

Ep #328: Legal Issues



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

Ep #328: Legal Issues

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 328.

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. Happy Tuesday. If you're new, welcome to the podcast. We're so happy you are here. My podcast is gaining ground. I'm so excited. It's gaining momentum. Y'all are loving it. If you love this and you have never written a review before, could you please go in and put a five star review in so that more educators can find this podcast?

You guys we're over here talking about things that you don't talk about in prep classes for your admin credential. These aren't things that they talk about. We talk about the real deal. We talk about how it feels to be a principal. We talk about how we want to experience school leadership, and we talk about what really matters the most, navigating the mental and emotional demands of this job. That's what we're here doing.

So speaking of mental and emotional demands, I'm going to do a very quick podcast talking to you today about when you're facing legal issues. I'm jumping on because I've had several clients in the last few months in situations at school that have required them to bring in legal support, legal assistance. So there have been legal issues.

So I'm going to say this outright. I am a certified life and leadership coach. I am not a lawyer. I help site and district leaders build the skills that they need to lead their schools and to navigate the mental and emotional management that you all due in the work. I'm not a lawyer. I'm not here giving legal advice.

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I'm simply going to talk about the experience of facing legal issues as a school leader, how it feels when you're in the middle of something that involves legal issues. Okay.

So as I said, a lot of my clients have been dealing with this. It could look differently depending on what you're dealing with. So it could be an HR issue. Maybe you're dealing with a teacher or a staff member. It might be a parent issue. Maybe a parent brings in an attorney or an advocate of some kind. It could be related to special education law and issues in IEP meetings as it relates to make sure the school is following the law and the district's giving people the resources that they need, but also within the confines of the law.

So I have to share with you a funny story. When I was a principal, we were in an IEP meeting, and the parent was asking the district to fund to pay for an animal support for their child, like an emotional animal support for their child. What they were asking for was not a dog or a cat or a little bunny or something. It was a pony. They were asking the district to pay for an emotional support animal in the form of a pony, a horse.

So, of course, we sought out legal counsel for that because it wasn't going to work in terms of putting it on an IEP for academic purposes. So as you can imagine, there are some wild things that come up in your school system.

The other thing that might come up are student issues, student behavior issues. I have another client who was dealing with some legal situation regarding student issues. So you might have a parent issue, you might have a student issue. It might be HR related with employees of some kind, or it might be special education laws that you have to deal with. So there are many ways in which legal situations can come up in a school leadership position.

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So what's going to happen that I've noticed is the first time that something comes to the surface that requires legal consult, it feels so scary. I remember myself the first time that something came up where there was legal conversation and actual legal experts got involved, I felt so afraid. So I want you to know this. First of all, it's normal. It's normal to feel afraid. It's normal to feel scared.

What I've noticed with my clients is that whenever something legal comes up, right away there's this huge fear that we've done something wrong. We're going to get in trouble. We missed something. We didn't do something we were supposed to do. We broke the law. We're going to be punished. We're going to be reprimanded somehow. I also think just the fear of the formality of legal issues can scare us off.

Look, most school leaders that I know are really good citizens. They are law abiding people who don't want to break the law, don't intend to break the law, don't want to be in trouble. We don't want to cause issue. We want to make sure we're following the law, we're following the rules, and that we're doing our job to the best of our capacity.

When we get into legal issues, it starts to feel very scary, and it feels like unfamiliar territory, right? So when it comes up, and most likely it will, most school leaders do have to face some kind of at least legal conversation, whether it's around a special education issue or around a student or parent issue, or maybe it's an HR issue, it is part of the business that we do. It's part of the work that we do.

So when you're new to school leadership or if you've been less than five years, you may not have had this experience, but eventually it does come up. It's normal to feel the fear. The fear is simply coming from your brain's desire to protect you and keep you safe. When something comes up that involves the law, it feels very scary.

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It is. It feels very true. It feels very real. It's hard to shake it. It consumes you, especially if somebody is coming at you directly. If they're accusing you of having misinterpreted the law or not followed the law or not followed some kind of policies or not followed Special Education procedures. When they said you specifically, you feel very threatened, very attacked, and the brain is going to go into fight or flight for sure. It's normal. It's okay. So I first want to let you know that you're going to feel the fear. That's normal. Don't worry about it. Okay.

But I want to offer this. With most of the clients that I've been working with, when they get on the phone with me, because our calls by the way just for those of you who haven't coached yet or haven't ever had a life coach, we just jump on the phone.

So we have 30 minute calls. We jump on the phone. When they get on the phone, they're like, and they're telling me all of their fears. Their brain's going 100 miles an hour. So I let them get it all out. Tell me all the things, all the fears, how are you feeling? What's coming up for you? What is your brain offering you? They'll share all of that.

What I have found to be true is that some of the things, like 80 or 90% of the things that your brain is offering you, they're not actually rational once you break it down. So I let the fear speak. I let it get all out of their system. Then we're like okay, let's go back and break these thoughts down. Let's see if they're rational.

What's the probability? What's the possibility that this could actually go down this way? What would you do if it did? If it was a worst case scenario, how would you handle it? What if it's a better case than you can imagine? We go both sides, and we look at all of the angles. Where do you think it will actually land? We try to get into the land of and, the middle ground, where is it going to land? What do you really think could happen here?

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Okay, so just notice if your brain is freaking out. First of all, please call me and I will support you, or join EPC, we'll support you there. But if you want a private confidential conversation, you can just schedule a free consult with me. The only investment is time and a little bit of energy. We'll talk on the phone. If you want my continued support, we'll look at coaching packages that work for you.

Or you can join The Empowered Principal® Collaborative and we'll help you and support you as a group. Because I promise you everybody that's in The Empowered Principal® Collaborative, or EPC as I call it, everyone in EPC has been through something similar. They can be support.

It's a mastermind where we get together and we talk about the experiences that we've each had, and we laugh over it, we cry over it, we support each other. It's a really empowered and loving and supportive community and space to be in. So I invite you in especially if you're going through something like this.

So first of all, the fear is normal. So if you think I shouldn't be so afraid, of course it's your good person brain just not wanting to be in trouble or being afraid you miss stepped or did something wrong. Second of all, what I want to tell you is that you are not alone in this.

I have a client who had an issue. I don't want to be too specific, but it was an issue where they had pretty strong suspicion certain that they knew the person involved who was acting in a way that might have been considered misconduct, but there was no substantial evidence. The principal that I was working with felt very heavy, very serious, really, really upset about what decision to make and what action to take.

First of all, I said look, we have to see the levity in this. Now, this wasn't something super egregious. Yeah, it was something I would consider misconduct if it were to be substantially proven. But it was also a little bit on the funny side. So, as the coach, I'm always going to bring the levity in the

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humor to this job because his job is crazy wild. So I got my client laughing about it.

But also, he was very, very nervous about what to do. Two things. His fear was weighing on him, but the second thing was, he felt like this burden of making this big decision. Here's what I said. You are not alone. When you are facing a situation that involves legality and legal issue comes up, there are legal experts in your district that can help you. You don't make decisions about legal issues on your own as a site principal or even as a district principal. That is why districts have lawyers.

So when you are faced, if somebody comes in with a lawyer, or they're threatening a lawyer, or they're threatening some kind of legal action or lawsuit, you go to your district. You let your superiors know, whoever your direct person is, they'll get to the top. If you need to get to the superintendent or assistant sup, if you need to get to the lawyers, they are going to help you.

There will never be a legal decision that you completely make by yourself. You will do it as a team decision. You will be guided, you will be conferred, you will be consulted. Now, look, you might get a legal consult. Then they'll say ultimately, here are your options, and you can pick from the options. But if a lawyer is telling you those options, what they're saying is I'm giving you permission to pick these because they're all legal. They all work. They're all within the confines of what you have permission and the right to do.

So please be assured when legal issues arise and your emotions are going off the chain and your nervous system is dysregulated, it's okay. You can take a couple of deep breaths. You can come on into coaching. You can get private coaching one on one or you can get EPC, but you also go to your district, and you ask for support.

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This is not a time to feel like I don't want them to see that I don't know or understand, or I need to fake it until I make it, or I need to handle this on my own. Legal issues are not the time to exhibit your principal insight or your principal wisdom. You want to ask for help on this one, okay.

Now, if for some reason, you did something or missed something or forgot something, maybe you missed a deadline or you misstep or you misspoke or you miscommunicated, I want you to tell yourself this. I acted in good faith. I did the best I could with what I knew at the time. I wasn't intentionally trying to misstep.

You're a human. We forget that. School leaders are human beings with human brains, human emotions, and human flaws. We're imperfect. We will misstep. We will misspeak. We'll make mistakes. It's a part of being human on the planet. You guys know this.

But when it happens to us, we freak out, myself included, because we want to get it right. We want to do it right, be right. We don't want to mess up. We certainly don't want to break the law. But know this, you've acted in good faith. You're never alone. This is the time to ask for help. If you do need support, your district experts will be called in to support you, to counsel you, to guide you through the process. Okay, my friends?

Again, if you want support, you know where to find me. I'm right here waiting for you, to catch you, to support you. I'm the safety net. I'm your advocate. I just love on you. I'm your admirer. I'm here to care for you. I'm here to care for you mentally and emotionally. This job's really hard.

Legal issues can really cause us to lose sleep, for our stress to go up. It can consume us where we can't get other things done in the job. I know. I've been there both personally and professionally. It's really hard. I'm just letting you know that, but we're here for you. You're not alone. Have an amazing week. We'll talk to you next week. Take great care of yourself. See you later, bye.

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Hey 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 likeminded 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.

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.