

Ep #312: Coaching Up



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

Ep #312: Coaching Up

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 312.

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, and welcome to the podcast. If you are new, if this is the first time you're ever listening to this podcast, you are in for such a treat. We talk about school leadership in such a different and empowered way.

Look, we have people listening to this podcast from all over the world. I'm thrilled to be helping people from everywhere. School leaders, I'm telling you, we're all in this together. We are on the same team. We want what's best for kids, what's best for teachers. We're all out there working really hard. This podcast is a space where you can come and talk about and think about the real things, the problems underneath the surface that are creating the waves or the failures or the obstacles that are in your way from feeling successful.

That's what this podcast is offering to all school leaders in the entire world. I'm so honored and so happy you are here. So welcome. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. The gratitude is bursting out of my heart and my chest and my soul. I love you all so dearly. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be able to record this podcast for you and to provide support, comfort, compassion, understanding, caring, and tools and strategies to help you be the best version of yourself.

So today, quickly, I'm going to talk about coaching up. What I mean about coaching up is when you need to speak to anybody that you define as having positional authority over you. So your bosses, people at the district

Ep #312: Coaching Up

level, so directors, assistant superintendents, superintendents, coordinators, anybody that's at the district level that you feel is your superior. Okay?

So I had a client who felt like she was in disagreement or out of alignment with her district leadership decisions and actions. So if you have moments, and I know I have had moments, where we're at a leadership team meeting, and something's just not feeling aligned for me. It's coming down the pipe. I'm hearing the words they're saying. I'm listening to their rationale, which they give sometimes and sometimes they don't. They just tell us this is what's happening. This is what you're going to do, and let's do it.

You feel that resistance inside of your body. You feel the disagreement percolating. There is an emotional reaction that happens when you're hearing your bosses tell you something, especially when they're saying you need to go do this or you need to accomplish this or you need to handle this or achieve this.

When they're telling you here's what you need to go do, and you don't necessarily get to hear why or understand what or how, or it doesn't feel like the way you would handle it. I want to talk about that because it comes up quite a bit in school leadership. Okay.

So when we are presented with information from our district officials that our brain hits the brakes on, what's happening is that we are saying to ourselves, I don't agree with this. I don't align to this. This doesn't feel right. I don't want to do that. I don't like this. This is not how I would approach school leadership. This isn't making sense. They should do it differently.

This isn't working for me. They're not thinking of my position or my perspective. There's nothing I can really do though because they're my bosses. So I'm frustrated. I don't like this. I have a lot of bells and whistles

Ep #312: Coaching Up

going off inside my body right now that are telling me I don't agree with this. Don't feel aligned. This isn't going to work for me. They don't understand.

When you're in that, you might go through this frustration, but then you also get a second wave of helplessness or disempowerment because it feels like when your boss tells you to do something, you just better do it. There's not much you can say or do.

But I want to play this out. When you stay in misalignment and you feel disempowered and you're spinning in frustration or spinning in kind of like judgment or little criticism internally. But that feeling of, I don't want to do this. I don't agree with this. This doesn't feel aligned for me. When you feel those emotions, they are an indication to you like hey, something does feel off here. Something does feel misaligned. Something's off track. I want to explore what that is for me.

So the first step when you're feeling those emotions, you want to let them be the indicator that something is a little bit off for you. Not that you're going to react out of emotion. You're not going to blurt out no. Not doing this. Doesn't work for me. Don't like this. No, thank you.

But when you're sitting there in the meeting, and you're like oh, I'm getting a bad vibe here. I'm getting a yucky feeling here. Use that as an indicator to have a little conversation with yourself. What is bothering me about this and why?

You might not be able to do this while you're in the meeting. You might have to do this afterwards because you're trying to pay attention. Just stay present, gather the information that they are sharing with you, and if it feels really intense, save this little exercise for afterwards so that you can kind of collect yourself and ground yourself and understand what's triggering you. Okay.

Ep #312: Coaching Up

But some questions I asked myself like why is this bothering me? What's coming up? What about this doesn't feel aligned? What do I think they should be doing or thinking or deciding? What do I think should be different here and why? You want to understand why your brain's in resistance.

There's a reason. There is a valid reason that your body and brain are saying whoa no, this doesn't feel good. I'm in resistance. This doesn't feel aligned to me. There is validity to that emotional reaction inside of your body. You just don't want to externally act on it until you're clear why it's bothering you.

So before you speak up and raise your hand and say hey, you want to sit with yourself and just give that emotion a minute to be there. Just let it be there for a minute. As they're speaking and as you're listening and processing, you might be able to do this in real time and you might not. Either way is okay. If you can't do it in real time, just let yourself sit there, gather the information, and then go after the meeting and give yourself time and space to process what's happening for you.

But if you are, you can give yourself this little minute of like hey, whoa, where's this? Oh yeah, I don't want to approach it that way. I don't want to have to say this to parents, or I don't want to send that letter. Or I don't want to tell teachers that they have to do one more thing. Why don't I want to tell them that?

Well, I'm thinking that they already have too much on their plate. There's the thought. They have too much on their plate. Now I'm going to be the person, the bad guy, who's coming in and telling them that they have to do more and put more on their plate. They're going to be unhappy with me. That is going to make me highly uncomfortable. I agree with the teachers, There's already too much going on. This is why I'm unhappy. This is why I feel out of alignment.

Ep #312: Coaching Up

Have this little conversation with yourself. How is this impacting me in the end? You've got to go through the motions of answering the questions and getting to the place of like this feels, my body goes into fight or flight thinking about this. I feel misaligned because it feels a little threatening to have to go back and tell people to do more when I already think they're doing too much. Or I already think they're carrying a heavy load, or that there's a lot on their plate.

Or oh, I don't want to have that letter sent out when I didn't write it. The district wrote a letter, and they signed my name to the letter. Those aren't my words. That's not how I would word this. But they're asking me to send this letter out to all of the parents with their words with my signature. That doesn't feel in alignment to me, right? I'm trying to think of examples that I've had in my own life.

But what you want to do before you coach up is coach you. You want to ask yourself what's going on for me? Why am I being triggered? What's the why behind the why? What's the problem behind the problem? How does it circle down and spiral down to you? How is the impact happening to you? What is the impact of these words and these decisions and these actions, okay?

Then once you figure that out, you want to ask yourself like why do I think they're deciding this? What is going on for them that they're making this decision in this way? Your brain's probably going to be like well, they don't want to do the work. They don't want to take responsibility. They just want to put one more thing on our plate. It kind of like goes into this poor me stage, at least my brain does at first. They're not thinking about it from my perspective.

That's a fair statement for your brain to offer you. Maybe they're not thinking about it from your perspective, and maybe the best next thing you can do is to provide that insight or perspective. So this is what coaching up

Ep #312: Coaching Up

looks like. Once you clarify for yourself how it feels for you and why you're in resistance and you clean that up and you say oh, part of this is I just don't feel comfortable doing that, even though I believe it's the right thing. Or you might think like oh, I just never thought of this before. This would be a great thing to do. I just didn't even think about it. It wasn't my idea. I was in resistance because it wasn't my idea. But the truth is, I'm on board.

Or it might be no, I'm actually not on board. I've cleaned this up. There's something we're missing here. I need more information, or I need to understand the why behind all of this, or I need to understand what outcome they want. I don't see it. I don't have the clarity on my own. I need more information to try and get on board, to try and get aligned. I need to look for the alignment. But I don't currently have the information or the understanding to help me get in alignment with this, okay.

Once you do that, your STEAR cycle will shift. So it's initially you're thinking like the feeling is resistance, frustration, disappointment, disempowered because you're having thoughts about they should do it differently. This isn't working. They're not hearing us. They're not looking at it from my perspective. They're not treating the situation like I would.

But at the same time, there's nothing I can do. We go into fight, flight, or freeze. We kind of shut down. We avoid the situation. We don't say anything. We stew about it. We vent about it to our colleagues. We talk about it behind their back, but we reluctantly do it.

But the result of that is that there is an external conflict. Like you either speak up and start a conflict, or you have an internal conflict with yourself. Either way, there's a lack of alignment. So you prove the thought true. This doesn't feel aligned, and the result of that is a lack of alignment.

So you might go do the motions out of compliance, but not out of alignment okay. Versus when you self-coach, or you're a member of EPC, and you

Ep #312: Coaching Up

bring it to us in EPC. We talk about it, and we get you coached. Sometimes it's too hard to coach your own brain. You need a clean set of eyes, a real clear neutral party looking at your situation to help you create perspective and clarity. That's what EPC is for.

But once you can do that, then you can shift into a new STEAR cycle, a new energy, a new wave, a new approach. So it's not to say that the goal is to always agree with district leadership, district decisions, district actions. There will be times they make decisions that authentically and genuinely do not align with who you are, what you value, or what you believe in, or what you think should be done. Or they simply did omit a perspective or some insight or information that might change their decision if they had it.

So when we feel the resistance, we use it to validate it. Why is this resistance valid? What is coming up that's valid about this resistance? Am I just being immature and not wanting to do something I need to do? Or is there a reason I'm being resistant? Is there something we're missing here?

So the thoughts shift into I wonder why they're choosing this approach? I have some questions. I need more information. There actually is something I can do. I can ask questions. I'm willing to ask the questions so that I better understand the ways in which we are aligned, or to share the reasons why this feels out of alignment.

The energy that you bring to the table shifts into curiosity and empowerment and openness and courage and alignment. I'm seeking alignment. Help me understand. Help me see the alignment here. The actions you end up taking is that you're going to ask questions, not from a place of defensiveness or resistance or reluctance or frustration, but out of curiosity. To seek clarification with openness.

Ep #312: Coaching Up

Maybe there's information you are missing that would help you get on board and be like oh, I get it now. Thanks. That helped me see why we're doing what we're doing or why I need to do what I need to do.

You allow the questions that you ask, this is how you coach up. You don't tell your superiors what to do. You ask them questions that ignite awareness and ignite their curiosity and add information to their understanding from your perspective. You offer information and you ask a lot of questions to ignite some conversation or insight or awareness to help them see like oh, we were up here at district office thinking this. We didn't take this part into consideration. Thanks for sharing it.

Or they might say we hear you. We appreciate your input, but we still need you to do this. They still might do that, but you don't know unless you offer. Just maybe, maybe when you coach up, it will give them insights that they are grateful for and that they appreciate you speaking up. Because when you ask questions to seek to understand but also you're asking the question to create awareness, it has a dual role.

What you're actually creating, the result you create, is that you drop the conflict. You're not going into battle with them. You're not questioning them. You're not backing them into a corner and pushing them against the wall. You're just asking for your own benefit to understand.

But it also plants the seeds of awareness for them to consider, for them to think about. They might not take your questions as seeds, or they might not water those seeds or nurture them, but you've planted them. What it does is it helps you drop the us/them mentality, and it creates a reconnection of alignment with yourself. You realign back to yourself and your values when you are willing to ask the questions and have the courage to ask them and add information in.

Ep #312: Coaching Up

Even if the result of that is still you need to do this. Okay well, at least you've had the opportunity to be heard and seen. Versus being afraid to or being frustrated and just not speaking up at all and then being mad about it. Then feeling like they never listen. They don't care. You have to offer it to them.

That's what coaching up looks like. It's very gentle. It's very unassuming. You're not judging or criticizing or coming at them sideways. You're asking questions with genuine curiosity to help ignite awareness and to validate your own values and emotions and to help try to get everybody back on the same alignment to the best of your ability by creating awareness. That's what coaching up looks like.

So if you want to learn how to coach up and you want to have coaching as a part of your life, we are up leveling our game in EPC. I'm bringing a new wave, a new energy, a new approach, some new teaching. I feel an entirely new definition of school leadership coming our way.

In the January cohort of *The Empowered Principal® Collaborative*, we are going to redefine the experience of school leadership. We're not going to buy into the past, which is overworking, overexerting, overscheduling, overdelivering to the point of exhaustion, the point of overwhelm, frustration, and spinning out in lack of progress. We're going to do this in a very different way, a very different approach with very different energy. I hope that you join us in EPC. Doors are open. I can't wait to meet you. Let's go.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit [Angela Kelly coaching.com](http://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.