

Ep #346: Compare and Despair Triggers



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 346.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly Robeck.

Well hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. Hey, y'all, I just want to do a shout out to all the brand new principals out there. Y'all are in for a treat. I'm so glad you're listening to this podcast. If you know a friend or a colleague who is a brand new principal, please share this podcast with them. Because this podcast helps people navigate the mental and emotional demands of this job. We strive to create some balance and stability and some consistency and sustainability. So we are here in service and support.

If you are a brand new leader, please join us in the Empowered Principal® Collaborative. Doors are open throughout the month of August. We're starting in September. We would love to see you there. I would love to support you, especially if you're a first year leader. I have additional classes and trainings and coaching sessions just for my brand new first year leaders. So if you want to be a part of EPC, now is the time to join. We would love to support you. Okay. Happy first year, all of you new school leaders.

This topic for today is pretty appropriate because I'm talking about compare and despair triggers, especially if you're new, but it's even when you're a veteran. Compare and despair, it can hit you at any stage of your career. It comes out of the blue. It happens to me. It happens to my clients, whether they're brand new and they feel really awkward or whether they've been doing something a while.

So I want to talk about that today, especially entering into a new year, meeting new people, having new staff members, or maybe you're a

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brand new leader and you have new colleagues who are veterans, and you might feel very insufficient around them. That's what we're going to talk about today. All right.

So I've been thinking about compare and despair because it hit me recently and it hasn't hit me for a while. I thought to myself, you know, it makes sense that compare and despair pops its ugly head up every now and then because there's always somebody out in the world who's different than you, who's out there doing similar work, and your brain's going to latch onto that and say, they're doing it bigger, they're doing it better, they're doing it faster. They're more amazing. They have more of a following, or they don't work as long as I do. How are they getting all these results done?

Like, if you think about it, there's somebody in the world who's technically always ahead of you in your mind, right? There's somebody who's always landed the school leadership job before you have. There's people who have years' experience, and you're just starting out. Their school perhaps was recognized or received some kind award, and your school hasn't received anything yet. Maybe they present to the school board with such ease, and they're just so comfortable presenting in public and you feel like you're going to choke on your words and pass out from fear, right?

There's all different kinds of ways that compare and despair can show up. When it came up for me, like within the last couple of weeks, it caught me off guard because I haven't really felt that trigger come up for me in a while. I am a very confident coach. I feel very strongly. I have a very strong self-identity when it comes to my ability to coach my clients to results.

I feel very solid in the content creation. I work hard to create relevant, timely, innovative content that goes below the surface of just managing your school, and it gets into the experience of school leadership. I really love this podcast with all my heart. I am so proud of EPC and my one-on-one clients and the courses that I have created and all of the resources. So I feel really grounded as a business owner, as a CEO, as a coach.

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Because I have so much confidence and stability in who I am as a coach, I know that I'm always in demand. I know the demand is growing and I'm incredibly generous with my offerings of support. I give all of my time and service and energy to my clients, try to give them a five-star experience whenever possible.

I give out lots of free content from the podcast, which is free. Every week you get new content to the webinars I offer, to the trainings, free masterclasses. There's a lot available for people out in the public who are just learning about the world of the Empowered Principal®. I have a public Facebook group that is free for people to join, and they can come in, and they can participate in Summer of Fun. They can participate in challenges throughout the year.

But big winners are the ones who join EPC because that's where we go really deep. The podcast just covers the surface. The Facebook group goes a tiny bit deeper, but the EPC program, the paid program, is where you get the depth, the content, the richness, the transformations, the evolutions, the ahas, the wins, the big accomplishments and successes. That's where it all happens, okay? So I'm very proud of my program and what I coach.

I also spend some time coaching in multiple groups and organizations because I so deeply believe in this work, in the value of coaching. I feel like this is the most valuable service that I could possibly offer to education as an industry. There's nobody doing exactly what I'm doing in the way that I'm doing it, and I want to help any school leader who is struggling or suffering.

Just to let you know, for those of you who are interested in EPC but you're concerned about paying for EPC, there is a new option. I've added payment plans to lower the ticket cost to make EPC available for every single person on the planet who's interested in joining. It's financially accessible.

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I'm offering insane bonuses to my one-on-one clients, insane packages and incentives for people who renew their coaching packages because I want to over-deliver. I want to wow people and I want to help them feel like they've won the lottery every single time they join an EPC program.

So I'm really solid in my work. But, still, with all of that confidence and all of the content and all of the foundation I've created over the last seven years, things can still come out of nowhere and trigger me right back into a place where I'm all of a sudden doubting myself.

I start to question like, gosh, am I on the right path? Am I doing the right thing? Should I just fold up my business, close the doors and go back into school leadership? Because sometimes that just sounds more fun than building a business. It's like oh, I'd rather just leave the school. I know how to do that. It's so much fun. I love the people. But every time I think about that, I realize this is what I was called to do. This is what I meant to do. This is the service that's needed in education. It would be such a shame to not have this service available for school leaders.

So when I got triggered this week, I saw some things on social media. It felt a little bit like perhaps somebody who may be following me might also be taking some of my content or recreating it under their own name in their own kind of packaging. It took me aback a little bit. I decided to step back, and I watched myself. I watched myself feel upset.

Then I felt kind of worried and scared. Somebody's taking over. Somebody's doing it better than me. Somebody's got this figured out. I felt myself go back into almost like an immaturity, an emotional infancy where I was just freaking out. I thought to myself whoa, time out here. I want to watch myself have this human experience of compare and despair, but I want to do it from a greater perspective.

So I let myself have the experience while I was also observing myself having the experience as though I was watching like somebody else go

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through the experience. It was like I had my coach hat on and client hat at the same time.

So I was watching myself react, reflect, adjust, and respond proactively. This is what self-coaching does so powerfully. You're able to catch yourself in real time and say like wow, I'm having a human experience here. I'm really upset, or I'm really frustrated, or I'm really scared, or I'm really doubting myself. I did this with the intention of sharing it with you in real time as it was happening to me so that I could help you if this ever happens to you, which if you're a human, it's going to probably happen at some point.

So in the school leadership context, you are going to see school leaders who are either locally in your district or in neighboring districts or people online. Principals of Instagram, there's a ton of principal groups on Facebook.

You might see a school leader who's not only running a school, mind you, which is hard enough, but they're out there. They've got a podcast, or they're selling a principal planner, or they're speaking at conferences, or they're running some big platform, some Instagram platform for their school or for whatever, right?

You're thinking to yourself, holy cow, like I can barely get up, go to school, do my job, and then come home, be present for my family somewhat. These guys are doing it all. They've got kids. They're getting their master's degrees, or they're presenting at conferences, or they're writing books, or they're creating products to sell, or they have a podcast going on. It can feel like there's no way on the planet that you could ever keep up, and you spin out in insufficiency.

Your local neighbors, right? Somebody's getting a Spirit Award or some school's getting acknowledged by the county or the state for their scores or their culture or whatever, right? There's no loss of situations that are going to bring up feelings of insufficiency. There are plenty of triggers out there for

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you to look for if you'd like to sit and compare and despair all day, all week, all month, all year long.

Especially if you're not grounded as a confident person, your brain is constantly looking for evidence of insufficiency. You will find it on social media as fast as lightning. It is available 24/7, 365.

So there's this moment when you see the thing or hear about the thing and it triggers you. You know that pit in the stomach feeling? What happens is you're there. Physically in body, you are still present in this conversation. Let's say somebody tells you they saw this on social media or this person got an award or that thing happened or you're looking at your computer.

You're still sitting there having that physical experience, but your brain, you go into your head. You start thinking about yourself. Why didn't I do that? How is it possible for them to lead a school and do all these things? How do they have any energy for that? What's wrong with me? Why am I not keeping up? Why am I not disciplined enough? I should probably plan better. I should probably do more. I need to step up.

It's like oh, wow, we went from zero to 60 there without even pausing to consider the thing that they accomplished. Is that something I actually want? Did I actually set the intention to achieve that? Or was I busy over here working on something else? When we're in this moment of trigger, it's a form of fight or flight. We lose the ability to actually stay present in the moment, or we find it challenging to observe the trigger from a distance.

That's what I was able to do only because I'm so well-versed in coaching, and I teach my clients to do this, to be able to notice they're having an emotional reaction and then observe the emotional reaction with some compassion and kindness and grace.

But when you're in it, when you're caught in the cycle of insufficiency and you cannot get out, you feel very compelled to take immediate action. You want to do something, anything. You want to kick into some kind of action. You want to sit down and start planning, mapping out. You want to research

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how to set up a podcast or how to establish some kind of social media presence for your school.

All of that action, though, isn't being fueled from the energy of inspiration nor is any of that action even necessarily aligned to what you want or what you desire or what you value. It's coming from the fuel of insufficiency and lack. If they did it, now I have to do it. I have to keep up. Doesn't matter what they did. I have to do it to feel good about me.

Compare and despair. You're in insufficiency. I'm not good enough. I didn't get recognized enough. I haven't been validated enough. I'm not being enough, doing enough. What are people thinking about me? They've got something I didn't. It's an immaturity that comes up because there's something unhealed in our minds that's reminding us that we're insufficient.

So here's what's happening, right? Other people's emotional states and actions and accomplishments are not a reflection of you. It feels like it when you're comparing and despairing. You're taking what they have done and then making it mean something about you when they're two totally separate things.

A principal on the other side of town who gets a Spirit Award or the Principal of the Year Award or whatever, that principal, her thoughts, feelings and actions and her results are completely separate from you, from your STEAR cycle, from your thoughts, your feelings, your actions, your outcomes. They were over there busy doing one set of actions. You're doing another. That person's actions, they're not a reflection that you're insufficient. You were busy doing other things.

When you feel compare and despair, what's happening is not the situation. It's not their fault that they accomplished something. Sometimes our brain wants to blame them. Oh, they have it so easy. Oh, they're at a school that's really easy to lead or oh, they have a lot of parent support. Oh, they have more money. Our brain wants to blame and abdicate the efforts that they put in.

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But what's really happening is you are being triggered. Your emotional energy is being generated because of the thoughts you have about yourself, by what you're thinking about what that person accomplished. Somebody else's accomplishments actually don't trigger you. They're separate from you. What triggers you are your insufficient thoughts about you based on something you've seen. That you're comparing yourself to them.

So when insufficiency is triggered within you by something or something outside of you, that is an invitation to explore your thoughts to turn inward. Not to go take a bunch of external action, but to reflect on wait a minute here what's my self-identity? What are my opinions? What are my emotions? What's coming up for me now and why? Because the simple truth is that it's simply a thought error that's been triggered.

A thought error is just a thought that you believe to be true, but it isn't true. It's an error. Any thought that feels terrible to you, if you think a thought about yourself, I'm insufficient, I should do more, I didn't do enough, I'm not disciplined enough, I can't handle that, I'm not good enough. Those thoughts, if you believe them to be true, they feel terrible. That's how you know that they're thought errors. Because thoughts that are true feel good.

Now I know you want to argue this. You want to say, but it is true that I'm not disciplined. It is true that I don't know how to manage my time. It is true that I'm this, that. It's only true because that is the self-identity you are choosing to wear at this point of your life. It's the self-identity you're choosing to surround yourself with, to put the cloak on of self-identity as a person who's undisciplined, or not good enough, or insufficient in some way. The only reason a terrible thought feels true for you is because that's the identity that you're hanging on to.

When you get triggered by something externally, what's happening is the trigger is there on purpose to capture your attention and invite you to explore a belief that doesn't feel good for you nor is it serving you.

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Somewhere down the line, there is a thought that is igniting the emotion of insufficiency.

Trust me, I am very intimate with insufficiency. I have felt it my whole life. I am working and evolving and growing my identity to dismiss insufficiency in any way that I can. I'm sharing tools in EPC on how to start to let go the grip of insufficiency.

Now, I want to talk about using insufficiency to motivate yourself. A lot of times we think that if we follow other people who are doing amazing things and whom we admire for their accomplishments, that it's going to motivate us and kick us into gear, kick our backsides and do the things that we say we want to do, but we're not doing.

Okay, I want you to play this out. How does it feel when you're following somebody and you're like oh, they did that. Oh, gosh, I got to do that. They did that. Oh, my God. They're working out. Okay, I got to do that too. All right. Oh, my gosh. They repainted the staff lounge and did all the cute decorations. Oh, my gosh. How'd they have the time and energy to do that? How'd they get the funds for that? Now I got to do that.

Oh, and then somebody over here on the other side of town. Oh, my gosh. They did these amazing gift baskets. They come up with the cutest themes. Oh, my gosh. They communicate the best to their teachers. It's endless, you guys.

If you think that using other people's accomplishments is going to motivate you, it tends to do the opposite. I've done this so many times, and here's why it doesn't work the way you think it should. When we're negatively triggered, we are believing thoughts about ourselves that we are insufficient in some way, and it feels bad. We get upset with ourselves. We speak terribly to ourselves.

We use other people's accomplishments to confirm that we are insufficient. We use it as evidence against ourselves, and that's not inspiring at all. So don't kid yourself and say, Oh, well, I'm following them because they're

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inspiring. But every time you see something, you're like oh, now they're doing that. Now I've got to do that. If it doesn't feel good, you're using the trigger as a weapon against yourself. Stop it. I'm teasing you. Easier said than done. I know.

But notice it. It comes down to how it feels. When you're in the negative energy of it, you're not stopping to take into account that accomplishment. what you were accomplishing while they were out busy doing that, you were out busy accomplishing something else.

You're focusing on their accomplishment, but not your own. Why do they get credit, but you don't? you're going to say well, I didn't really accomplish anything. I didn't get that accomplishment. But what did you accomplish? What were you busy doing? Who cares about a stupid award?

To be all honest, that's external validation. That's not what we're chasing in the Empowered Principal® program. We're validating ourselves. We're proud of the work we do in the way we do it and what we accomplish. we're not using people to weaponize against our own accomplishments.

Furthermore, we have no idea what inspired that person to go for that accomplishment. There may be some reason we have no idea. Or maybe they weren't even trying, and they got the accomplishment, which makes you even more mad. Right? It's because we want the external validation. Compare and despair is about seeking external validation because we're not validating our own effort. We're not feeling proud of who we are and what we've done and the work that we have accomplished.

We haven't even stopped to think about like what's really in that accomplishment for us? It might be very meaningful to that person, but it might not have as much meaning for you. Sometimes we only want it because they have it.

Like little toddlers when they're not interested in playing in a toy, but then their sibling picks it up. Now it's the toy they have to have. There's this big battle and a scream out match, and they're pulling it back and forth one

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another. That's what we're doing in the adult sense on social media. Oh, I didn't know I wanted that. But now I do because they have it. That's the only reason. Because I want to look good. I want to feel good. I want to post a picture of me holding an award.

Here's the hardest part. The hardest part is taking ownership of our accomplishments, celebrating our accomplishments, taking ownership of the actions towards creating those accomplishments. Look, if you decide I really do want my school to win some XYZ award, it's got to be an internal reason. It's got to be something that's internally validating. Otherwise, you're just chasing the boobie prize. You're chasing the false pleasure, the false win.

When you're out there feeling envious, you're less likely to even give that person who did get the accomplishment the credit for the work that they put into that accomplishment. That's when you know it feels a little whiny or a little bit of like blame, like you're blaming the set of circumstances or dismissing the amount of effort that was required on their part.

Instead of owning what you have accomplished, acknowledge your work and maybe acknowledge like I'm going for that too, but I just haven't figured out yet how to accomplish that thing. They figured it out on their terms. Now I've got to figure it out on mine. I'm going to own that. If somebody's had a win in their lives, they've worked to figure it out. Sometimes that stings for us because I'm working to figure it out. Why haven't I figured it out yet?

But your path is going to look different as everybody else's path. You've got to trust that your timing and your path, it's all coming. If you don't quit, then you won't fail. You'll figure it out unless you're spending time comparing and despairing and collecting evidence of how insufficient you are as a principal. You can't be insufficient as a principal.

I suppose you can if you try hard enough because what happens is you will create a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you continue to believe you're insufficient,

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you're going to show up in insufficiency. You're going to get overwhelmed. You're going to play whack-a-mole. You're going to overwork, overexert, overschedule. You're going to miss deadlines. You're going to miss important conversations. You're going to not communicate something. You're going to get in the weeds and get really messy. Eventually there will be outcomes to that insufficiency.

I invite you, I strongly encourage you to look for how you are sufficient and live and lead insufficiency. So if you notice yourself comparing, it comes down to how it feels. You can be triggered into inspiration, or you can be triggered into insufficiency. If you see somebody winning and you want that similar experience, you can leverage it as inspiration.

What it sounds like is, wow, that's amazing. If they can do that, so can I. I'm going to figure this out. That is fueling your actions with empowerment and inspiration. That is what I call comparing without despairing.

So when you're in a moment of compare and despair and you're feeling triggered, just take a moment, take a breath, sit down and ask yourself why. Write it out. Look at the thoughts. Notice the thought errors, the untrue thoughts about yourself, about the other person, about the accomplishment. You're giving it so much momentum. You're giving that that accomplishment on a pedestal. Basically, you're putting it up on a pedestal.

Notice that. Notice where you're being mean to yourself, where you're slipping into insufficiency, where you're collecting evidence of how insufficient you are. Here are all the ways. Notice where you're blaming. Notice where you're abdicating ownership and where you are more focused on the prize and the person than you are on the pride and accomplishment of yourself and working on building up your self-identity to be completely sufficient just as you are right now.

This is deep work, but it's the best work, in my opinion. It's the work that transforms your life and the lives of those you lead because once you learn

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how to do this, then you can offer this to those you lead. Come on in. EPC, now's the time. Let's go. Talk to you next week. Take good care. Bye.

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.