

Ep #348: Empowered Principal® CURRENCY



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 348.

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 and Happy New Year. We are back at it. Brand new school year. Summer was amazing and it's time to gear up. Buckle up, Buttercups, because on this podcast episode, I want to make a declaration. I'm going to make a declaration. Are you ready? Here we go. The Empowered Principal Program is not a cute little podcast. It's not just a coaching program. The Empowered Principal Brand, the program, the coaching, the mentorship, the content, all of it, isn't just another self-help or professional development program. It is about creating a movement in education. It is about creating a movement in education. A movement that enhances and improves the quality of the experience that you have as a school leader. A movement that enhances and improves the quality of the experience your teachers have as teachers. It's a movement that enhances and improves the quality of the experience your students have as students. It's a movement that enhances and improves the quality of the experience your families and members of your school community have through the experience of being members of this community.

The creation of the Empowered Principal was not born simply from the desire to help other leaders learn the skill set of leadership, and although I definitely include leadership skills in my programs because it is a necessary component, and in all honesty, it's what we think, especially as new school leaders, it's what we think we need to do. Yes, you need skill set. Of course you do. But in addition to skills, there is a component to school leadership that is overlooked, and it is the most important part. It's the part that feels like it makes or breaks you as a school leader. And in my experience, what I have witnessed in myself and others is that this component is how one

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defines themselves as a leader. It's what makes somebody think they are a good leader or a bad leader, an exceptional leader or an average leader. It's what develops their influence and their impact and creates their legacy as a school leader. It's what determines whether they enjoy the job or they spin out in frustration, confusion, doubt, overwhelm, misery. And it's the part that gets overlooked because we're so stuck in the weeds that we cannot see.

The part that is overlooked is our belief systems around schools, education as an institution, leadership, relationships, culture, learning, teaching, what we think about people in general, what we think about our bosses, our parents, our students, things like what we think about their motivation, their behaviors, if they have drive, if they have grit, if they have compassion, if they have understanding. We have a lot of opinions about ourselves and the humans that we work with and those opinions and those belief systems about people, about institutions, about past practices, about relationships, about what it means to be a leader, how we define all of these things. All of those belief systems become the experience that you have as a school leader. What you believe is true, you filter it through the lens, and that becomes the truth. It becomes the experience.

So, for example, if you believe the job is too big, too hard, too demanding, too overwhelming, and just too much, that is the experience that you have. When you believe that teachers are stressed out, when they're maxed out, when they're burned out, when they're checked out, this impacts the way we interact with them, the way we approach them. We view them as disempowered. We view them as overwhelmed. We view them as incapable of handling their stress and their workload or we make assumptions that they're checked out or burned out or maxed out and we try to comfort them and coddle them. We disempower them when we see them disempowered. The goal is not to come in and save the day for your teachers. They have power, personal power, but when we believe that they don't, we treat them as though they don't, which creates the result and the

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experience of them feeling like they don't. We actually reinforce those thoughts. It impacts the way we lead our schools.

And when we look at students and we believe they're not engaged or they're not interested or they're not trying hard enough or they're not focused or they're not behaving or they're not caring. I've been hearing post-pandemic it's a different kind of student. And I'm not saying it's not. But when we believe those thoughts and we look for evidence to prove post-pandemic behaviors true, we'll find them because we have the lens on. When we believe that they're not engaged and they're not caring and they're not trying and not focused, all of those things, it influences our decisions and actions around instructional leadership and behavior management. When we focus on what isn't working, we feel at a loss as leaders. We collect all of the things. There's a whole laundry list. This isn't working. That's not working. This teacher's not doing their job. This student's not trying hard enough. Those parents don't care. The superintendent's not listening. Nobody's communicating.

When we're looking at all the things that aren't working, and we're collecting them and piling them up inside of our minds, that impacts how we lead. And when we feel there's a laundry list 10 miles long of everything that's not working, how are we going to lead people through that? We don't feel like we have the power to lead, and we don't. We don't have the power to control other people when all we're doing is looking at what they're doing as not working. And then what we try to do when they're not doing it right, and we have a whole list of reasons as to the things they're not doing right, we try to get them to do what we want them to do or what we think they need to do for us, for the superintendent, for the school board, for the test scores, for their colleagues. And in that attempt, we feel powerless in our ability to lead because we cannot control other people's behaviors, we can't control their thoughts, we can't control their behaviors. And when we try to, we feel defeated and powerless. And our ability to positively influence and inspire people into creating an impact that we mutually desire to create is lost in the attempt to force and control.

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And then when we feel powerless as leaders, imagine, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much power do you feel you have? How much influence, agency, control, autonomy do you feel that you actually have? Most leaders are not saying 10.

They're saying under 5. When we feel powerless, we look to things outside of us, either to blame or to help us in a desperate attempt to try and leverage some leadership technique outside of us to gain back control of the situation. So we're either blaming, it's the district's fault, it's the teacher's fault, it's the student's fault, it's the parent's fault, it's COVID, it's the system, it's the institution, it's out of my hands. We either do that and sit helpless, or we look for something outside of us. Maybe it's this platform. Maybe it's that curriculum. Maybe it's these kind of teachers. Maybe we need that sparkly, shiny new object. Maybe we need to go to this conference. And we look out of desperation for solutions.

Because what we want is to feel good about our school, about our staff, our students, ourselves as leaders, the district, we want to be proud of the district we work in. We want to be proud of our school. We want to feel proud of our students and proud of our teachers. We want to love what we do, how we do it, who we work with, and we want to feel we're making an impact and that we're helping people. So we search for solutions outside of ourselves when we feel powerless. If the belief or the core thought you have is that I don't have the power, then the power must be out there somewhere externally. So we get busy, we search, we read books, we go to conferences, we get on Facebook and we go into the groups and we pose questions for other people, we listen to podcasts like this one, we're looking and seeking wisdom and information outside of ourselves.

And what this program does, what the Empowered Principal program does, is it invites you back into your personal power, into your leadership power, into the agency that you do have. It asks you, what do you think? What do you believe? What do you feel? What decisions and actions can you take? What do you want to experience? What if you did have full control, then what? If you couldn't look outside of yourself for the answers, then what?

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The very institution we work in teaches us from a very young age that the answers and the knowledge and the wisdom and the guidance is all external. Teachers are in charge. Principals are in charge. The curriculum companies, whatever they say in their books, they're in charge. The testing companies, they're in charge. The politicians who make laws and write standards and create these structures, they're in charge. So we have to do what they say. We have to believe what they believe. We have to do it their way. That's not empowerment.

Let me tell you a story. My first few years in school leadership, I felt completely powerless. I want you to take a moment right now, as you're listening to my words, to my voice to this podcast, take a moment to feel how powerlessness feels in your body. Think of a time when you felt completely helpless, completely powerless, almost like destitute. Notice the vibration, the energy in your body. Notice how believing that you are powerless, it impacts your energy immediately. It zaps it right out of you. It erodes your confidence, your determination, your momentum. Notice how it influences your decisions and your actions. It just sucks the very life out of you. Notice how disempowerment questions your very purpose, your vision, your mission, and the point of it all.

This is where I was. I would sit in my office and cry because I had no idea what to do, how to do it, where to tap into any form of power other than the will of my staff, the will of everything outside of me, my secretaries, my instructional coach, my bosses at the district level. I was told to take charge, but I didn't feel I had the power to. And when you feel powerless, particularly when you're in a position where you are expected to have some level of power, it leaves you in a total bind. It was the most constricted and helpless feeling I ever had. It was horrible. It's a terrible feeling to lack agency in a position that is supposed to have more agency. I can remember a moment when I said to myself, I actually feel less autonomy as a principal than I ever did as a teacher. And I can imagine that some of you feel the exact same way.

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In a classroom, I'm the person running the show. I'm the adult. I designed my classroom physically the way it worked for me and put systems in place that worked for me and that worked for students and worked for my families. I had agency over that classroom. And if something didn't work for my kids or my families or myself, I listened to their perspective and we worked together to iron it out and create a win-win. I had agency to make it work. So the reason I founded the Empowered Principal Program was to show principals how to tap back into their personal empowerment. I kept thinking to myself, I was in so much pain, I almost quit so many times, I can feel it right now, the desperation, the angst to want to figure this out, to desire being a great principal, but feeling like I had no way to get there. And I told myself, gosh, there has to be a solution to this. There have to be principals out there somewhere who feel agency, who feel empowered, who feel like they're really good at what they're doing, who aren't overworking, who love their jobs. There has to be somebody in the world out there who's doing it and loving it, but not at the expense of themselves or their personal lives or costing them relationships, costing their marriages, costing relationships with their kids or their families or their friends.

Time after time after time, I talk with clients and they say, I don't have time to go out with friends. I don't even have time for myself, let alone going out with friends. I work. I come home. I take care of my family. I work. I fall asleep. And I do that five to six days a week. And then I pass out on Saturdays only to get up and work on Sundays because I'm worried about Monday. And I do that week after week, month after month.

I hold my breath until I get to the break, sleeping through the break, or getting sick over the break because I'm so depleted, waiting for that summer, relishing in the summer, but not planning the summer so it kind of just slips away, and then we get to this time of year, the end of August, and we're like, what the heck? Where did summer go? Now I've got to do this all over again? And it's like you just sink back to the bottom of the ocean and you don't get to breathe for the next 10 months.

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The reason I founded this program is for you to know there is a way to tap back into your personal empowerment, your own empowerment, and to teach you how to stop looking for others to grant you permission to feel empowered, to stop waiting for the approval of others to wave their little magic wand and to grant you access to feeling good someday about yourself as a leader.

When you accomplish something, you finally someday get to feel amazing about your work and your life and feel proud of your school and love the people you serve and work with and to enjoy the actual journey of the school leadership experience. We think it's out there in front of us. Someday I'll be good. Someday it'll be enough. Someday people will approve of me. Someday my life will be balanced. When does that day come? It can only come when we decide it's here right now, it's available to us today, this school year.

The Empowered Principal experience, in my opinion, is its very own economy, its own form of currency. There is nothing else like it, to my knowledge, in the world. We don't have to agree that the current educational economy, meaning the current framework, the current systems, the current approach, the current experience we're having, which, when I view it, seems very top down, driven by testing and curriculum companies who lobby for legislation that increase their profits, we're very focused on test scores, and that's run by politicians, most of whom have never been educators, who are writing laws, writing policies, expecting us to behave in a certain way, to lead in a certain way, to keep them in their power, to keep education in their power, to keep lobbyists in power so that curriculum and testing companies can make billions of dollars, which they do. They're running the show here right now.

And you know, who's feeling the burn right now are institutions of higher education, colleges, universities. They're seeing the breakdown because kids are saying, hey, you used to be the institution of knowledge. You were the gatekeeper. You decided who got in, who didn't get in. How? Test scores. We can go in a whole other topic. I won't dive down into that, but

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you get what I'm saying. And now kids are saying, look, I don't have to go to college to live a great life, to contribute to the world, to be successful. I know I need to know enough to get online, to have a vision, to have a mission and to sell a product or service in a way that makes me contribute in the way I want to contribute, not in the way you teach me I have to contribute.

The current experience we are having, the current economy, the current currency that we're having, which is overworking, overscheduling, overexerting, burnout, feeling miserable, just playing the game, chasing the, whatever they call it, chasing the moving cheese, whatever that book is called. It never ends. We're trying to find the end of the rainbow only to have the rainbow move. You know how it goes. This isn't the only possible experience. It cannot be. We just need to look through different lenses. We need to put on the lens of empowerment and try it on and see what happens.

The reason the Empowered Principal Program does not agree that this is the only experience available to us is because it does not feel good to most school leaders. There are school leaders who have figured this out on their own. They love what they do. They do it really well. And if they are in their empowerment, great. I'm so happy for them. I could wish nothing more for them. But for the majority of us who are in belief systems that have us limiting our potential, limiting possibilities, limiting our enjoyment, limiting our lives, and putting work before play every single time? Putting work before rest? Putting work before our health? Our physical health? Our mental health? Our emotional health? Putting work before relationships? Putting work before pleasure and joy and experiences outside of work? I can't fathom that that's the only option on the platter for us.

The reason I know that is because it doesn't feel good.

It doesn't feel good, and it's not working. It's not working for school leaders. It's not working for teachers. It's not working for support staff. It's not working for students. If the current economy of education was flowing with

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success and abundance and progress, if kids were confident as students, if they were learning, if they enjoyed coming to school, if teachers felt happy and confident and balanced and effective. If parents were in support of and appreciating their school and appreciating the staff, if district leaders were in harmony with the site-level workers and the work being done at the site levels, if top-down, lobbyist-driven, test score-focused and politician-led schools were working for all of us, if this system, if this current structure was working, then we wouldn't have to question it. We wouldn't have to adjust our approach. It would be working. How do we know we'd feel amazing? But in my experience, this is not the case. It wasn't the case for me as a school leader, and it's not the case for the hundreds of school leaders I have been working with over the last eight years.

In this program, we create the school leadership experience we didn't believe was possible to experience. We start to throw out what others told us to do, told us what to expect, told us what to believe, told us what to think, told us what was possible, the cage that we are in. We rewrite our own job description. We rewrite the script of who we are and what we prioritize when we work, where we focus our energy and attention, how we show up, and why we do this work. Because the way we develop the skillset of a leader is by developing the mindset of the leader. The way we gain the skills of leadership is through the process of developing our minds as leaders. Expanding what we think, expanding what we believe, and what we value, and what we trust, and what we know, and what we feel. Your emotions are the guide. If it's working, you'll know because it feels good. If it's not working, you'll know, because it doesn't feel good. It's as simple as that, and yet we deny it, we decline it, we resist it, we avoid it, we ignore it.

Once you understand how your mind creates your experience, how your mind creates energy and momentum, how your mind determines what you can accomplish, you will create an entirely new economy. Empowered principals experience school leadership in such an evolved way that it's a world of its own. It's a frequency beyond any past school leadership experience. And to those on the outside of it, they look and they say, that's

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not realistic. That's completely unattainable. But for my clients who've tapped into the energy of it, it feels magical and almost too good to be true.

Empowered principals get more done and have so much free time on their hands, they almost feel a little bit guilty that they're not always in constant motion. Because, right, we go back to those old thoughts, it's what their mind and body used to believe was the good principal experience. You better look busy, you better be busy, because good principals are very busy. They're always in motion, they're always running around, they're always living on the edge, right? That's not true, it's not the case. You create an experience so powerful that it takes your mind and your body time to normalize the improved experience.

I have a client who finished her second year of her principalship this past summer, and she had created so much flow that she felt her job had become too easy, too simple, too much time. Can you imagine? She had to get used to the new economy that she had created for herself. She created so much time in her work week that it felt awkward to her at first. Her mind wondered what would people think if she wasn't more visible on her campus, if she wasn't running around scurried and super busy and a little discombobulated. She worried that they would think that she wasn't getting other things done or doing enough, except that she was. She was keeping up. She was keeping up with her emails, her deadlines, her appointments, her meetings, her paperwork, her observations, all the behavior management. She mastered her mind around her thoughts about her time, productivity, planning, and creating balance for herself, which then created balance at her school. It's a well-oiled machine. Her mind shifts, the belief shifts, are what allowed her to be more decisive, to slow her actions down long enough to actually plan with intention, to be a valuable planner, and to prepare herself to select her priorities and to learn how to say no to things that weren't the top priority. She delegated tasks that she used to believe she had to do all by herself, and she held conversations that used to make her feel unsure and afraid.

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I have another client who spends more time having fun, and I'm talking about during the school year, not just over the Summer of Fun challenge that we just had. This principal, she is the poster child of Summer of Fun, Fall of Fun, Winter of Fun, Spring of Fun. She has more fun during her year than I could ever have imagined back when I was a principal.

She blew my mind. She runs an incredible school, and she travels, she explores, she exercises, she relaxes. She lives her life both at school and outside of school to the fullest. A shout out to Rebecca, and a shout out to Erin. You guys know I'm talking about you, right? Not to mention, I've got Amy, Jenna, Erica, Pamela, Lisa, there's so many names, there's so many people. I wish I could name you all, but I've worked with a lot of people in the last few years. I've got Jason. I've got Nate, Chris. There's so many people. So many people who live amazing lives because of this program. And I want you to have this. It's possible. I want you to love your career so much because you love your life so much. Because you feel fulfilled.

Fulfillment is not about raising test scores, having a healthy school culture, getting your work done on time, your observations done on time, or implementing some kind of program at your school. Those are lovely things. You can be successful in your job and not fulfilled in your life.

I want you to be fulfilled, to be happy with yourself, your staff, your students, your school, and your personal life. I want you to be so tuned in to your internal compass that you know what you want and what you don't, what you need, and what you need to do to get what you need. To expand what you think is possible for yourself and to imagine experiencing that amazingness. And not just to stop at imagining it and seeing it in your mind and feeling that it feels good to imagine it. It feels just as good, actually. But I want you to bring it into existence. To plan for it. To plan on it happening and to design it with intention so that it can happen, that you are living that life. You're not just imagining it, you're actually living it.

I realized something this morning, and it's so powerful that I had to record this podcast in the energy of this moment. While I was on my morning walk,

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I want to share something with you. I have been on an extremely personal journey this past year, and it's one that I'm going to share more about in the future, but I'm still working through it. It's still a little tender, it's a little raw, and I'm not to the other side yet. But it's been a significant impact on my life. The impact has been so profound that my entire future has been rattled. It was truly a catalytic event. And the future that I imagined is not the future I'm going to have, it's been shattered. And I've been working with my life coach to process the pain. The pain, the grief, the shock, the disbelief of the feels that come along with such an unexpected event, but we've also been doing something brilliant. We've been expanding my mind on what is possible for me, for my business, for my clients, for my life, for every aspect of my life, for every aspect of my business.

I promise you this, the experience that I have had personally, I now see it as an opportunity to expand and deepen my work with you as clients, to expand your lives. I have learned so much, I've grown so much, and at the deepest level, I see my empowerment. It's been fun for me to see how I truly hold the pen that writes the story of my life, even when there are major plot twists in the story. I'm still the one who designs the script. I am the producer, the director, and the editor. So when life offers that plot twist, I'm the one who gets to edit it and then leverage that plot twist as an opportunity because I'm the main character. There are people in your life who are characters in your story. They have impact on you, but they're not the main character. You are the main character. The story of your life is about you. What's happening with the side characters, the B characters, you decide. You determine. What they do and say can impact you, but you can leverage it to your advantage, to create opportunity.

So I have spent a great deal of time imagining and pushing the limits of what I think is possible. And I noticed something. I noticed this morning, right when I was walking up the stairs to my new little place, and I thought, oh, I'm making decisions, actual decisions in my life, taking action in my life based on what I thought was possible. Not what I most desired to create in my life, but what I thought was possible to create. And the only reason that

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I had not been planning my future based on what I desired is because I really did not think that it was available to me, that it was even possible. I caught it. And it stopped me in my tracks. I was like, wow, the only reason that I'm planning this trajectory is because I don't think that trajectory is available to me. And what's so powerful is that just the awareness of the limiting belief is what breaks it down and allows you to expand into bigger possibilities.

So the moment I saw, oh my gosh, I was actually going to take all this action in my life because I was like, this is the limit of what I believe is possible for myself, my business, my future. So I'm going to go down this path because it feels, it feels true. It feels in alignment. It feels in reach. And then I had another thought. It's like, but I actually like, this is going to be great, but what I want is that, and I don't think I can have that. I don't see how that's possible. I just don't see it. It's too far out of reach for me. So I just didn't even go there. I didn't even plan it. But now, and this is something I'm going to teach in EPC, valuable planning, it's going to be a course, a bonus course that I offer inside of the membership, I realized I can still take the path of possibility, predictability, basically. It's like, I can predict that I can handle this trajectory, but I'm not going to close off the potentiality. There's predictability, possibility, and then potentiality and I wasn't even considering the potential of my life, the potential of my business. I was barely even playing with possibility. What if it were possible? I wasn't even going there because I didn't think it was possible. Do you see it? It's so amazing when you catch a limiting thought because it changes the trajectory of what you think is possible.

So EPC is changing the way we approach school leadership. We discuss what brings about change, what generates momentum, what feels good. We use our internal compass. If it feels good, keep going, you're on track. If it doesn't feel good, let's take a peek because something's off track. Let's compound what's working and let's review what's not. To expand our influence and impact on our own lives and on others requires us to look at where we're limiting ourselves without even realizing it.

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I invite you into this program and into this work every single one of you. There is nothing holding you back.

There are three doubts. You don't think you're going to be able to come in and show up and do the work or you don't think I have what it takes or you don't think the program has what it takes or your belief in those are I want to do it I can do it. I believe in her. I believe in the program, but I have a fear. What if I invest time and it doesn't work? What if I invest money and I don't get my return on investment? We get so clingy with our money. It's a form of currency. We get clingy with our money. We get clingy with our time and our energy and you should they are your top assets. They are your forms of currency that you use. Currency is an exchange of value. I give you my time for something in exchange for something valuable. In exchange I give you money and in exchange I get something valuable. I give you my energy. I get something in exchange for that energy. Notice. But it comes back to even if you're afraid to pay for EPC, notice it. Because you're thinking I'm not gonna show up and get what I came for or the program's not gonna give me what I came for or the coach isn't gonna give me what I came for. It still comes back to the belief triad. There's the belief in you, the belief in me as your coach, and the belief in the program. Which one is it?

So, if you're interested in this work, the doors of this round for EPC close in one week from today. This is your last opportunity. There will not be another podcast encouraging you, inspiring you. This is your last opportunity to get in for this round. If you are interested but you feel any form of resistance, you can coach yourself on it, or if you need more information or you want me to help you come to a clean decision, schedule a 15-minute Q&A call with me. I will speak with you directly, I will answer any questions you have, and I will coach you to a clean decision. I do not convince people to join the group. If you don't want to be in, I don't want you in, because it brings down the energy of the group. I want people who are inspired and encouraged and are hopeful and want their empowerment. That's the filter. We only allow people in who are all in. If you're all in and you're ready to go but you

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have some questions or you need a little bit of coaching to come to a clean decision, schedule the call. The link is in the show notes. This is your last opportunity to start the year by stepping into your full empowerment.

Have an amazing week. I love you all. Take great care. Happy New Year. We'll talk next week. I hope to see you in EPC. 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.