

## Ep #334: How to Turn Meetings into Actionable Outcomes



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 334.

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.

Hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. It's May. I hope spring fever is not kicking your buns. I hope it's lifting you up. You are near the finish line, my friends. You're getting close. Hopefully the weather is beautiful in your neck of the woods. You are thriving off of spring. Entering into the end of the year and the summer. It's such a fun time. I know it can be exhausting. So give yourself a little space and grace if you're running 100 miles an hour. I know you out there probably are.

I want you to just take a step back, take a deep breath, relax for one minute, and just acknowledge everything around you, the beauty of the springtime, the beauty of the joy in the students that school is near the end of the school year, summer's coming. Everyone's in that good vibe, even though you might be a little tired. Just breathe it in and relax for just a minute to take it all in.

Testing's over, hopefully for most of you by now. It's just the end of the year celebrations. Letting kids embrace the joy of school, the pleasure of their friends and their classmates and their teachers and all of the fun, open houses, end of the year recognitions, all of the fun stuff is happening now. So don't forget to see it as that. It's fun. It's light. It's beautiful out. I hope you are taking moments in to breathe in all of that.

Okay, now we're going to shift gears. I'm going to talk just a short and sweet episode about decision making in meetings. I was just coaching a client, and I wanted to jump on and do a podcast on this because I think

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this gets missed when we're planning and preparing for a meeting. A lot of you now are going through IEP meetings. You're having conversations around IEP or 504s or student success team meetings, or you're talking about retention for kids.

This came up in a conversation with a one on one client of mine. She was a little nervous because there was a conversation that was going to be around retention. We coached on this, but I said look, for every adult in that meeting room, there's going to be a different opinion. Everyone has an opinion about retention. There are people who are for it. There are people who are against it. There are different camps. There are different theories. There are different opinions about the impact of retention.

So she knew it was a charged topic. In this case, it was not an IEP meeting. But there was kind of this discussion around should it be a retention, or is this a language issue? This child is also learning a second language. Or is it developmental, like we need to look at assessment kind of a conversation you've all been in these conversations. Is this retention issue? Is it a language issue? Is it a developmental issue? Is it a cognitive issue? Do we need to assess what's going on here, right?

Here's the coaching that I gave, and here's what I want to offer to all of you. When you're in a conversation about something like this, something similar to this, or this exact topic, I want you to think in advance about what's really happening here. Okay.

Even though you know people have different opinions and different data points they're using and different theories and different ideas about what's best for this child, your job as the facilitator, or as one member of this meeting if you're not the facilitator, is to look at the common goal is to focus on where are we all on the same page. We're going to be on different pages about the how but what are we on the same page about. What

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you're on the same page about is everybody wants what's best for the child. Everybody wants this child to be successful.

Then you take that one step further. What do we want out of this particular meeting that we're in right now? When people leave that meeting and they're walking out, what is it you want to have accomplished? So I was talking this through with my client. She's like, "Well, I want everyone to be on board."

I said what you want is for them to feel good about the decision. That's what we want. It doesn't mean everyone agrees with the decision or got their way, but they are in alignment with it. They feel good about it at the end, as best as possible. That's an ideal outcome, right? That's what we want. We want to have a conversation. We want people to express their thoughts and their opinions and their theories and their data points and their feelings, get that out, and bring everybody back together. We are on the same team. We all want the same thing. We want to serve this student as best we can.

So we made that agreement, we decided what that might look like, and we came up with some language around how to get people back on track with the idea that we all want the same thing. We are on the same team. We can have different opinions, and we can have debate and discourse. But at the end of the day, we all want to walk away still feeling that we're on the same team and that this was a team decision.

Which brought us to the point of I asked this client, this principal, how are you making the decision? What is the decision making protocol that you're going to implement in this meeting? Is this a top down decision? Is it truly a consensus? There are many types of protocols. You can google search them, find different protocols for decision making.

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I used to have a list in my office. I had it pinned up on my board that went from like it's an executive top down decision completely, like one person, and down. There were like five different kinds of protocols all the way down to full consensus, right? There was like stakeholder input but executive make decisions. It was like stakeholder input then a group makes a decision. There were different layers. Look them up, find the protocols. I can probably look some up and put them in the show notes for you.

But what's important about this conversation is you want to articulate and communicate very clearly beforehand, before everybody's sitting in a meeting, you want them to understand how the decision is going to be made. If you think about this, this is the one thing that gets overlooked when we gather a meeting, we gather people together in a meeting to hold a conversation about making a decision but we haven't identified the protocol we're going to use to make that decision.

I have found that is what makes meetings blow up. It's what makes decisions get delayed or get circumvented, or they get sabotaged. Because when people don't understand what process you're using to make the decision and then a decision process is implemented that they weren't aware of, that will upset them more than the actual decision. They'll be more upset about the process that was used. Especially if you fake a process, but then you just revert back to executive decision making.

People don't like that. That's why a lot of teachers don't want to take the time to give input because they're like they've already decided at the top anyway. What doesn't matter? You've heard this I'm sure. You've probably felt that before where they ask for principal input, but the decision was already made. You know what I'm talking about?

Okay. You want to be the exceptional leader who identifies what's the process for decision making? Do I make the decision? Is this a team decision? Does somebody at the district level make this decision? Are the

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parents ultimately, do they have the ultimate voice because it is their child in this decision? What are we going with here? We need to know that ahead of time.

So if you're not sure the decision making protocols in your district, ask somebody who knows, get that information or have a discussion around it before the meeting, and then articulate that at the very beginning of the meeting. Look, we're here to ultimately do what's best for the student. Everyone's going to share their thoughts and ideas about what they think is best. We're going to share those data points. Here's the decision making protocol that we're going to use and have that ahead of time. Okay?

Because you don't want people getting sidetracked and having the conversation derailed because nobody knows how the decision is going to be made. Or they feel like their voice doesn't matter because there hasn't been a decision protocol decided or articulated or even considered ahead of time.

It's like oh, we haven't even thought about who makes this decision or how it's going to be implemented or what's going to happen. We're just all here to powwow our two cents out, right? To like I want to say what I want to say, and I want to be right. I want my way, and I want it to be this. I'm pro-retention, or I'm anti-retention, or I'm this kid needs more time with language development, or this kid needs to be assessed immediately, or this kid needs an extra year developmentally. They've had these delays in their experience.

There's so many approaches and ideas. There's no one wrong way to serve the child. The thing to keep in mind is what is the one next best step for the student and for the family? By the way, one of the questions I loved to ask my team when we were having these discussions, I would say to the team, okay. What we do know is that we want to pick the next best step for

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this child. So let's lay out all the options. Let's ask ourselves what would that approach look like for the student.

So if we were to retain a student, the idea is that if we're going to retain we have to indicate how the programming will look different and be different for that child if we retain. We don't just retain to give them exactly another year of the exact same programming and instruction. It has to look and feel different. It has to be different to qualify for retention. What does that look and feel like?

If we were to retain, what is the service we're going to provide that student? What is the instructional strategy? What's the approach? If we were to not retain and have this child go to the next grade level, what would that look like for the student? If we were to focus on language development and keep this kid in retention, what would it look like? If we were not to retain the child but focus on language development, what would that look like? What would it look like if we were to assess and retain? Or if we were not going to retain but we were going to move forward and assess?

We just lay out all of the options. We ask ourselves as a team what would it look like? What would it actually look like? What are we going to do as an approach? This is one other thing. This may be controversial, but I'm going to say it because it's my podcast. I get to say it. When people are so in a rush to assess a student my question to them was what do you think the assessment will change?

How will this benefit the child by being assessed and getting a label or not getting a label or receiving special ed services or not? What about the services would look different? What do you think will be different for the student if they are assessed? Is there anything about that that we can implement right now as a tier one or tier two strategy prior to assessment? Because we don't always need the assessment before we provide the strategy, right?

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If this kid needs additional reading instruction or they need a slower pace, can we not give that to them in some fashion in our Gen Ed classroom? Maybe yes, maybe no. It's worth exploring. I'm not saying all of the strategies that are accessible in special education are applicable to Gen Ed. I'm simply saying of the strategies we want to see for this student, is there anything available that we can try now while we're assessing or before we assess?

We just want to focus on what does the program look like for the student? What is the decision making process? What might it look like with any of the decisions we make? We want to map out what's the plan for this, for A, B, C, D, E, and look at that. Then we talk about that. We get on board. Then because we've decided how we're going to make decisions within a meeting, everybody in that meeting knows exactly who's ultimately responsible for the final decision.

So it's just something that gets overlooked because we're busy, and we're not thinking about how the decision is going to be made. We're thinking about getting these people together and just getting this decision made and getting it over with so we can move on to the next thing. But what I've noticed is that the obstacles come in not as much with holding the meeting or having the conversation. It comes up when we get to the decision making process and when we don't map out what all of the options that people have suggested, what they look like rolling out, and what that means to the child.

Once we do that, sometimes it makes it very clear the next best step for the student and then everybody can see it. You get on board with it easier. It's easier to make that decision and have people come to terms and be on board and be at peace with that decision. So try that process. Let me know how it goes for you.



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If you have any questions, join EPC, my friends. We're talking about this stuff over in EPC. We'd love to have you. Have an amazing week. Talk to you next week. Love you, take good care. Bye.

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