

Ep #301: 5 Strategies to Avoid the Fall Dip



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 301.

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.

301 episodes. This is insane. Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast* everybody. I hope you are well. I am so happy to be with you today. Happy Tuesday. All right, let's dive in. It is October. I have been coaching people on their thoughts about it being October. So I thought we would welcome you into October with the fall dip.

I have talked about this in previous years, in previous autumn seasons, but I want to talk about what you can do when you feel or experience the fall dip. So October is a beautiful month. It's the month of ghosts and goblins and Halloween and candy and excitement. It's colorful leaves, pumpkin spice lattes, it's all the things right.

But for school leaders, it's one of the most exhausting months of the year. You are going full blast. You have been going full blast since July, August. Hiring, planning, preparing, meeting, going to retreats, trying to get your plans up and ready, onboarding teachers, having teachers leave, having to hire last minute, not being fully staffed, getting the school year kicked off with a bang, welcoming parents, onboarding new families, getting kids in and settled, routine scheduled, making sure technology is up and running, making sure that teachers have what they need to do their jobs well. You have been pushing a boulder up a mountain all season long.

So the fall season, that first major trimester of the season, is really exhausting. You get to October, things are starting to hum. You're in the middle of teacher observations. You're in the middle of endless meetings,

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IEPs, setting up student success team meetings and collaborations, behaviors are starting to come into play. Your teachers are tired because they've been doing the same thing you've been doing, setting up shop for the year, right?

So we get to October, and we're like October, we love you, and we hate you. We dread you, I should say. We don't hate you, but we dread you. I just want to acknowledge October is a long month. It is a tough month. Kids are little dysregulated with the change in season. Teachers are tired, and maybe they're a little grumpy. You're feeling the burn too.

So by this time of the year, there is a long haul ahead of you, but you feel like you've been doing the heavy lifting 24/7. You still have six months to go. Okay. So what ends up happening is you want to pass out from exhaustion, or you're dusting off your resume looking for a cute little coffee shop where you can just hang out, right.

So what do we do? I'm just gonna give you a few tips and strategies for enjoying the fall and not having October feel so heavy. I'm also going to share with you a conversation I had with one of my clients on what she's planning to do to make her October better and better every season. So here are some of my tips and strategies for making your October more enjoyable.

Strategy number one, focus on your accomplishments. Instead of only thinking about how much work lies in front of you, all of the grind that you have yet to do and accomplish, all those six months that are laying in front of you, just take a moment and look back and pat yourself on the back. Feel proud that you got your school up and running. Look at all the work you've already accomplished.

I get it. Our brains are not wired to celebrate what we've accomplished. They're wired to prepare you for what's next? What now? What do we need

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to do? What do I need to be prepared for because it wants to know what's going on? It doesn't want to be caught off guard. It doesn't want to get behind.

You don't have to spend a lot of time looking back, to remind yourself how far you've already come. You don't need to always look at the gap. I want you to look at what you've gained, what you've accomplished, what you've created already, and it's only October. Look how amazing you are. Your brain wants to forget and dismiss. Once it's checked off the list, it's gone. Your brains like forget about that, on to the next thing.

Yes, that's fine. We'll talk about planning in a second. But give yourself a little bit of validation and confirmation that what you're doing is awesome. It's amazing. It's exceptional. You're doing right by your teachers and your students. You're setting up systems to make them as efficient as possible. You want to validate the work you do because it generates pride and momentum for you to step into that next round of work that you want to complete.

So give yourself permission to give yourself a pat on the back, feel proud about your accomplishments, and allow that to be leverage and momentum to say okay, I'm ready for the next round because I've acknowledged and validated myself for the work I've already completed.

Strategy number two, put your favorite fall activities on your calendar. October will feel so long and heavy. When the nights are getting darker, faster, the days feel shorter. The only thing you have to look forward to is getting up, going to work, and coming home. Work, work and more work your brains like bleh. That does not feel amazing to me. This feels long and boring. Where's my fun?

Most of us use our calendars to schedule in all of the important things, our work tasks, our meetings, our projects, our deadlines, our appointments,

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doctor's, dentist, whatever, our kid's activities. We put all of those things on the calendar. But what we don't tend to put on the calendar is what we want to do for fun. We just assume that fun is somehow going to fall into place or fill in the cracks between all of the responsibilities between work and home. So we don't block out actual time for it.

You know what ends up happening. Fun doesn't happen. Work and chores and errands and your kid's things and your spouse's needs and work needs, it all fills in the blanks. Then you're too tired for any fun. I had a client say to me, "Like, I want to sleep all day on Saturday. I only have one weekend day a week because I'm so exhausted on Saturday I can barely wake up enough to enjoy it."

That's because we haven't scheduled in time for fun during the week to keep up that momentum so that you feel energized and ready to take on Saturday and Sunday. I mean that in a fun way.

So here's what I want to sell you on. I want to sell you on the value of scheduling fun into your calendar, to actually put it on the calendar. We talked about this in the Empowered Principal® Facebook group. We talk about it in EPC. I'm going to talk about it here. The value of fun.

When you schedule it onto your calendar, what you're doing is that you are intentionally creating space for that fun to have time to come into your life. You're inviting it in because you're giving it a space. You're giving it quality, time, and attention. You're giving it priority because you're calendaring it.

When you don't schedule fun on your calendar, basically what you're saying to the universe is it's not as important or valuable to me because I'm not willing to give it my time. I'm not willing to schedule a date, a time, and a duration and honor that as equally as I honor other tasks and activities and work projects on my calendar. So you're saying like fun doesn't really matter as much as the rest. The universe is like okay. If you don't want it,

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you don't value it, you're not gonna put it on the calendar, we'll just fill all that space up with work.

So this month, I want you to decide that your fun, your pleasure, your rest, your play, whatever you love to do is equally as valuable as every other important task on your calendar. So this month put your fall fun activities on to the calendar. Schedule a night out with some friends or have a date night with your partner, your person. Take your kids out for ice cream, take a walk, enjoy the fall colors, take a road trip to look at the Fall foliage. Go to an apple orchard, go to the local high school football game on Friday night.

Do something that you love to do that feels like fall, go get that pumpkin spice latte and enjoy it fully to its fullest extent. But you want to let fun know I love you. I care about you. I welcome you. You're important to me. It's a relationship that you have with fun. You want to welcome fun into your life and cherish it enough to give it time onto your calendar. Okay.

Strategy number three, slow down. This is going to sound counterproductive. Hear me out. When your to-do list is a million miles long, the instinctive urge you have is to go faster. In response to that urge, what you do with your time and your energy is you over schedule, over exert, and over work. Giving into this urge does one thing for you very, very well. There is a net positive in your mind. Here's what it does.

It compounds your exhaustion. It reinforces, you collect more evidence to believe that hustling and being on and working 24/7 is the only option. Here's what's so crazy about it. We think that we need to work harder, longer, faster in order to get ahead so that we can finally create time for fun and rest. So we think that if we work really hard and get everything done, then we'll have time to relax and rest and feel good about ourselves.

But in that quest, in that chase to get ahead and to get everything done on the list, the list just keeps creating more to do. So the actual chase of trying

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to get to rest and play by out running our to-do list creates the very thing we don't want, which is burnout. We know this on an intellectual level. We know we're just chasing our tail and chasing ourselves down the spiral of more exhaustion and burnout.

We know this at a cognitively intellectual level, but we don't question it because we've been so socially conditioned to believe that the opposite is true. That if we don't keep working and we don't keep up, that it will result in professional death. We think that we will get fired. That people will think we are incompetent or incapable. We think that our reputation will be on the line if we're not always on top of everything.

We think that if we slow the pace down, we're going to get further behind, and that we will no longer be an effective school leader. While this feels very true and very unsafe, I invite you to try slowing down, scheduling a little bit less, going home on time, letting today's work happened today, and tomorrow's work happened tomorrow. Just notice what happens. I'll give you a hint.

What ends up happening when you slow down and when you stop overworking, over scheduling, over exerting, crunching everything in, and you just slow your pace down. You come in, you do your job, and you leave. What you'll notice is that everything that's meant to get done gets done. Nothing goes terribly wrong. You simply learn how to get better at constraining and prioritizing your time and your focus. Slowing down makes you better at your job. You become more efficient and more effective when you practice the art of constraint and focus.

Strategy number four, map out your month. As a part of slowing down, I invite you to take 30 minutes at the beginning of October and write down everything you want to accomplish for the next 30 days. Create a laundry list. Here's what I want to do. Then I want you to prioritize it to three

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essentials. What are the three essentials, tasks, projects? What do you want to have completed at the end of October?

It makes it very tangible and real and manageable. When you think about the Halloween Day, October 31st, the kids are going wild on all the sugar highs, your teachers are having all their celebrations, parties, festivals, whatever school is happening that day, and you're at the end of the month, and you are feeling so accomplished and proud of yourself. What are the three things that you got done in October to allow you to feel sufficient and enough as a school leader?

Prioritize that list. For a lot of people, it is getting a certain amount of teacher observations done. It might be getting your site plan turned in and presented. It might be setting up maybe your staff meeting agendas for the year. Getting something solid in place that's done, tangible results. Choose three and then you simply get your calendar out.

You say okay, if I'm going to get six teacher observations completed in October, or ten observations or whatever you need. It depends on the size of your staff. Map out, if I've got 30 observations to do, I'm going to do 10 a month for the next three months. Where are they going to fit in? You get your calendar out, and you put them on the calendar. Date, time, duration.

Don't spend an entire hour in a classroom. Spend 40 minutes, 30 minutes. Get the information you need to be able to complete that teacher observation and move on with your day. Do not spend hours and hours on end. Give yourself a duration. You have 40 minutes to observe, and then you schedule the last 20 minutes of that hour to write it up and to be done and to schedule that post-observation meeting. Boom.

Now, what I invite people to do is make this fun. Make it a timed test challenge. Make it kind of fun. How much can I get done on this project in one hour? I've got one hour pencils up at 10:00 a.m., pencils down at 11.

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No exceptions. Okay? How much can I get done on my site plan? Make it fun.

What happens with your brain when you shorten the amount of time that a task takes is that you actually laser focus in. Think about it. When you were in college and you had to take a time to test, this essay test, you didn't have time to business and did I spell this right? You just did the essentials. You got your content from your brain onto that paper, maybe a quick editing check, and you moved on because you had to go to the next question.

Do that with your site plants. Do that with your newsletters. Do that with your teacher observation write ups. It's okay to do B plus work. Sometimes your B plus work is your most brilliant work. It's actually your A plus work because you're not over analyzing it and over editing it and second guessing it.

Map out the next 30 days. Get those three essentials, put them onto your calendar. Then what you'll notice is that you stop stalling and procrastinating in an effort to try and perfect everything. This is the master principal at her best. Let me tell you something done is always better than perfect. Because done is real and tangible. Perfect is simply imaginary. It's a fairy tale that we are chasing. It's the end of the rainbow does not exist. Done exists. Done is progress. Done is better than perfect.

Strategy number five, give yourself grace and permission to be human. You are doing enough. You are doing your best. There is no better way to be leading your school than the way you are doing it right now. What you get done was what was meant to be done for the day. Do today's work today and tomorrow's work tomorrow.

Even when you have what I call a wipeout day, a day that takes you off your planned course for that entire day. Your decision to pivot and focus on that on anticipated situation is what was meant to be done with your time

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for that day. Allow yourself to flow with the realities that come up in your school on any given day. Give yourself grace when you feel off track, or you need to take a day off to rest and recover. You're a human being. Accept and allow your humaneness.

Because when you do that for yourself, that gives you permission to allow your staff and students the grace and permission for them to be human as well. All right, my friends. So I want to invite you to get the support you deserve. Being a school leader can be a very isolating and lonely experience, especially if you're new out there. Hearts, love, support to all the new school leaders out there.

If you're a school leader with for any number of years of experience who wants practical solutions to every aspect of the school leadership journey, come on into my world. I invite you into the Empowered Principal® Collaborative. It is my group coaching program for school leaders just like you who want the support and the nurturing and the skill set to become an exceptional and an empowered school leader.

I will share my best tips with you every week so that you can create exceptional results and enjoy your school leadership experience. Come on in. Let's get started. I can't wait to meet you. Take great care. Talk to you guys soon. Bye.

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.