that meeting. See the difference? Take the same thoughts and turn them into choice, into intention, and into self-agency and control.

If your brain resists the difference between the two, it's like no, but I really have to go. They're really making me. Here's the fastest way out of that mindset is to then don't go. What would it look like to not go to the meeting? What would be the outcome of not going to the meeting? Just don't go. Your boss isn't in your bed or in your home. They're not taking your body and getting you ready for the morning and putting you in your car

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and holding you at gunpoint to drive to this meeting. I hope not. If they are, we have another problem.

But for the most part, you're not being held by your boss to go to that meeting. So what would it look like not to go? Now your brain is going like, are you kidding me? I have to go. Yes, we know you have to go, but what would it look like not to just for fun? I'm not saying do it. I'm saying consider it. Just play with it in your mind. What would it look like not to go? It might feel great not to go. You might not need to go.

You might actually find that you can call them and tell them you have this other thing. I'll find out what was happened in the meeting. If you were sick, if you had the flu, you wouldn't go to that meeting. Just imagine what it would be like not to go to the meeting? What might be the outcome of not going to the meeting? Okay. Are you willing to not attend that meeting?

If you don't want to go and you have more valuable things to do with your time, are you willing to let them know I won't be in attendance and not go to the meeting. Why or why not? Just explore your answers, your thoughts about not going. Then what would it look like to attend the meeting. If you believed that you wanted to go to the meeting and that it was a good use of your time and it was going to be productive, then what would you be thinking? How would you be feeling? How would you show up energetically to that meeting?

What would the outcome be? What would you gain in return when you believe the meeting was exactly what you needed, the information you needed, the time that you needed to spend. It was the best use of your time. It was a productive meeting. Think about how you show up energetically when you think there's a good meeting, a productive meeting, good use of your time versus not. Play with those things. From that place, make a decision about whether or not to attend.

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Remind yourself that you are always in charge of whether or not that you attend a meeting that somebody else has called. That you're choosing to go because XYZ reason, love your reasons, or you're choosing not to go because of XYZ reasons, love your reasons. That puts you back in the driver's seat. Okay.

Now, let's talk about unexpected or unplanned meetings, like pop up meetings, last minute meetings. I know a lot of school districts, they'll send an email out oh, we scheduled a meeting today. You're like, I had a full day to get my stuff done. I was going to work on the master calendar, and I was going to meet with teachers. Now I have to go to this meeting from one to four. What the heck?

You're going to use the same process with the pop up meetings as you did for the meetings outside of your control. You're going to look at when you see that meeting, that email, or you get a phone call or a text saying emergency meeting or new meeting scheduled or maybe even a parent or teacher comes marching in and says I need to meet with you right now.

You can just go through the same process. Say can I have a few minutes and ask yourself why would I attend this meeting right now? Why would I not attend this meeting? Now notice when you have a pop up meeting, and you ask yourself why should I go to this meeting. Because they want me to, because they're my employer, because it's important, because I want to handle it now. Because they'll have a negative emotions if I don't.

Notice why you're making the decision to go, or to, especially when a parent or teacher interrupts you. They're like I've got to talk to you right now. It's really important. They think it's important. They value it. They think it's a productive use of your time and use of their time. What do you think?

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You might think yes, I'm willing to meet with you because I do have the time. I can make it happen. I want this resolved right here right now. But if you're like oh, they're going to be mad at me, or oh, they're going to freak out, or oh, I can't say no. They want me to and you abdicate the responsibility back onto them.

Then what you're going to find is that you blame them and you're angry at them for interrupting you, for having to have this meeting, and then you not getting your other work done.

Now, you get to decide. If your boss calls a meeting last minute, you might go through the process and say I choose to go. I want to go. I want to find out what's going on. I remember when I was a school leader, we had excessive meetings at the beginning of the year, particularly. When they'd pop up, I remember thinking oh, okay. I'm in. I want to go. I wanted to go to leadership meetings. I valued them because of my self-concept.

I was so proud that I had earned the right and the privilege to be a school leader, I wanted to be privy to those meetings. They felt like VIP status to me. I wanted to be in the know, to meet with my colleagues, to hear what they had to say, to learn from them. If there was a meeting, and I was called in, I felt valuable. They wanted me there. I wanted to be there. I wanted to learn. I wanted to hear. I wanted to contribute my opinions and my input.

Because if I didn't go to the meeting, and they made decisions without me, that's on me. But if I went to the meeting, and I was a part of the collective collaboration, I felt like even if my input wasn't implemented, it was heard. I gave my input, right?

So think about how you think of meetings. If your thought is like well, they require me to be there, but they don't care what I have to say, we want to

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explore that too. Right? Why don't they care? What do you do in response to thinking the thought that they don't care? Okay. So go through the same process.

What would it look like to attend the meeting? What would it look like not to attend the meeting? If you thought this was the best use of your time, how would you get what you came for? If this pop up meeting isn't at a convenient time and you want to reschedule it? How might you approach that person? You might say I have a deadline. I've got to get this turned in by noon. Can we meet at 12:30? I hear you. I see this as important. I want to hear you, and I'm under a deadline. Can I meet back with you at one o'clock, two o'clock, whatever?

Acknowledging them, but also holding boundary to what you need to get done that's right in front of you. You might decide that. To delay the meeting or reschedule it, and to let them know I'm here. I want to hear you, and I have this deadline. Can I get back to you? Or you might find like the deadline is less important than this is a true emergency. I am going to take this on. You see it? Okay.

One last type of meeting are the meetings that are in your control. Meetings that you schedule. How many meetings do you schedule and plan? Why do you schedule them? What is your intended outcome of them? What are your thoughts about your own meetings? Do you think they're important, valuable, productive? What do you think teachers are thinking? Do they agree? Are all of the meetings that you scheduled important, productive, and valuable to your teachers? Or would they view your meetings as excessive? Just consider that.

I oftentimes notice in myself that when I'm thinking somebody else is being excessive with their meetings, I usually am. There's a projection of my own opinion of myself. So just be mindful of that. Think about what other people

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are thinking about your meetings and what you're thinking about other people's meetings, and how can you find that balance of them being productive use of your time, you wanting and choosing to go to the meeting, but ultimately having agency over the way that you approach and participate in these meetings.

All right, let's talk about our thoughts on finding subs. So in the school year, there are a lot of mornings that you spend scurrying to find subs and to manage the sub situation at your school to secure subs. Okay, I remember this very intimately. So I can speak to this from the heart.

Finding subs, for me, felt very annoying, and it made me wake up early, be in frustration, be an annoyance. It felt like a huge pain in my backside. I hated it. It was a burden that weighed me down every morning. I dreaded it. I actually dreaded it. I resisted it. I didn't want to do it. I was in panic about it because I was watching my brain going into a tantrum and thinking like oh, we're not going to have enough subs. It felt very scarce. It felt very graspy. It felt very frustrating. I felt like I had no control over the sub issue.

Okay, so I hear you. You're feeling this way. You could prove in a court of law, there's probably less substitutes than there were pre-COVID. I don't really know all the stats. I will just agree with you. There's less subs, the sub pool is low. People are leaving, or there's less qualified or good people, right? We could go down that path, but I'm just going to talk about the act of finding the sub as it relates to you as the school leader. Okay.

So why does finding subs feel terrible? The truth is that we just want to do something else with our time. So we wake up in the morning worried about subs, having to scurry for subs, and we're thinking I'd rather be sleeping in, getting the rest that I need, getting up early, planning my day, getting in a walk, doing some yoga, or just entering your day with the peace of mind knowing every classroom's covered. Students have coverage. They have

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safety, security, supervision. They're going to get taught today. My school is performing and functioning well.

If kids are having teachers and subs, I can spend my time doing something else. I'm not worried about them, right? So we would rather not be looking for subs because we'd rather be doing other things. To be fair, we just don't like the task of looking for them. It's kind of stressful. We don't like the way it feels. We also worry what will happen if we don't get enough subs.

What's going to happen if you don't have enough subs? You're either going to have to sub yourself, you're going to have to split a classroom, you're going to have to get very creative and problem solve for finding coverage for your students. Whether that's paras who might be qualified to take that class, splitting that classroom into different groups, having somebody have to teach on their prep time. I mean, there's all kinds of ways that we try to cover when somebody's out, and we don't have a sub.

We don't like the feeling of ourselves having to solve that problem. We don't like to have to get down and get to work being creative. It just feels like it's hard. It's frustrating. It takes us away from the other things we want to do. We're worried about what other people will think. We certainly don't want to have to serve ourselves because that's going to wipe out our whole agenda for the day. We're not getting to our real work because we're being pulled away from the other priorities.

We believe that we have to. Oh, this is such a good one. We believe that we have to take care of the sub situation, even if it means we sub all day. But then we leave that classroom then we think now I've got to go and finish everything I had scheduled for the day. That is why we overwork late into the night. We stay at work, and we bring the work home, and we're up working to the late hours because we did a full day of subbing and now

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we're doing a full day of being a principal. We think that this is how we should approach subbing and our job as school leaders.

Let me offer you some additional thoughts and additional approaches to finding subs, especially in the morning. So the first thing I recommend is acknowledging that it's just not your favorite way to spend your time. You don't have to love everything about school leadership. You can learn to love it. You can find ways that you love it. But you don't have to.

I think it's best to just tell yourself the truth. I don't like doing this. I don't like finding subs, especially first thing in the morning. I feel blank when I'm looking for subs at the crack of dawn. I would rather be doing XYZ with my time from five in the morning till seven. Okay, be truthful. Here's why.

If you skip this part, your brain is going to dig down deeper. It's going to argue louder. It's going to dig its heels in more. It's going to keep telling you why you should hate it, why you do hate it. It's not going to let you bypass the experience of being frustrated and annoyed and having to find subs. So acknowledge it, make peace with the frustration and annoyance, ask yourself this question.

What do I fear is being taken away from me when I'm spending time working on finding subs? What am I missing out on? What am I losing when I'm busy securing a substitute teacher? Okay.

When you think of it that way then you're thinking oh, the reason I'm such resistant to finding subs is because I think or I would prefer to be spending my time this way. Now, notice that. I would rather be doing this than that. Ask yourself is that true? What if I just chose to do that instead of looking for subs then what? How does that play out? Do I love that outcome?

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Then ask yourself why do I look for subs even when I don't want to? Why do I spend time securing subs when I hate doing it so much? There's a reason you're doing it. Be honest with yourself. Why are you looking for subs in the morning instead of sleeping in or waiting until you get to work? What is the reason you get up in the morning and get to work finding those subs? So what would it look like to find the subs? Why do you do it? What would it look like not to do it? What if I just chose to do the other things that I want to do instead of looking for the subs?

Here's what it comes down to. Spend your time with intention. How you spend your time is in your control. You can decide to look for subs or go to that meeting, or you can decide not to look for subs or not go to that meeting.

There is a cost and an outcome associated with both sides of your decision, but the shift that occurs is that you feel in control of the action you're taking. Whether it's attending a meeting or looking for subs or going into classrooms, whether you stay late at work or honor your calendar and go home at the time you said you would go home. Your job is to remember that you are the one in control of how you spend your time.

So I'm willing to look for subs so that I can dot, dot, dot. Or I'm willing to not look for subs so that I can dot, dot, dot. I want you to consider that attending meetings and finding subs are just a task as a part of being a school leader. Then you can decide to live with those tasks as a part of the decision to be a school leader.

Or if you really can't tolerate it, and you're like I just can't do the meetings. I'm so sick of finding subs. I want a different life. I want to go to the islands and get away from it all. You have the right to do that. Consider what else you do.

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If you can't coach yourself on how to be a school leader with the tasks that are involved, it's very okay to give yourself permission to imagine what it would be like to not be one. But the goal here is to put yourself back into the driver's seat of what you think about time, and that you don't have to do anything you don't want to do. That the things you do decide to do, you're choosing to do it because of the outcomes it creates for you. That you're choosing to do them because it actually makes your life easier on the back end in the future.

The brain wants immediate gratification now, but the goal is to decide with intention what do I want to create for myself in the future? What is the outcome I actually want? Right? It's like do I want the third piece of cake now? Or do I want to not be victim of birthday parties and eat three pieces of cake?

You can apply this to anything in your life. You are in the driver's seat of every decision you make and action you take. Whether it's related to time, whether it's related to money, your energy, your focus, your attention, your career, your personal life, all of it. You are in control. Have an amazing week.

You know what? It's going to be an amazing year when you are able to grasp the concept that you are in control of your time. Come on over to EPC and join us. I'm going to be coaching there, and the doors close September 11. You must apply and register to be in EPC before September 11. That's Monday of this month. Apply now. Join us, learn how to take back control of your time. I'll see you there. Take good care. Bye.

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learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.