

Ep #321: Clear Intentional Decisions



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 321.

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 principals. How are you today? I'm so well. Thank you so much. I am happy to see the sun shining today. We have had weeks of rain here in California. Today is the first day we've had a beautiful clear sky. After this podcast recording, I'm going to go out on a beautiful walk in the sun and soak up all the vitamin D. So I'm thrilled to be here with you, and I can't wait to go on my walk.

I want to talk to you today. Talk with you, not at you. I want to talk with you about the thought that most of you carry around with you all day long as a school leader. I was coaching a client. She has this, I call it a power thought because it is a really strong thought that you hold very tight on to. You believe it. It shows up over and over again in different capacities. Sometimes it's wearing a mask. It sometimes shows up in different flavors or in different scenarios or it comes up in different ways.

But a power thought is a thought that drives your actions and decisions in sneaky little ways. It really is driving the way that you show up, the way you approach school leadership, the way you approach life. So let's talk about it. The power thought that my client has is that she wants to make the right decision.

Now, what does that mean? It means something different to everybody. So it's very important that if you have the thought I really want to make the right decision. If you find yourself spinning in indecision or spinning in

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procrastination or fretting, worrying about whether or not you're making the right decision, listen up, hold tight. This is for you.

First of all, you have to ask yourself what does that sentence mean? When you say to yourself I just want to make the right decision, I want to know that I'm making the right decision. What does that mean to you? You need to answer this question for yourself. It will look a little different for everybody, but this is what it looks like for my client.

She said, "I want to know that I did the right thing, made the right decision with the information I had." That's fair, right? We all want to do our best with the information that we have. "I want to feel good about it. Because when I make the right decision then I feel good." I find that interesting. Because the way I think about decisions is I think about the choices I have available to me, and I choose the one that feels right versus deciding and then hoping I will feel good after the fact.

So I use my emotions to guide my decisions versus making a decision in the hopes I will feel something good after the fact. So just notice that. If you're chasing an emotion and you want to feel good about that decision, what does that mean? You want to keep digging down.

When I asked her about that, she's like well, I want others to feel good about it too. Ah, here we go. Right? In the end, I want to know it was a good decision. The way that I know it was a good decision is how other people feel. Basically she said, "No one's disappointed. No one's angry." She goes, "I know the decision is good when fewer people are upset than happy." So she's deciding whether her decision was a good decision or not based on other people's emotional reaction to the decision.

She said she gets caught up in being disappointed herself, or the bigger fear for her was feeling like she's disappointing others or letting people down. What she makes that mean, if people feel disappointed in her

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decision, she's making that mean that she wasn't responsible, and that it was a wrong decision.

Just notice how the brain comes up with all of these stories and perceptions and kind of summaries of what a decision means. A right decision, a wrong decision, a good one, a bad one, one that feels good, one that doesn't feel good one, that people react to, one that people don't react to. Our brain comes up with all of these meanings around a decision that we make.

I want to ask you something, what will happen, what do you believe will happen, if you make a wrong decision? Are you worried that people will be disappointed? Are you worried they will be angry with you? Are you worried they will give you feedback? Are you worried that you will feel bad if you make a wrong decision? Are you worried that you'll be blamed and held accountable? Are you worried that you're going to have to fix it or change it or make it better?

I want you to really think about what is the fear that spins in your mind when you think about making a wrong decision. Because this fear is what's locking you down, preventing you from being confident in making decisions. Because you're thinking there is a right answer. Here's what is so fascinating.

We hold ourselves in indecision for extensive periods of time because we want to make the right decision. Our fear of making the wrong decision delays or prevents us altogether from making any decision at all. What's uncomfortable is the indecision. When you have a decision to make and you're like okay, what information do I need to make this decision? Let me get that information, and let me make the decision.

I believe that I'm going to get the information I need, make the best decision I can, and I'm going to be confident in that decision. I'm going to

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move on. That process doesn't take time. It doesn't take a ton of research. It doesn't take weeks of gathering input of other people's opinions, unless you're making a group decision, of course.

But like for you, as the principal or the site leader or the district leader, if you have a decision to make, the most painful part of it is the indecision. Is the I don't know what to do. Well, what do you need in order to know what to do? What information do you need in order to make the decision? That's all. Get the information you need, make the decision, and move on. But why don't we do that? Why do we fear it so much?

Let's dissect this train of thought because I've done it myself. I see so many times where we stall in indecision, and we hover in indecision, and the indecision is the painful component. Because once you've made a decision, yes, I'm going to do this, no, I'm not going to do this, and you're solid in that decision, no more pain. It's done. You've cut off the choice.

Here's what I find really fascinating about this is that when we believe we want to make the right decision, we need to make the right decision. The right decision means there's one right choice. I have one chance to nail this. If I get it right, I win. If I get it wrong, I lose. There's pain involved with a wrong decision. There's happiness and success and joy in the right decision. It's very all or none thinking.

How this plays out is every time a decision presents itself to you and your thought is I just want to make the right decision. If I make the right decision, I win. If I make the wrong decision, I lose. There's going to be pain involved if I lose, happiness, if I win. I get one shot at this. You're going to be anxious and doubtful and question yourself. You're going to be very stressed. You're going to feel conflicted. You're going to pro and con the heck out of yourself.

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So when you're doubting, you're feeling anxious, you're not sure you're going to make the right decision, and you've got one shot to get it right. If you don't get it right, bad, terrible things will happen, painful things will happen to you. You are locked down in the fear of the pain and the fear of what might happen if it is a wrong decision.

You're, of course, going to procrastinate. You're going to put that decision off. Or you're going to spend an extreme amount of time and energy and effort and focus and attention like trying to make this decision, pro and con list. You're going to worry and fret about it. You're going to research, trying to gather that one extra piece of information that's going to tip you into the I am confident in making this decision energy.

The other thing I see people do is asking for endless streams of input. What do you think's the best book I should read? What's the best way to roll out SEL? What's the best way to do MTSS or PLC? What do you guys think of this? How should I this? What's your master schedule? There's nothing wrong with asking for input, but I want you to know the more input you ask for and the more opinions that you collect, the more you have to sort through in making a decision. It actually makes it harder.

The result, unfortunately, of extensive research, extensive seeking out other people's opinions, extensive pros and cons, extensive back and forth, and all this internal conflict is that no matter what decision you make, you are never sure it's the right one. You wait for others to confirm for you if it was the right one based on their opinion and how they feel and their reaction to the decision. You never trust yourself. You never trust the decision.

Then decision making becomes extremely painful and very drawn out because you're like I don't want to have to do that again. I don't want to have to make another decision that could be wrong. I don't like the decision

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making process. It's so painful because I drag it out. Then even after the decision, I'm still in pain because I don't trust I made the right one.

Indecision is what feels terrible. The act of deciding is actually what's empowering. When you are standing in your empowerment and you're feeling it in your bones. You're like okay, I have a decision to make. Tell me the information I need. I'm going to give it a time limit. Collect the information, I'm going to make this decision as soon as I can.

Why would I want to make a decision as soon as I can? Because the decision allows other people to then go do their thing. You tend to be the bottleneck. When you stay in indecision and you procrastinate, you delay, you're stopping everybody else from the flow of work. The act of deciding, you just make the decision and you decide and move on, that's empowerment. Then you're free of the decision for the rest of the day.

You make the decision. Like okay, I've got these three decisions to make. I'm going to collect the information I need. I'm going to make the decision. I'm going to communicate that decision. I'm going to trust that I made the best decision I could with the information I had at the time. I know, at the end of the day, the worst thing that can happen is that the outcomes I had planned on didn't quite work, and I need to adjust or revise my decision. That's the worst thing that can happen.

But our brain makes it like there's some life or death consequence at the end of the road here if we make the wrong decision. For most decisions we make in our life, that's not the case. Unless you're deciding like do I follow the road, or do I go straight and go down the cliff? Right? Which in that case, the decision is extremely clear. You get a very clear yes, this is the right path. Please don't do that. No, thank you. You know the decision you need to make. It's a matter of trusting the decision.

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Here's what I've come to notice with my clients. Believing that you have to make the right decision implies that there is one right answer, as I said, but that you only have one shot at getting it right. I want you to question that thought. Is it true that there is only one right answer in this moment? Maybe there's one right answer for this moment, but maybe tomorrow there's another right answer. You don't have to worry about tomorrow's answer and decision. You only have to worry about today.

In this moment with this amount of information, what feels most aligned for me? What feels most true for me? Could it be possible there are other amazing answers? What if any decision I made was the right answer? Question the thought: is it true that there's only one right answer? Is it true that you only get one shot to get it right? Especially in school leadership. Is it true that you get one chance to make a decision, you have to stick with that decision for the rest of your life. You never get to change it or improvise or improve it. Put those questions to the test.

Let me put those questions to the test. I'm thinking of people who maybe only have one shot. So like people in the Olympics, they work their tails off their entire young lives to be as fit as possible to achieve whatever goal they have, which is to win the gold at the Olympics, right?

So for an Olympian, they're going to say to me, "Yeah, actually, there is only one right answer. The only right answer I want." Notice that it's a want. It's not word of law. But what they want, what they desire, the one answer they really want is gold. They want to win gold. So yes. To them, it's like, "I only have one answer. It's gold." Okay, they're going for gold.

When you ask them is it true you're only going to get one shot at gold? It might be true. They might only get one chance. If you think of Michael Phelps, definitely got more than one chance to win gold. I'm sure the guy also won silvers and bronzes, and he probably didn't win everything. But is it true? Is it absolutely true? Is that the only truth? It might be possible that

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you get one shot, but most of the time for most of us leading our schools, we get more than one shot to get it right.

So you can relax knowing even if I make the decision in this moment that I think is best right now, and I get more information in the future that alters that, I get another shot. Think of it that way. You'll feel more relaxed knowing I'm going to make the best decision I can now so I can be free of that decision. I can move forward giving it all of my intention and knowing that the decision does matter. Of course.

It's not that you're not putting any weight into it. But it's what's the best decision I can make right now, trust that decision. Don't doubt it until there's a reason. You don't need to even doubt it. You just need to trust it. Then if more information comes say, oh I couldn't have known this when I made that decision back then. Now that I know this, we can adjust moving forward.

So back to the Olympian. If they want to win gold, and they only get one chance to win then here's what happens. If they win, they win. Good for them. We celebrate them. They celebrate them. They're proud of themselves. If they don't win and they go home with silver, is it life over for them? Or if they got bronze, is life over for them?

They might be disappointed. It might feel very painful, that disappointment, but they continue to live their lives. They're proud of the journey that they went on to create that silver or bronze medal, or even the honor of being in the Olympics.

See? it depends on what you make things mean. If you win gold, and you went for gold, and you got gold, that's incredible. It's extraordinary, very few people get to win gold medals in the Olympics. Yes, if that was your goal, and you nailed it, great. But think of all the people who got silvers, who got bronzes, or who just were thrilled to even be present in the Olympics.

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You can be grateful for being present. You can be grateful to have been a spectator. Not everybody ever gets to be a spectator of the Olympics. You can be excited to be a spectator. You can be excited to be a coach, a team member of the Olympics. You can be excited to just participate. You can be excited to get bronze, silver, or gold. It's what you make it mean.

So even when the stakes feel that high, as you get one shot, and you have to make the right decision. Even in that case, it's still not life or death. Those Olympians go on to live amazing lives for the rest of their lives. That one decision that they made in that moment, whether it made them gold or didn't make them gold, doesn't need to define them for the rest of their lives. They get to feel proud of their effort and their journey into the Olympics and the Olympic experience.

I also want to point out that wanting to be right and feeling that urge and need to be right and make the right decision, it also implies, this is something your brain does really sneaky. It implies that you don't make the right decisions. I need to make the right decision is being fueled by the thought but you don't make right decisions. Or it's possible you can make a wrong decision. Did you ever think about that? Let me doubt you. Let me question you. Let me poke you. Your brain is so mean, right? My brain is that mean too.

But look at it this way. If you knew you were making the right decision, if you trusted that your decision was the right decision in that moment, you would make that decision with much more confidence and then your brain would get to work collecting evidence that it actually is the right decision.

If you believe that you're making the wrong one, your brain goes to work looking for all the reasons that it's the wrong decision. I doubt this decision. I'm not sure if it's the right one. Okay, let me show you all the reasons why you should doubt it. I think it's the wrong decision. Yep, it is the wrong decision. I'm going to show you how it's the wrong one.

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It's the right decision. Oh, okay. I guess my job is to go notice how it's right. There is no right decision. There's only the decision you decide to make right. You pick it and stick it.

That's what I told my kid growing up. I said Alex, you've just got to pick it and stick it. There's no bad decision here. There's nothing wrong that's going to come out. There's no harm, no foul. Even if you did do something and you chose something. Let's say you go break the law. There's a consequence of that, and you very much dislike the consequences of your decision to break the law. You're going to get through it. It won't be pleasant, but you'll get through it. So pick it and stick it, right? Make a decision.

For most of the time I was talking to him about what do you want to eat for dinner? Like what do you want off the menu? Pick it and stick it. Do you want to go to this boy scout event or not? Pick it and stick it. Are you going to go hang out with your friends? Pick it and stick it. Because my child was very like fretting, worrying, anxious, poor guy.

So we just had a phrase in our house. It was like let's just pick it and stick it. You know what? If you change your mind, you change your mind. If I can accommodate that change in your decision, I will. If I can't, I won't. Right? If he didn't want to go to his friends and he was just like I just want to stay home. Later on he's like, "You know I want to go play." I'm like okay. If I can accommodate your change, I'll make it happen. No problem, because I wanted him to trust his decisions. I wanted him to know he had agency to make decisions and change his mind and have it be okay.

Other times if he changed his mind, and it wasn't okay, he was still okay. Because the original decision of staying home, there's no harm, no foul. You're okay. You might be disappointed, because now you want to go see your friends, and I don't have maybe the car or the time to take you. But you'll be okay.

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The worst thing that happens is he feels a little bit of disappointment. Then he learns he can handle that. I can handle disappointment. If I didn't really want this, and I said I did but I didn't. I'll learn to handle it. Then I'll know better next time what decision I want to make.

I mean, imagine if you went out for dinner. Every time you went out for dinner, you decided that whatever choice you made was the best choice. It's exactly what you wanted. It's the perfect thing. You were craving it. It's going to be so good. You go out for dinner, and everything on the menu looks delicious. You're like, "Oh, I can't decide what I want. It all sounds so delicious." But you know whatever you decide is going to be the exact thing you were meant to have, you enjoy that meal to the fullest.

Or are you the person that when you go out to eat, you're like, "Hm, everything looks so delicious. I can't decide. I'm afraid I'm going to make the wrong decision." You order the pasta. Then as soon as you get the order taken and the waitress comes and takes your order, and then you're like, "Oh, I should have got the steak." Then you're looking at the menu over and over again. Like, "I still, oh I should have got the steak." Then you get the pasta, and you're like meh.

You've already decided the pasta is not going to be as delicious as the steak. Then you don't get to enjoy it. It's not as satisfying because you're wondering and thinking about was another decision better. It's the whole grass is greener on the other side of the fence thing. You can live your life thinking there's another better decision, and that yours is wrong. This is right or that should have been this or that should have been that.

But if you think about it, even if the worst case, let's say you ordered the pasta. You're like this is going to be the best pasta ever. Then it comes out, and it's absolutely terrible. It's undercooked, or the sauce is weird. The chicken's chewy. You're like ugh.

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If it's that bad, just the you know what? I thought this was going to be amazing. I wanted it to be amazing. But I'm not having an amazing experience with this pasta. Might I order the steak? They're going to say sure. I'm going to take it back. I'm going to bring you a steak. Or the pasta is fine. You eat the pasta. There's nothing really wrong with it, but the next time I'm really going to get the steak. It just informs you.

So notice how you make decisions. Do you make decisions with intention? Do you make them clearly based on what you value? What feels good at the time? Do you make these decisions based on confidence? Or are you in chronic anxiety, worry, doubt because you're thinking about what other people might feel and other people might think, and who's going to react and how that's going to make you feel and all the things that you're going to have to do.

Then people are going to think you're not a very good decision maker. When, let's be honest, you're not really that good of a decision maker anyway. Chatter, chatter, chatter. Your brain goes on and on. I want you to focus on the decisions in your life that you really feel you nailed. Things you do feel 100% proud of and confident in.

Maybe it's your partner. I so picked the right person for me. We click. It's the right person. I know it. I feel it. There's no person, other person for me. This is my person. Maybe it's about having kids or not having kids. I feel solid in not having kids, or I feel really grateful that I had kids. I'm grateful I didn't. I'm grateful I did.

Getting a pet or not getting a pet. Your career choice. Now some of you might question it on some days, but are you proud that you're an educator? Are you proud to be a school leader? Most days. If you're a school leader listening to this and you're miserable, and you don't want to be a school leader, I give you full permission to live the rest of your life doing something you love.

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But I'm assuming if you're here, you love what you do. You want to be empowered, and you want to live the best life as a school leader as possible because that's what this podcast is about. So do you love your career? Are you satisfied? Do you love your home?

Do you love the car you drive? I love my car so much. I've named her. She's my girl. We go everywhere together. She's on all my adventures. I love my car. If I had to buy any car on the planet, I'd still buy her. That's how I feel about my car. I love her, and I will probably buy another version of her when it's time.

Or little things. Maybe the big stuff in life might feel a little stressed out right now. Maybe marriage is a little rocky, or you're in a tough chapter with your kids. Maybe you're worried about your career or your home. You're in process of moving, whatever. Maybe there's a lot of flux, but look for little things. Do you love your nail color? Do you love the clothes you wear? You're so excited about the perfume you wear. Do you love your toothbrush? I don't know. I'm just thinking of things. There's something in your life that you are solid on in your decisions.

You have to look at all the decisions you made that have been successful and where you made them with confidence, maybe where you went to school or graduate school. The school district you've selected. There is something in your life where you have confidently made a decision. Focus on that. You want to focus on how you don't waver versus how you do.

Because what is the difference between decisions you feel confident about and those you do not feel confident about? It's that you love the decision. You feel the love of the decision. You feel alignment with that decision in advance. It feels good to make that choice. You're going with that choice. From that good vibe energy, that emotional like lock in alignment where you're like this feels like the right decision. I'm going with it.

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When you feel good, and you love your decision, then the decision feels confident. You feel certain in it, grounded in it, aligned to it. You made that decision with intentionality based on your values and what you desire. Then you get to feel good before you make the decision, when you make the decision, and after you make the decision. Because how you feel is the indicator that it was the right decision.

Hey, I'm also going to add this in. There are decisions that feel aligned. They feel right, but they aren't comfortable. Right? When you had to put hundreds of thousands of dollars down or however many thousands of dollars down on your down payment for your house. You're like this is the right house. I feel it. I want this house, and I'm scared to death to spend this level of money and to have a mortgage for the first time. It's not to say it always feels easy, or it feels light and joyful. But it feels aligned. It feels right inside of your body, not externally.

When you love the decision I love this house. I was scared to make this downpayment, but I did it because I know this was the house for us. You love the decision, even though there is a component of like anxiety, doubt, fear about the future. Do you see the difference? You can love your decision and make it from alignment and make it with clear, clean intentions and feel good about it even though there is discomfort involved.

I coach people on this all the time. People who want to sign up for EPC or they want to sign up for one-on-one coaching, they will come to me and say, "Should I sign up for one on one, or should I sign up for EPC?" I walk them through a series of questions to help them make the decision. It doesn't matter to me if you sign up for one on one or if you sign up for EPC. What matters to me is that you make the decision aligned to what you want.

For most people, what they'll do is they'll get weirded out about the money. They'll be like oh, I want the one on one, but that's more expensive. I'm like

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of course it is. Of course it's more expensive. It's a customized personalized experience. It's for a longer period of time than EPC. So yes, it is more expensive. But if it's what you want, the discomfort of saying yes to that investment because it's what you want, and it feels aligned for you. It has to come from alignment.

Look, I'm not going to be offering one on one forever. So for people who want one on one, they can jump in now, right? Eventually, it's only going to be EPC as the choice. I have some other cool things coming down the pipe. You guys, I'm so excited but I can't tell you just yet.

So my point is that you will have decisions that feel right and feel aligned, but sometimes you get the little butterflies. That is different than the indicators that this is not the right decision. Don't go down the dark alley. Don't hire this person. You get those vibes that's like this is not feeling like the right decision. That vibration of no is a different sensation than yes, this is yes. I want this. Thank you. I'm so excited. Yes. I'm excited. I'm nervous. I'm eager.

Do you realize that when you're scared, in a good way, like excited feels a little bit the same as scared in the body? When you're excited and eager in anticipation and you're really ramped up, that can feel similar in the body to like fear, like getting on a roller coaster and being deathly afraid. The body kind of has that adrenaline rush when you're excited and when you're afraid because they go together sometimes. You have to decipher for yourself is this excitement adrenaline or is this no, I'm going to die, this is a bad decision adrenaline?

So the bottom line is this. Here's the summary. The summary is there is no right decision, and there's no wrong decision. Even if there were, let's just play. Even if there were, you can always change your decision. If you do make a wrong decision, you can always adjust, fix, improve, repair, whatever it is you need to do.

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What I want for you, as empowered principals, is I want you to love your decision. I want you to give your decision a time and a duration. A lot of people will say to me I want to go and think about it. Here's what happens to your brain. The longer you think about it, the harder the decision feels because decisions don't take time.

They take alignment. When you just decide to be aligned, you decide this is the right decision. For me, this is what I want. This is what I'm going for. This is why I want it. I want these outcomes. I believe this is the right decision to get closer to those outcomes.

When you make decisions from alignment, it creates clarity. The more clarity you can create, the more confidence you create. When you're clear as to why you're making the decision and it's aligned to your values then you feel confident in it. Then you begin to trust yourself. Now you've established a relationship with yourself in regards to decision making.

That is the goal. Trusting yourself, believing in the right decision, believing that whatever decision you make is the right one, and knowing that no matter what you can handle any decision you make and any outcome that that decision creates, and you can always adjust at any time. So with that, my friends, go out make clear, intentional decisions. Be well. I will talk to you all next week. Take great care. Bye, bye.

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