

Ep #340: Having Courage as a First-Year Leader with Wendy Cohen (Back to Basics)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 340.

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.

All right, my empowered leaders, this is a Back to Basic episode where we are taking one of our popular podcast episodes. This one is an interview with a client of mine who has worked with me for the last four years. This was an interview that happened in her very first year of school leadership, and the reason it is so well-loved by The Empowered Principal® audience is because it really taps into the feelings and emotions and thoughts that happen when you are a first-year principal. It's such a magical year. It's also such a pivotal year in your career when you transition from teaching into administration.

So Wendy is one of my clients. She's been with me since the beginning. She's coached with me for several years. She is an outstanding principal, and she started at the ripe age of, I believe she was 28.

She has now been in the position for four years. She is a master at her craft, and I love this episode because it inspires brand new or aspiring leaders to let you know that it is possible for you to be an empowered principal. So enjoy the show.

Angela: I am so happy to share with you the story of one of my clients. Her name is Wendy Cohen, and she and I have been working together for almost a year during her first full year of school leadership. Wendy has been an A+ top notch client. She shows up to the calls. She does all the work. She really does apply the coaching and the tools that I share with her to her work, her leadership work, and her life.

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She is here today to tell her story about her experience with school leadership, her experience with coaching, what she's learned about leadership and life and coaching. All of the great things. I am so honored to have her. Welcome Wendy.

Wendy: Thank you so much. What an exciting introduction. I feel so special to be here and so grateful. So thank you.

Angela: Aw, you are so special to be here. I'm so happy to have you. I'm so excited for this. I have to let you know for the listeners that I always ask my clients. When I think they're ready to share their story, I ask them, invite them to be on the show. Some people are like, "Absolutely not. I'm too scared." Other people are like, "I'm in."

What I love about Wendy is she did her contemplating and thought about it and really felt compelled to share this story with you. I'm just so honored that she's here today. Wendy let's just dive right in. Why don't you tell the listeners your leadership journey?

Wendy: Yeah. It sounds good. So this is my first full year in a school leadership position. I taught internationally for a couple of years, and then was in the classroom for five years in an elementary school. I'm in New York City, so urban environment. I taught in a bilingual classroom. I was the Spanish component of the bilingual program. Then I transitioned to an out of classroom position as a technology integration specialist.

About three-quarters of the way through that role as a tech integration specialist is when I became an assistant principal, which happened to be like two weeks before the COVID shutdown in March of 2020. So I was in my new role for all of three weeks before closing and doing everything remotely, including building relationships with all the teachers and students and families as well as transitioning everyone to remote pretty much overnight.

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So we planned all summer to reopen, and then had a successful in-person year from September until now in June. So now I'm in just the last couple weeks of the school year and wrapping up my first full year in an assistant principalship here.

Angela: Yes. All at the ripe age of 30. I want to add this because Wendy is my youngest client. She turned 30 during the course of our coaching work together. She has been just obviously you can tell a phenomenal educator. Always seeking to learn. Always growing. Trying new things. Being in different places, new experiences. So when she and I started working together, I was just mesmerized with her story and all that she's accomplished in her short amount of time in education. So Wendy, how many years in total have you been in education?

Wendy: I've been in the Department of Education in New York City for seven years. But between my experience abroad and teaching before that, I would say more like ten years. I was in a head start. I did a Fulbright program. All of that was before I took my first full time classroom teaching position.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: So about ten years I'd say.

Angela: Yeah. So you have a breadth of experience to bring to your leadership position.

Wendy: So it's funny that you bring my age up because I know that we're going to talk a little bit about how I ended up in this coaching with you.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: The age thing, I think, was one of the biggest hurdles and one of the biggest challenges that I was coming in with because I really felt a little bit of a lack of confidence because of that. I think I just felt like well, I could easily spend another ten years in the classroom and then go into the

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school leadership, and I would still be learning new and different things every day.

But, as you're saying, when you have this skill set and you feel ready and the opportunity presents itself, it did feel like the right move. That was something that yeah. In our early coaching sessions, I think I was very concerned with well what is my staff going to think of me? Are they going to respect me as an instructional leader?

Angela: Right. Will they listen to me?

Wendy: Yeah. So I feel I've come a long way with that over the course of the years as, you know, I am definitely one of the younger members of the staff in my building, and I happen to be the assistant principal.

Angela: Yes, yes. That is one of the reasons that brought you, us, together I should say because I remember you saying, "I'm only 29 years old. I'm in this new position." A lot of your concern was revolving around your thought. The belief that because of my age, people won't listen, respect, trust me, all of the things. We've worked through that.

So tell the listeners just on this one little note here. Wendy and I have been coaching, it's been just about a year. I think we're at like the 11 month mark. So after 11 months and going through COVID and going through a year of AP and a year of coaching, what is your thought now about your age and your leadership?

Wendy: I do think that I've come so far. I would say that I'm starting to see where it's a strength and an asset instead of something that could potentially alienate me from my staff or make me different from my staff. You know all the things that you say about young teachers, the same things apply. They come in with new ideas. It's a lot of fresh energy. They see things in a different way. They can relate to the students and the families in a different way. I think I've seen all of those things to be true as I keep moving through this role.

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Specifically to this year. I mean so much of what I offered for my staff and early on especially is that I do have a great comfort and fluency with technology. So I think I thought well, what do I know? I'm new. I'm just going to defer to the principal. I'm going to defer to the other assistant principal. They've been doing this so much longer. In reality, I was the one who held a lot of the expertise that was needed here.

I think it's just one example, the technology thing, in like a menu of leadership skills that are required. I think that one example made me realize hey, my voice actually does add a lot of value. No one cares how old I am as long as I know how to help them, and I can support them. Then no one's really thinking about that.

They just want to know how do I add this post on Google classroom and share the link with my kids. If I can support them and help them with that, it was a really nice reframe for me to see how valuable I was as a staff member regardless of age and regardless of experience because I bring in a special expertise.

Angela: Absolutely. So there's two things I have to say. So first of all, in the month of June. So this podcast will drop in June. It's now, what, we're recording June 2nd. So this will be within the next week or two. But I want to talk about value. Because value and our belief in the value of ourselves, what we have to offer, the value in our teachers and students, community. The value in ourselves, the value in them, and then the value in the program that we're offering. The belief in those, that belief triad, is what creates results.

So when you believe that you as a leader have value to offer regardless of any circumstance. Your age, years of experience, where you've taught, what grade level you taught. I remember thinking I can't lead a school. I've only taught primary, like kindergarten and first grade. Fifth grade teachers are going to give me the hard time. Fifth grade is just big kindergarteners, right? It's the same. I have so much to offer.

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So my point being this month is all about value. What Wendy is saying about like understanding her value as a leader and taking out all those circumstances and just shining and being the example of what that value is. It really is the difference between leaders who create results and leaders who feel like the results are out of their control.

Wendy: Yeah. I love how you said that because there's so many things we have hard data for, right. Like this achievement and that achievement and this retention, attendance, and everything else. I think getting caught up in some of those measures and not recognizing some of the other things that you bring to the table.

Like I am someone who cares a lot about social emotional learning. I'm rolling out a social emotional learning program because that's one of my core values. It's something that I bring to the school as something new and that I am adding. You're not going to necessarily see that on the state exam reports, or you're not going to necessarily see that on the attendance reports or anything like that.

But I do think that when I pull back a little bit and I say what have I done this year? It's so much easier for me now to think of all the things I have done. I think actually one of the exercises you gave me towards the end of the 2020 calendar year was actually write down some of the things that you've done that you should feel proud of. I think I said, "Holy cow. I did add a lot of value."

Maybe I don't see it on the compliance report or maybe I don't see it in my email inbox. But when I step back and think about all of the things that I have done over the last year, I realize I did add a huge contribution and add huge value to the building in this new role.

Angela: Yes. So number one. If you're an aspiring school leader but you feel like you're too young or too inexperienced, I want you to write down all of the things that you do know that you have contributed, that you have

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already accomplished and use that as a springboard into believing into this next level and this next version of yourself.

Whether you want to go from classroom to instructional coach or instructional coach up to a position of any kind of leadership, you already have skill sets and knowledge that you can take with you. So that's a really important step to take when you're moving forward in your career as a school leader.

I love it so much. I just could talk about this all day long. Okay. So I want to take the listeners back to the beginning because there are a lot of listeners out there who number one don't understand what life coaching even is. Or they think it's kind of woo-woo. Or they don't understand it's value or how it helps and supports us to create the results we want for ourselves. So can I kind of rewind you back to the beginning of your coaching sessions?

Wendy: Yeah.

Angela: Tell the listeners where you were then. Who were you then? What were your thoughts? What were your fears? What did you want to accomplish that you didn't think was possible? What brought you to coaching?

Wendy: Yeah. I'm so honored also to be as a guest on your podcast. Because listening to some of those episodes with your coaching clients was one of those things that helped push me to be like, "Oh my gosh. How can I not do it?" Like this is going to have such a huge impact.

So at this time last year, which is pretty much when we started off, I had been working with an LMSW who was like I had like a weekly therapy kind of check in. It was definitely helpful, but I think I was looking for someone who really understood what the job of a school building leader entails and the amount of responsibility and the relationships and the day in and day out. So I was looking for someone who really understood what I was experiencing.

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Then I was also thinking like I need someone outside of my organization because I just want like anonymous. I want to be truly vulnerable. I really want someone who can just call me out on it if I need it, to just make me be really honest with myself too. After hearing some of the conversations that you had with other guests and other coaching clients, I was like, “Okay. Angela’s going to keep it real with me. She’s going to really push me.”

Angela: Yep.

Wendy: So I know I already talked a little bit about some of the confidence struggles that I was having just as far as if I had to make a tough decision, or I needed to be a little bit decisive about something or handle a situation. I think I was spending so much time second guessing myself and questioning if I was doing the right thing and getting in my own way about it.

I think I wanted support with not abandoning myself in those moments and then thinking, “Well what is he going to think of it? What is she going to think of it? How am I to come across? What’s the perception of the other person?” So much so. From working with you, one of the things that I realized was I was getting so caught up in the emotions and the feelings that I didn’t even know if they were my emotions or someone else’s.

Angela: Yeah.

Wendy: You know? I will talk more about the STEAR cycle and how that’s been such a helpful tool for me. But to be able to separate like, “Hold on. How do I actually feel about this situation? How does the other person or the other party in this scenario feel about it? How do I feel about how they’re reacting to it? Am I still okay with my choice in spite or whatever the action’s going to be?”

Knowing that there were tools to help me with that confidence. And that the coaching was going to help build me up to be able to really own my decisions and know that whatever was thrown at me I was going to be able

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to handle. So that confidence and that just trusting in myself, I think, were two of the huge things that I was looking for and wasn't really finding in other types of coaching and therapy.

I'm a self-help enthusiast. I definitely read a lot of the books, a lot of the podcasts. Done the courses and all the things. Sometimes it's just hard to see your own areas of weakness. Like I don't like the term blind spots, but just having an outside perspective to be able to say, "Hey, do you notice that you're doing this?"

I think I was just really looking for someone that who was going to be able to tailor the conversations more to my role as a building leader. Then also some of the things that I might not even be realizing that I was doing and the patterns and thinking that I was not even aware of until someone just mentioned it and I said, "Oh, you're right. I am doing that thing again."

Angela: Right. Because a lot of what we've talked about over the course of the year, and this is why the program is a full year. Because I could offer six weeks, eight weeks, 12 weeks. But to really understand ourselves and our own patterns you need that time to be able to apply this work in different situations and see how the brain has created patterns for itself. That it responds the same way at work as it does at home as it does with friends as it does with family. It feels different to us, but in reality, there is a pattern to it all.

Wendy: Yeah. I had so many of those lightbulb moments. Of course, you know, you now have coached with me on family stuff, on relationship stuff in my personal life, on work stuff. It amazes me every time where I'm like, "Oh. It's that same thought that I had about this other scenario. Now it's coming up here."

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: Connecting the dots of, "Oh I see. It's not just this one situation. It's actually something that's coming up in multiple areas of my life." Applying it

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to my personal relationship with my partner or with my own family and my sisters and brothers, my parents, to my boss, to my colleagues, and the teachers I work with. Realizing hold on, it's just my thoughts, and I actually have control over my thoughts that create my feelings about this. It's not so different, right? It's not just isolated to school leadership.

Angela: Right. Exactly. So giving ourselves this, I call it the luxury. Like a luxurious amount of time to see those patterns to know. Like one of the things that I think is beautiful about this coaching package in particular is that the full year gives you the comfort of knowing, "I have an entire year with somebody who's in my corner, who is my advocate for my dreams, who is going to help me through the day to day stuff, but also the big picture stuff. And we have plenty of time for all of that to happen and also allowing life to happen."

So like when things do come up like you've got an emergency meeting. The other day you had some big chaos happening in your parking lot, right. Like there was like something where you couldn't come. That was, I think, the first call you ever missed. The year just allows for that flexibility for us to reschedule and adjust and to really deeply apply the work in a way that you can say to your brain like, "Look. I've got all year to do this. It's my first year of school leadership, and I've got somebody who's just here for me."

Like I don't know anybody you work with, anything about your school. We can talk about all of that, but we can bring it down to just what it means for you and how we want you to experience the relationship and to experience that moment or that situation. So that's what's so beautiful about the beauty of that full year of working together.

Wendy: I, of course, was like I have to cancel a session. I, of course, was disappointed, but the flexibility is so appreciated. Because in this role, you don't know when you're going to have a 911 call, or a parent banging down the door who's upset about something.

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I would say that early one of my hesitations was do I really have time to commit to a 45 minute/hour long call every week? Where I have a hundred and one things on my list that I can convince myself are more important. I think in committing to the work was also just, again, going back to the word value. Valuing my own growth and my own time. Saying that I'm going to choose to make this a priority for my own professional growth, but also as like a form of self-care, right?

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: Like you can be staring at a computer screen for 10 hours a day. If that's the one period of 45 minutes where you step away and go for a walk and talk to Angela on the phone. It built in this time for myself that by choosing to move forward with coaching and invest in the process, I also had to choose to value myself enough to know that I was worth investing in.

I had to talk myself into it. I was like oh my gosh. The time cost, the financial investment. I could just continue working with my therapist who I'm working with. Who, yes, is adding value, but this is something that's going to take me further in the long term, I think, than some of the other things I was doing and thinking. Again really just helped me understand how I needed to not be pouring out of an empty cup, right. I needed to make sure that I was pouring into myself to be able to come here and serve every day.

Angela: Right. So we have three assets. I love that you said this because we have three assets. We have our time, we have our money, and we have our brain. Those three assets, they're the most powerful assets that we have full control over. We have full agency over our mind, over how we spend our money, and how we spend our time. We don't believe that those are true, but they are truly assets that we do own and can take full responsibility for.

So what happens is we have to decide that we are worth it. Our brain, mindset is worth it in order to invest those other resources of time and money. Because it does take time. Actually now my offer is now 30 minute

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calls because one, I've gotten so good at coaching I can get people to the heart of the matter really fast.

Two, it just eliminates the argument. Because if your brain isn't willing to invest 30 minutes a week in yourself, for you to be able to say, "Here's how I'm thinking. Here's how I'm feeling. Here's what's working. Here's what's not. This is where I'm feeling stuck." You get 30 minutes of somebody else caring for you and listening to you.

I can pretty much guarantee if you're not willing to give yourself 30 minutes, you're not willing to give yourself self-care. You're not willing to invest in your professional growth, in any of it. You are your top asset. If you can't invest 30 minutes in you as a leader, then that's the reason you need coaching. Wouldn't you say that Wendy?

Wendy: Absolutely. I mean I think last year I was either in burnout or on the verge of burnout. One of the reasons that I said I really need to learn this lesson now as a new leader is I think I had a story that it was selfish that I didn't answer emails at 10:00 at night. When really the best thing I could do for myself was to create that boundary and create that space, right. Taking 30 minutes/45 minutes/an hour for myself once a week, there's nothing selfish about it. Because the purpose is so that I am my best self to show up and serve every day.

I think something else that you helped me understand early was the return on investment of doing this work now at a young age. I would love to be blessed to be a mom one day. I don't have a family of my own yet. But in my first year of school leadership, if I can't learn how to find one hour once a week, how am I going to be able to create boundaries and figure out a way to balance the demands of work and a family life? How am I ever going to work towards that I have for myself if I can't even find an hour once a week now to invest in myself, right?

So I look forward to reaping the rewards of this and the fruits of it years and years and years into the future. Now that I am going through the process

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now and finishing out my first year, the way that I spend my time and the way I view my time has shifted so much. Like I do feel I'm more fresh the next day when I go home and I don't open my laptop because I gave myself the time.

Angela: Yes.

Wendy: You know? I might not have known that otherwise.

Angela: Right. So a lot of what we work on in The Empowered Principal® program is time. We talk about our beliefs around time and the scarcity around time. In education, we're always saying we need more time. We don't have enough time. We have a lot of conversations around time.

Can you tell them more specifically some of the things you've worked on with time and how you feel more abundant with your time? How you feel you have more control and agency over how you spend your day, your evenings, your weekends, all of it.

Wendy: Yeah. I think before starting coaching with you and even in the beginning stages, I was leaving work, I mean dismissal or my day ended at 3:00. I was leaving work at 5:00 or 5:30. Going home, shoveling a quick dinner, reopening the computer, doing another hour or two of work. Sometimes to the point where you're falling asleep on the computer, or you open it the next day and you're like, "What was I working on last night?"

If you're someone who works late into the night, you'll know what I'm talking about. I think I was coming in depleted the next day, and then saying, "How come I'm not fresh and ready to serve again?" In understanding that I needed to give myself time to unplug and recharge, I was going to come in and be more effective with my time because I wasn't going to be run ragged and burnt out and exhausted. I was actually going to be able to get stuff done when I showed up at work the next day.

So now, I would say, not that I don't ever stay late after school. I am quite frequently here until 4:00, 5:00, but when I leave, I leave. When I go home

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for the night, I'm not reopening my computer. I have emails on my phone, but I don't always read them. I certainly don't answer them in the evening hours or the weekends with very few exceptions.

I mean there's emergencies and things that happen. Especially in the times of COVID where you're dealing with positive cases and there's some follow up, and it's time sensitive and this and this. I think I've put so much pressure that if that person didn't get a response to their email today that I was going to be written off as the worst AP that ever walked the halls, right?

I think now I'm like, "Is it so important that I answer this right now? That it can't wait another 12 hours until the morning when I get to work. Is this going to be okay if I go for a walk after dinner instead of back on my computer?" Nothing terrible happened. There was no disaster.

I think I had to just have like a week of experimentation with it to almost prove to myself like, "Hey, everything will go fine if you don't answer that email. It can wait until the morning. It might seem like so urgent and so important right now, but actually nothing bad is going to happen if you take the night for yourself, pour into yourself, recharge, and come back and answer it the next day. 99.9% of the time that has worked so far.

Angela: Right. What's so good about that is you had to train yourself to trust that everything will be fine. Work's going to be there in the morning, right? That not only will it still be sitting there waiting for you. Sometimes the person gets it resolved on their own. Sometimes it's not as big of a deal as they first thought it was. Sometimes you have to deal with it. Then the 1% where okay, maybe I could have answered it, we coached through that part too, right.

Nobody's perfect, and nobody will get it just right. There's no perfect email answering time. There's no perfect way to approach any email system. There's going to be glitches in any system that you set up for yourself when it comes to email.

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What we've talked about is like, I just had a client the other day who's like, "I hate emails." We're still working on emails. But the thing with emails is whatever system you decide to implement, you have to give it that play and experimentation and practice for it to work. It takes time to create a system that works for you. If you just go in and decide like this is what it's going to be. I'm going to shut down at 5:30. I'm not going to open again until 7:30. It's going to be okay. You get into a belief system where that is running true for you in your leadership life. Yeah?

Wendy: I do think that that was one of the biggest hurdles was my hang up or the story that I was telling myself about if I don't have a good response time on my emails, then I'm going to be viewed as unsupportive or not responsive. Not being a problem solver or not being available. I had a whole story about how I'm new, and I have to make this impression that I'm going to be there when someone needs something.

In reality, it was just causing me so much additional stress and anxiety and burnout that I wasn't able to do all of those things that I wanted to do. It was like, again, just getting in my own way of being able to perform and being able to serve with this thought that doing it the other way was going to be sending some kind of message when in reality it was not helping anyone, myself or the staff members I was trying to support.

Angela: Exactly. So tell the listeners what are your current thoughts? Like a year into coaching, what are your current thoughts about the time you've invested, the money you've invested, and then the energy I would call it that you've invested in making these adjustments? Like playing around with your schedule, playing around with your email, the relationships that you've been working through through the course of the year in terms of building relationships with your staff, with your principal, your assistant principal.

Talk to the listeners about that. Because people know where you were because that's where they're at right now, and they can't imagine what it feels like on the other side. Like they want that so badly. Can you talk with

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them about how you bridge that gap? The thoughts that you think right now that you couldn't imagine believing back then.

Wendy: Yeah, yeah. There's so many good ones. One of the big takeaways that, I see this shift in myself because it comes up all the time is that kind of type A perfectionist shame spiral that happens when things don't go well or you're not immediately successful at something the first time. Or when you have to take some feedback that maybe is constructive or like cool feedback.

I would say a year ago, I would get a piece of feedback that was like, "This could be done a different way. Or next time try this." Or something like that. I would immediately go in that space in my head of, "I'm not going to make it through my first year. Taking this job was a mistake. I'm not suited for this." Some of the imposter syndrome stuff.

I think working with you over the last year and unpacking the thoughts of, "Okay, well why? Why does it feel like this piece of feedback is so difficult or so challenging?" And realizing that it's just my thoughts and my feelings, actually. I have total control over it, right?

So understanding that now that I have more tools to identify like I'm feeling this way because of this conversation. This is the expectation that I had for myself, and this is why I'm feeling this disappointment or this dissonance now. I think I can identify so much better where I'm allowing other people's thoughts and feelings to kind of sneak in.

I was getting caught up a lot in, "Well, he or she must think this if they're giving me this piece of feedback. Now I'm questioning everything and my whole reality." Instead it's like do I like myself? Do I like how I showed up? Did I do my best with the information I had at that time? Can I be at peace with the things that I did even if there's still room to improve?

There's like this space between loving myself and accepting myself just as I am and also being a work in progress and always striving for continuous

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improvement. I think I was so far on the end of the spectrum where I was like, “Nothing is ever good enough.” It has to be right the first time. It has to be perfect. I can't have any constructive notes.

Now I'm so much more of like giving myself grace. Allowing myself space to be new. Learning some of the ropes and remembering that it's going to take some time to figure out some of these things, and not going into the whole shame spiral of, “Oh my gosh. I didn't get it the first time. There must be something wrong with me.”

Angela: Right.

Wendy: No, you're just new. Give yourself a minute, give yourself some grace. Don't read so far into everything where you're coming crashing down in reality. It's actually going to be okay.

Angela: Exactly. You know one of the things that prevents us from doing something we want to do or saying something we want to say is because of a feeling that we are trying to avoid. I'm curious. This is such a great question. I'm curious to know like what feelings were you avoiding that you are willing to feel? I'm not saying they feel good. But I'm saying what are you more willing to feel now than you were in the beginning?

Wendy: Yeah. The processing emotions and just being present with emotions, I think that was our first six months of coaching.

Angela: Yeah.

Wendy: Was, “Hey, I think you're feeling some feelings. Let's calm down a second.” I think that now I'm more willing to show up courageously to something that I know is going to be a little bit uncomfortable instead of trying to avoid the discomfort only to end up in a different kind of discomfort later on. Some of the times it goes from like a small conflict or a small problem to a much larger thing because I wasn't courageous enough to just show up and address it the first time.

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So where before I was maybe insecure or feeling shame or feeling uncertain about something and maybe wasn't willing to admit like, "Hey, I need help. Or hey, I don't know something." Instead of being like I'm going to figure everything out on my own, and I'm just not going to say anything about this. Or there's an elephant in the room, and I'm just not going to address it because it will just magically just fix itself.

I think now I'm like hey, I can show up courageously and address this because I know that in the long run this is going to avoid a bigger headache later on and is going to require the same amount of sitting in discomfort. It's either I do it now or I do it later. Or I do it in this one way now where it's maybe not such a big thing and then avoid later on it turning into some kind of bigger conflict or bigger concern.

Angela: Right. I love that so much because we think that if we do or don't do something that we can avoid discomfort, being unhappy. I also love that you said courage. Like the feeling you're willing to feel is courage. Because I think people think courage feels good. But if you really think about courage, true courage is really, really scary. Like if you're in the space of courage, you're feeling fear, but you're taking action anyway.

Wendy: Yeah. They can't see me on the podcast, but I'm shaking my head that no. Courage does not feel warm and fuzzy at all. It feels terrifying a lot of the time. One of the other things I wanted to say that relates to that is just a willingness to be vulnerable more now in a way that early on I think I was so concerned about coming out of my shell a little bit. I'm the assistant principal that has like a little altar with crystals and all of that in my office. I'm a little bit of like a nature lover and a little bit of a quirky kind of off the beaten path person.

I think at first, I was like let me be buttoned up. Let me be really serious. Let me try and be taken seriously by other people. I think that vulnerability of, "I think this is a cute activity. I don't know what the staff is going to think of it, but we're just going to do it anyway and see what they think."

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One of the things that you had me coach on was if you're having fun and you love it, then other people probably will too. Also if they don't, it doesn't matter because you're still having fun and you love it. So I think it was like a Valentine's Day activity that I was like, "I don't know. Is anyone going to even participate? Are they going to think it's cheesy?" I had to say to myself I think it's cute. I think it's a nice thing. I want to do it. We're going to do it. Guess what? The staff loved it. It was a smashing hit.

So I just had to take that courageous vulnerable moment of saying, "I'm not sure how this is going to go, but I'm going to commit. I'm going to just roll with it because I like it. I think it's fun. This is who I am." In being more myself in those moments, I think I've been even more warmly welcomed and received by my staff because it's nice to see like a little bit of a human side.

It's nice to see that people are humans. They're not just an assistant principal, but actually I have a family. I have feelings. I have my own struggles. I have my own techniques that I use for copings. If that's the essential oil diffuser in my office or one of my other kind of woo-woo hippie things, I think people appreciate that. No one has written me off as like the crunchy hippie assistant principal. They just think that I'm really approachable and value social emotional learning, which is something that I hope that they would think about me.

So overcoming that and kind of like coming out as like more of myself, I think, has taken a lot of courage and a lot of vulnerability. But I don't think I would have the type of relationships that I've built over the past year. Mind you, half of it being over a Zoom screen building relationships as a new leader.

I don't think I would be where I am if I didn't just say, "I'm going to throw away my cool card and throw away this idea that I should be this buttoned up kind of stern administrator. I'm going to have fun with it. I'm going to be

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myself.” I think my relationships have benefited so much from that attitude going into it.

Angela: I love, love, love that. This leads me to my next question is what in your eyes, and I love this because everybody answers it differently. What in your eyes is the long term results of this? Yes, we've coached for one year together. Maybe we coach for another year together. Whatever our relationship coaching wise is, I'm talking about for you, the benefit that extends through, it's kind of the compound effect of coaching. Where do you see the long term effect happening for you as a leader but also in your personal journey?

Wendy: Yeah. I can't overstate enough how transferrable I think all of the coaching work we have done is. I mentioned to you that I have a mentor who I work with through my union and through the Department of Education.

Of course, there's so many helpful things about that. Like online systems that I need to use, and this platform, and you enter it on this portal, whatever it is. I think in five years when they roll out a new portal or when we get a new superintendent and the expectations change, I'm going to have to relearn a lot of those things all over again. That's not something that I'm going to take with me on my journey.

I think some of the skills in this coaching have been transformative in a way that it's like you can't unlearn them. Like I now have to call myself out if I'm avoiding processing an emotion. Like oh, it's that thing again. It happens to be with my parents or my sibling around what are we doing for Father's Day. Or it happens to be with my boss or with my principal. Or it happens to be around my teachers who I'm working with. I think once you see those patterns playing out, you notice them come up everywhere. You have the awareness to self-coach through them, right?

So I don't know in five years if I work in a different job, or I work in a different district, or I have a different building leader. Or if I one day become

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a principal one day, I think that some of these skills are, you know, it's not surface like the online portal where you're entering the data. It's this deep work that no matter where you are or what the scenario is, it just builds that trust in yourself that no matter what it is, I know that I'm in control of it because these are my thoughts and my feelings. I can coach myself through it.

Whether that's my car is broken down on the side of the road and now I have to be a problem solver, or I'm now in a job interview and I have to speak to what my strengths are, whatever it is. Just that believe in myself that I have the capacity to manage my own emotions and deal with whatever it is that comes up. It's all about relationships not only with other people, but with myself, right. Like in this moment, how's my self-talk? In this moment, what is the thought that is creating this feeling that I'm having? That works in any scenario.

It works in any situation personal, professional. I think that I have seen it again and again come up. Oh, I didn't even know it could apply in this circumstance, but here we are again. The same pattern of either avoiding emotions or going through the shame spiral or whatever it is that has come up that I've identified as something I'm working on. I see it more and more now that I'm aware of it, and now I have more opportunities to self-coach myself through it as the year progresses. So it's so transferable and has been transformative on all levels.

Angela: It compounds exponentially because when you become a parent, you feel time crunched, and you think I don't have the time. You can apply these tools to find and create time and decide on your priorities. Coach yourself through letting go of some of those things you used to do that now with having a baby you no longer do or you are willing to let go of, right?

It impacts you financially because when you understand how to manage yourself and build relationships and manage your time, you become more valuable to your district, right? Which you become more attractive as an

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employee, and then you're more wanted as an employee. People will say like, "Hey, I want you to move up to a principalship. Hey, I want you at a district level. Hey, I want you running as a superintendent because they see your value."

Your value is created through the belief that you have about yourself and other people and what you have to offer. Those three belief systems when in combination, when you work on that in all the aspects of your life, it knows no limits.

Wendy: I look forward to it's almost like stretching out that muscle in different ways. Like you're saying right now it's working great for not answering emails after 5:00 p.m., but maybe in a future time I'm going to say, "Hey, why don't I become an adjunct professor at a university?"

If it's something that I have as a professional goal, I can find the time for it. I don't have to talk myself out of it because I don't think that I'm capable of managing it or I don't have the time. Or whatever the scenario is. I mean I just feel like so many possibilities have opened up just by having the belief in myself that if it's important enough to me that I can make it happen.

Angela: Yes. Yep. Absolutely. I am thrilled. I love sharing Wendy's story most of all because she is so young. I cannot wait to see the impact that she is going to create in the world as a result of her ability to manage her mind so well. Because if you can manage your mind, you can manage time, money, relationships, resources, challenges, 911 calls. You name it. You can manage it.

It just has been such a pleasure working with you. I'm so honored to be your coach. I have really valued our time together and your energy and your willingness to dive into something that really is a brand new service to the world, to the field of education, to school leaders. It's been really fun to play with you through this year, and coach you through COVID, coach you through so many amazing experiences that you've had.

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Is there any last words, tips, thoughts, experiences that you'd like to share with the listeners to help people who were in your shoes a year ago and help them know that they have support available to them? They don't have to go through school leadership alone. That there is something out there that can help them enjoy the process of leadership so much more.

Wendy: Yeah. Well, first I just have to say thank you. Because I don't know how I would have gotten through this first year in the role if I didn't have that hour carved out for myself and that shoulder kind of to lean on in those moments that were really challenging. I will just say that I've had mentors in the past. I've had coaches in the past. I've been through lots of trainings and professional development.

If you have concerns about is this going to push me to the next level or is this going to really help or is it going to be specific to me. I will just say that every single session when I showed up, I got exactly what I needed and left that session feeling a thousand pounds lighter, really heard and listened to, and challenged in a way that felt helpful and productive even though it wasn't always easy. I think it's like the medicine doesn't always taste good going down, but it is exactly what you needed.

I think on those days when I just needed to really hear from someone who could see from an outside point of view, you offered me that and so much more. That's not something that I had in other mentorship programs or other coaching opportunities where it was kind of, "Here's the generic script. Here's the generic curriculum. This is the modules that we're going to go through in this exact order."

Whereas in this coaching it was in the moment live. It was what's on your mind today? What's coming up? Just felt so authentic and so applicable in the moment that I just, again, I don't know how I would have made it through this first year and still be standing in one piece in the light of COVID and being brand new and everything without having someone who I

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can go to and be really vulnerable, really open, and have that anonymity as like a nice outside point of view.

Angela: Yes, yeah. Oh thank you.

Wendy: So I really can't thank you enough and can't recommend enough the coaching. I think every school leader should have something like this. Not a mentoring program where you learn how to do the online compliance program, but a real coaching program that is tailored to your needs. I think every school leader should have that. I am so, so grateful to have had the opportunity to work with you truly.

Angela: Aw thank you. I will say too like those mentoring programs for those specific hard skills that you need to learn, like you want all of it. I would say like go for that so you can learn those technical skills, but this work is more about navigating those emotional and mental demands and building the resiliency it takes to be a school leader. To allow yourself to not be liked, to have people talk behind your back, to have to make decisions people don't agree with, to have to stand in your truth even when it feels awkward or hard.

I think that really speaks to the work that you've done, Wendy, because I coach, but you go out there and apply the work and have to stand in that practice of applying the coaching to your specific situation. So I mean, yeah. Absolutely.

Wendy: I'll just share one quick other final thought. The sessions, like the time in between them, sometimes the lightbulb moments and the realizations come when you least expect them. Like that time of integration. I had the one moment that I shared with you where I just heard this one specific song. And the message in the song just pushed me to realize just like everything clicked in that moment of this is why I'm doing this, and this is why it's so worth it even though it's sometimes uncomfortable.

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I was not expecting that in the middle of the night when I was trying to fall asleep, and that's when the wisdom came through. I think if we hadn't had the session prior or the session following on the books, that might never have kind of crept in. So I think the time to integrate and process over the course of the year, it is worth every moment spent and every penny invested. Absolutely.

Angela: Oh awesome. Awesome. All right my friend. What an honor to have you on the podcast. I have been waiting on this day for so long. Here it's come true. To hear your journey from the beginning to the end, it's so phenomenal. I do hope as long as we coach together or not that we stay in touch, and we will.

I will love to bring you on in the podcast in the future so that people can hear how you have continued to evolve yourself, your leadership skills, and truly how this work impacts and evolves education at large. How it involves bringing staff along, bringing students along, bringing families along, and actually alters the experience in a positive way for everybody involved. It really can have that profound of an impact.

To see you at 30 years old applying this work at such a deep level, I can only fathom the brilliant things you are going to contribute to students and staff and families for the next years to come. So.

Wendy: Thank you. I believe in that ripple effect and can't wait to report back and would love to be a guest again. Would be fabulous.

Angela: Great, awesome. Thank you so much for your time today. It was so good to see you. We will be coaching together very soon.

Wendy: Sounds great. Thank you again.

Angela: All right. Thanks. Bye.

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