

# Ep #351: How Taking on a New Challenge Will Transform Your Leadership with Wendy Cohen



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 351.

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.

Angela: Hello, my empowered leaders. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. I have a very special and dear guest on the podcast today. Her name is Wendy Cohen. She is an AP in New York City, which I think is amazing. She has been working with me for how long, Wendy?

Wendy: Since spring of 2020.

Angela: Yes, we have been on a journey together, and we're so excited to have this conversation with you all today. Wendy has had some amazing gains, amazing wins, and we're just here to talk about it and share with you guys the power of coaching, the beauty of coaching. Really, what I invited her on the podcast, in my heart, the intention of this podcast is to celebrate her success. She has so many things to share with you today, and we're going to dive right in and talk about it.

But really, my intention is to celebrate her life, celebrate her professional life, her personal life, and to invite you in, all of you as the listeners, into celebrating because this can also be your experience and her experience is just one of many empowered principal experiences. But hers has been so delightful and such a joy to witness that I wanted her to share her story with you in her own way, in her own words. So welcome to the podcast, Wendy.

Wendy: Thank you. thank you for saying that. It is felt and deeply appreciated. Yeah, I think it's really just a continuation or a summary of our

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last three coaching sessions that we've had toward the end of June and into July and integrating a lot of things that we've coached on over four years, but in particular, in the last six weeks or so.

Sort of this theme of facing new challenges and feeling like you're a novice and you're brand new at something and growing through it and how your identity shifts through that process. Then as you move through, feeling proud about your progress. And, like you said, taking the time to celebrate and reflect and feel like we don't do that enough as school leaders or in general. So it's welcome as an opportunity to take a little bit of time to look back on the journey and feel like, wow, look how far we've come.

Angela: Yes, it really is. I am actually working on that myself and going deeper in planning with intention my life in all of the aspects in business, in professional, personal relationships, health, just anything. I'm really shifting from this idea of like having a goal to creating a plan because a goal, to me, is like a to-do list. It's like you hit it or you didn't, you check it off or you don't. It feels like it's an experience that you have for a moment when it's a goal, right?

We're going to talk about this because Wendy did something new in her life this year that it was a goal, but it really turned into a journey and into it's an evolution. It was more of a plan and an identity shift. But a goal is I'm going to run this race. Then you check it off. I ran the race. I crossed the finish line. I started, I finished, I crossed it off. That's a goal. That's exciting for that moment that you crossed the line or maybe that day. You bask in the glory and then it's gone.

But the journey and the intention and the identity shift and the plan of becoming a runner who runs races, that's a different approach to your life planning. So can you tell them about your experience?

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This has just been such a fun thing to talk with you because I am a former runner. I used to run long distance, short distance. I was really into racing, but I did not start running until I moved to California. So I did not start running until my mid-twenties, but it became such an integral part of my life until my body decided that running was maybe something I wasn't going to do on the daily. But tell the listeners your experience, Wendy, of becoming a new runner, being a runner.

Wendy: The connection with coaching on the school leadership side and coaching in the personal side really came through in this running journey because there are so many lessons that I learned through coaching as a new leader that I applied to the running journey. Now having checked off my goal, but also gone through this whole transformation through the training months that I'm now bringing back to school leadership as well. It's sort of feeding this cycle of building a new sense of self and this new identity and new confidence as a result.

But going back to the beginning of the running journey, I have so many friends and family members who run. They love it. It's their life. My husband is a runner, and I'm someone who never even ran the mile in high school when we had to do the fitness test every year. I faked it. I walked, and I never got it.

Angela: I got sick.

Wendy: Oh no.

Angela: It really made me sick. I ran, and it made me, they made us run like our senior year a mile. I was like I can't do that. I physically got sick.

Wendy: I never got it. It was just not something that I was interested in. Or when New Year's resolutions come around, everyone's like, this is the

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year I'm going to run a marathon. Never really crossed my mind to even add that to my list of goals or things that I was interested in. But this year I reconsidered it, and I said, you know what? This would be a way to challenge myself. Go outside of my comfort zone. Try something new. See if I like it. I might surprise myself and actually find out that I really enjoy it.

Also to be able to have this shared interest with those in my community. My husband, my in-laws, his sister, it was part of this race. When they signed up for this 25K, now they signed up for it last year and ran in 2023. I said, nope, this is not the year for me. I'm planning a wedding. I have other things I'm working on. Not the time, but maybe next year.

So January 2024 comes around, and they say, we're signing up for that race again. Last year you said you would think about it. I said, you know what? Let me give this a try. In the past, I would have thought there's a steep learning curve. I have zero confidence as a runner, especially around people who do have experience with this.

That feeling of being new at something and just being scared of that uncertainty, the lack of confidence, there's certain lingo and jargon. I don't know what intervals are. I don't know what tapering is. I don't know how to do the electrolytes and gels. There's a whole world, a whole subculture of running that was unfamiliar to me that I was really afraid to explore, I think, because of that new feeling. This year I said, you know what? Let's try it.

Being new at something in general can be scary. I remember when I was a new AP, being very impatient with that beginner mindset and being new at something and wanting to know how to do everything right away, wanting to go from A to Z overnight and realizing that you don't start by running 13 miles. You start by maybe walk and run one mile and that you do have to work to get there. So this being new as a runner, I thought, well, let me take

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what I've learned and try and apply it, go outside my comfort zone, and make it an opportunity to grow and expand.

I think when we talked about it in coaching, it was really a conversation about the fear of being uncomfortable, being worth going through that because the things that you might be missing out on and taking a risk knowing that it could be like an assessment of what the outcome might be on the other side of that risk. Am I going to feel embarrassed? Am I going to fall and scrape my knees? I did the fear of all those things.

It's worth going through that process of feeling uncomfortable because of what can happen on the other side. I think in becoming a new runner, I said, you know what? Let's take this risk because it probably will be worth it. Let's see what comes out of it knowing it will get easier. Knowing I'm not going to know how to do it right away, knowing I have to start with one mile and I would work my way up.

But through coaching was able to sort of see how in the past, my experiences as a new leader and being new at things, being newly engaged, moving to a new apartment, all these things we've coached on over four years of becoming an AP, getting engaged, buying a car, moving to a new apartment, getting married, all of these experiences when I was new or in transition and realizing what could come on the other side of it.

I said, you know what? Let's commit to this training cycle. Let's go through these 14 weeks, pretty much 16 weeks with a little bit of a base building in the beginning there. I said you know what? We're going to jump in, and we're going to try it.

Angela: It has been so fun to watch you go through being new in multiple facets of your life because with full transparency, being new feels scary. I think it's scarier for adults than it is for kids. Like we do feel scared at

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certain things as a child in our lives, like maybe the amusement park felt scary for the first time or going to somebody's house you didn't know, those things.

But also I think about kindergartners when they walk into a room, they are so excited for the new. They have a sense of humor with the new. Like if they don't know it, they don't feel embarrassed. They just ask, what's this? What's that? Can I touch this? Can I do that? Bringing that lightheartedness, that sense of humor, just being like, oops, sorry. I didn't know. I'm new, right? Like having some levity around being new.

You did kind of a trail run. It wasn't just, so when you said you fell down and scraped your knee, it's not like you were just running and tripped. It was you were probably on a trail where there was some rigorous hiking or all of that.

But I just love watching you be new over and over again because there's still that ledge o, as you're making the decision, there's this teetering of like, am I going to jump? Am I going to take the leap? Am I going to try the new thing? The fear never stops coming up.

But what I've witnessed in you, Wendy, is the ability to like, I recognize this stage. I know that this feeling is temporary. I know that after I jump, after I say yes, and when I do commit to trying the new thing, being in it and falling and scraping, those things aren't actually as bad as we anticipate they will feel because you know you've handled it time and time again.

Buying the new car, that actually felt like one of the scariest things you ever did, right? Then the moving was another big thing. Then getting married was a huge deal for you. The process of allowing yourself to be a bride while maintaining the integrity of your school and leading a school, especially in a high power, high stakes situation, state, school, all of that.

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Being new in all these facets has really just blossomed you into a person. I've seen the identity shift in I can do hard things. I can handle anything that comes my way. I'm really okay with being new. Being new isn't a bad thing. It's actually what I want. I want to be new at new things.

Wendy: Yeah, and through all of those experiences and coaching the mindset shift from this is so scary that I'm going to shy away from it to it's an opportunity for growth and an opportunity for expansion and up leveling. This idea of if you're not growing, you're staying the same. I actually don't want to stay the same. I actually do want to grow.

Knowing, as you said, it's like phase one of a transformation is oh, this feels a little sticky. Uh-oh, this is uncomfortable. But knowing that it will get easier and being able to take the time to look back and reflect, even on the little gains. Like when on my little running app, I would see it went from one mile to three miles and then from three to four. I was like, wow, I can run a 5k now. I couldn't even run a 5k a month ago.

I think seeing that little bit of progress and taking the time to look and see where you've come from through this conversation, even, and all the things that we just mentioned through what we've coached through over these last couple of years. It's a nice reminder of like, I remember when I was in the new phase. Even going back to being a brand new teacher, a first year teacher. Like, yeah, like that was a hard year. I got through it. I even ended up becoming a school leader after all of that growth.

Angela: Yes. I love the part where you were talking about if you're not expanding, if you're not trying new things, you're stagnating. I think there's a place where people are like what's too much? Like, am I just going to live in discomfort every single day in order to grow and evolve? You can if you want to. But sometimes we reach a plateau where we take a moment and



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we look around, and we're like, I know what I'm doing. I'm not new right now. Things feel really good.

I say get on that little, I picture like floating out down the river, right? You're in your floaty. You've got a refreshment in hand and life is so good. Take that all in. That's a beautiful space to be in it. I don't think consider it a plateau at all. I consider it the celebration phase.

But if you only -- like there is a moment where you start to feel stagnation. It shifts from like everything's going so great. I love my life. I love my job. Everything's going great. I think we're wired as humans that dissonance comes back and there's this little urge or this like desire for something new or different.

We actually do want things to be new and different and exciting and challenging and fun. That being new is not all scary and bad. It's actually engaging and exciting, and it's curiosity, and it's growth. So there's both. There's the growth. There's running up that mountain, literally in your case, right? Running up those trails, falling, scraping. It's that journey and that discomfort and the grit and the strength and getting up earlier, like feeling tired the next day, but feeling good tired. There's growth. Then there's the celebration. But eventually you're right. That tickle of desire for the next growth does come in.

If you're afraid, if that calling makes you feel afraid of the growth, there are people who literally stay in the same job at the same place for 40 years. that's all they do. If that continued to feel good for 40 years, do it. But the empowered principals that I attract into my world tend to be people who are like this is fun for this amount of time. Then what else? And what else and what else and what else.

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Wendy: Yeah. As I'm getting to know my own tendencies, we've coached over the years of how do you know that it's an authentic one? How do you know when you're just feeling kind of pressured, or you're feeling that rushing pace? I remember moving into this apartment and being like well, in three years, we're going to be buying a house. So I don't want to buy a couch because we can't get furniture now because I'm going to have to get new furniture.

You're like hold on. We just finished one transition and you're already rushing forward to the next one. I had to learn that was one of my tendencies of okay, let me sit and bask in the moment of now of being in this apartment and not worry about is the couch going to fit in my house? Because the future is coming up down the line.

I think going through the new leader process, that was a push year in the professional sphere. Going through the engagement and the wedding planning process, that was a push in my personal life and in that atmosphere. There was a reason that I didn't sign up to do that run last year when I was invited to because I think I knew that I was expanding in a different way and was wanting to really be present in that aspect of my life.

In this newlywed year, deepening my connection with my new husband through this running journey, it felt like an aligned thing to do in this year, in this time. But notice I'm not searching for a house. I'm not looking for a new job. I'm not trying to do some of these other things because I think we can get on the roller coaster of what's next, what's next.

Sort of finding the happy medium between I love my life, I'm soaking it all in, things are perfect and I love and accept myself just as I am now. I want to grow, I want to expand, I want to up-level. When the time is right, I'm going to have another push year in some aspect of my life to evolve myself

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and evolve my identity. I do have future goals. I would love to own a house. I'd love to start a family.

Professionally, I may not be an assistant principal forever. When the time comes to make a transition, I think we'll be coaching on it, but I'm sure I'll be feeling into the timing. Does this feel aligned in this moment?

For me, this year running, it was the time to finally give it a try after seeing other people go through it and knowing that it wasn't always my challenge or it wasn't always the right time. This did feel like an aligned time to take on this type of challenge and this type of personal growth.

We're school leaders. We're kind of on the type A. We're kind of in the personal development world. We're life coaching all of our staff members on a day-to-day basis. We're growing small humans in our schools. It's very tempting to sort of sign up for every challenge and want to sort of fast forward the process on some of these changes.

In this moment, I'm grateful that we've coached so much on the slowing down and the checking in and the why does this feel like the right time versus is it really coming from within, or is it an outside pressure? Is it judgment of myself? Is it perceived judgment from other people? Trying to really turn off the outside noise and really listen to my why and coming from within from me of why is this the time and what is my reason for wanting to do this?

If it was just to be able to post a picture on Instagram at the end, that was not a good enough why to be coming home after a long day and putting on the shoes and going. You really have to want to do it for a compelling reason to sign up for a 25K trail race, which actually ended up being 17 and a half miles, not 15. But you don't just do that because you feel like it or because you want to post a picture at the end.

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Knowing your why and knowing that it was an aligned choice, I think through coaching and being able to feel really confident with the decision helped me to be successful through the whole training. Not just checking off the goal, but evolving through the process of going through it.

Angela: I really love, and I want to reiterate something that you said where we are people that love the drive of the thing, right? We are goal-driven. We're plan-driven. We are achievement-driven, accomplishment-driven. What burns us out faster than anything or what feels actually less fulfilling is to try and have push. I love how you said that like a push area. Like to be pushing in all areas of your life and being new in something all around in all aspects, that is what thins out the process.

I love your like alignment with yourself. Where is the area I'm going to push this year? We don't need to push in everything all at once. That's where you get overwhelmed and discombobulated, but it ultimately, it discourages you. It defeats you. You feel deflated because you can't be growing in every area all at once. But when you focus on one, it impacts all of the others. That is so, so powerful.

I wanted to reiterate that because we think we've got to be healthy and we've got to be the best parent and we've got to be the best partner and we've got to be the best principal and we're going to do, that's like New Year's resolution energy. Then it fizzles because it's too much. The brain's just like, I can't do, the body can't do all of this.

But when you focus on with intention, what's my one area of growth that I want for me that matters to me this year? Maybe it is health. Maybe it is professional. Maybe it is personal. Being decisive about that and sticking to it, knowing there's plenty of time and space for the rest of it.

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Like last year was about the wedding and being a principal and being a partner. But the wedding was the focus, the new. Before that, it was the move. Before that, it was the car. Before that, it was the AP. Now this year was the running. This was the focus. Then you'll choose something next year, which I think is, it's a brilliant way.

This is the concept that I teach in the Balance Mastery Program where balance looks different every single year, every single three-month plan you create, depending on your focus for that time of your life.

Wendy: Yeah. I 100% agree with, as you said, the connections between these different areas of your life. Last year as I was planning a wedding, I was thinking to myself, if I can evacuate my building for a fire drill and have 500 people get out in four minutes, I can figure out how everyone's going to get from the ceremony to the cocktail area and then from the cocktail area to the reception. So having gone through that growth as an AP helped me on my journey of the wedding planning.

Now in this running journey saying to myself, well, I had to figure out how to do time management when I was planning a wedding on top of my job, and I had to figure out how to be more intentional with my time. Now I have to figure out how to fit training for this run into my life.

Well, let me take what I learned through my wedding planning journey, through my new AP journey, and apply that to how am I going to fit this running training into my schedule. It all is integrated, and it all does apply. Because, at the end of the day, I'm one person, and I have 24 hours in my day, whether I'm wearing my AP hat, my wife hat, my runner hat. It did seamlessly kind of dovetail on all of the coaching we've done around expanding my concept of time and not having that scarcity mindset approach to time.

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Because training for a half marathon for 25K, if you're running 25 miles a week, you're dedicating four, five, six, seven hours, and that's not even including eating enough, stretching before and after, all those extra showers, changing clothes, all the other things that go into it.

I don't think if we hadn't coached around time so much when I was a new leader, or if I had gone through some of the other transitions that I've gone through, it would have come as easily with this new challenge in the running sphere, just knowing that so many of those coaching principals apply and crossover.

Angela: Yeah. Let's talk, I was, you read my mind about the time management thing because people are all sitting here listening like, oh my gosh. Like I'm barely able to figure out how to fit work into my life, let alone any other kind of personal project, whether it's for pleasure or just personal growth or gain. Just can you tell them the process of how you personally were able to do this?

Wendy: In my 2023 fitness life was not a runner, but liked to think that I was someone who was kind of active. I like to go to Pilates. I would squeeze that in probably three times a week. So I was already making my health a priority to some extent. Now this was like expanding to another level of commitment to physical health.

The good thing with growing as a runner is that you do have to start small, and that forces you to not overdo it right in the beginning. If I had tried to run five miles in the beginning, I probably would have gotten injured and would have gotten discouraged and just quit. So knowing that all I had to do was go out and do one mile, and it would take 15, 20 minutes and I would come home after. That was all I had to do. It's kind of hard to talk yourself out of 15 minutes.

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Like if you can't find 15 minutes for yourself in the day, it's an opportunity to reflect and see like, how long am I on Twitter? How many hours a day am I looking at emails? How many hours a day am I spending doing things that maybe could be delegated or could be reallocated in another space and time or just done more efficiently? Staying up late instead of going to bed early and then being able to wake up early and having that time.

So starting out small with that 15 minutes, I said okay, we can get one mile in. I would do that largely on the weekend, but I did try and incorporate it probably two days a week during the work week as well. Then as the months go on, when you start going from one mile to two miles and two miles to three miles and building upon it.

Knowing that I didn't have to go home and carve out 15 minutes, but I had to go home and carve out 45 minutes, I would sort of backwards plan and say okay, if I know that I need to run for 45 minutes after work, I'm not going to have time to meal prep on that day. I'm going to make sure that I take care of that on Sunday, or I'm going to make a double batch of this the other day.

As that grew and then you're doing eight, 10, 12 mile training runs, and that was like just a Sunday thing, I really made it a point to carve out that time for myself on Sunday and try and front load other things during the week, on the weekend, trying to just be more efficient. Working as a team with my husband made a big difference with that as well. I knew which days he was training, which days I was training.

We tried to collaborate, but it did kind of force us to zoom out and take a bird's eye view of the week and where my time was going and do a little audit of some of the ways that I could take time back. Whether that was leaving earlier so I didn't have to sit in as much traffic and getting that time

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back when I came home, or perhaps some of the meal planning stuff for the weeknights or going to bed earlier so I would wake up earlier.

It was a little bit challenging in the beginning, but I'm actually shocked at how much time you have if you are intentional with it. When you are very honest and self-reflective, your phone does tell you how much time you spend on apps. I don't need to be spending an hour on Twitter every day. That hour could easily go towards running, even if I'm using it professionally, even if I'm using it as a healthy outlet and not something like a phone addiction situation. It's not an essential.

If it's a priority, and it's important to me, and my values are I want to focus on my health and I want to accomplish this goal, and I want to be committed and dedicated to the training plan that I've made, you set up a calendar, you write the miles on it, you cross out each day and you go through and you say well, that was the priority. It wasn't a priority to talk on the phone, to go on Twitter, to stay up late watching a show.

I was able to check in with my values and audit my time and find the time. Just the nitty gritty, knowing that I was going to be building it out over the months, it also helped. Starting small and then okay, what else can I reallocate? What else can I move around? How else can I find more time in my day and building it over the months?

By the time I was running for four hours on a Sunday, when the race was done, I was like, I just got four hours back. Now look at all these things that I could do now that I have all this time that I've created and all this space in my schedule, just from it's like a secondary bonus of having gone through this process of learning this new point of view about how I want to spend my days, my weeks, my months, and really that becomes your life.



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I mean, that's my life over the course of 2024 is I spent all that time dedicated to improving my health, to running, and opens up so many new possibilities moving forward that I wasn't even anticipating that as like a secondary bonus of this whole training cycle.

Angela: Yeah, here's what I hear. The theme that I'm hearing is once you decide, you make a decision that something is a priority and you put that first on the calendar. You're like this is, it's a non-negotiable. It has to go on the calendar. Then you reallocate, you redistribute the other tasks.

What you find is that what you end up shaving off are things that were just kind of consuming time versus being the most intentional about the time. Again, there's nothing wrong with being on social media or watching Netflix or any of that, as long as you're doing it with intention, and it's healthy. But when you do have a goal or you have a desire or you commit to it and you prioritize it.

When that goes in first, it feels like it's almost seamless or magical that like everything that needed to get done still gets done. But now this running thing is just a part of your new identity. It's a part of who you are as a person. I'm a runner. It goes into my calendar. I'm a school leader. That goes into my calendar. I'm a wife. That goes into my calendar.

Now, what I want to say is for those of you who are principals, spouses, maybe you're caretaking for elderly family members, or you have young children, and you're listening to this and we're talking about prioritizing physical health and running or some kind of movement, physical movement in your life, but you are caretaking for young children, older adults, or you are prioritizing other things in your life. Here's what I want to say.

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Again, be intentional with those priorities and do not use Wendy's experience to beat yourself up. If you are prioritizing childcare or healthcare of a loved one and you're thinking to yourself, well, I'm lazy or I'm not managing my time well enough because I'm not running on top of all of these things.

Remember, your push year, what you're doing is you're choosing to build up your relationship with your children and your parenting skills, maybe your spouse and your relationship and co-parenting with your spouse or caretaking. I'm just thinking of a couple examples here, but there's a lot of things that we have to prioritize in our lives. I've done this personally.

So I'm speaking to it because it's very easy to hear Wendy's story and say well, like, oh, it's easy for you. You don't have kids, or you're young, but everybody has dualities in their life. Everybody has something else going on in addition to school leadership. Your extra things may be childcare. It may be adult care, healthcare. It may be planning a wedding. It may be going through a divorce. It may be moving that year.

Or I mean, there's an endless realm of what would I call them? Pivotal moments or like chapters that you go through that you might not be able to go for a run. Just as Wendy said the year before, it was about her wedding. So she said maybe another time.

Just know this. If you're in a chapter of child rearing or you're in a chapter of parent care or you're in a chapter of getting married or getting divorced or relationship changes, family changes, anything personal that's big and you're prioritizing it, be still with that. Be at peace with that. Remind yourself, I'm choosing to focus on this right now as my area of newness and growth knowing that it's a chapter. It is a chapter and it's a beautiful chapter. Some child rearing is a long chapter.

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Maybe, I know my sister and I are caring for elderly parents right now. I just went home to take care of my dad, and it's a chapter, right? So I might not be going to the gym five times a week or four times a week anymore. It might be once or twice because my priority is my dad's wellbeing and taking care of my sister, who's the caretaker, right?

So just know that everyone has duality in their lives. You're never just a school principal. Even if you're a single person with no children and no home, even if there's not a lot of other attachments, there's still the version of you that's a principal, and there's other things going on in your life. It's okay to not be trying to do it all at once.

Again, I just want to reiterate, that is when you go a mile wide, you only go an inch deep. So I invite you to consider one thing at a time. If you have a wipeout year or a wipeout day or unexpected, unforeseen circumstances come up that re-shift your priorities, allow that.

One of the things my coach is teaching me to do, and I'm going to add this to the three-month planning because it's so valuable. She takes the priorities, and she puts them on Post-its. Because instead of scratching it out or erasing it and say I failed. This was a wipeout. We're never going to accomplish that. You just move it. You just move it. Because for Wendy, it was never that she said I'm never going to be a runner because she was planning a wedding. She just said, I'm going to move that to another chapter, to another timeframe.

Where we get caught up in planning and balance and prep and expanding and growing and expanding our identities is we want it to be in this certain timeframe. We want it to happen right here, right now by this date. if it doesn't, it's this very all or none feeling.

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But that feels terrible. It's discouraging. It's defeating. It's like graspy. It's well, you guys know the energy where like I need this to happen right here, right now. We try to control and coerce and force things to happen. Versus this goal is on a Post-it, and the Post-it is going to keep coming with me. If I just find the space and time when I can actually prioritize the running and put it in three days a week and from 15 minutes to 45 minutes to however hours probably when you're trail running, eventually it comes together into this moment of accomplishment.

Now, Wendy, I guess I want to transition to asking you tell them about. Actually, you have a great story about the actual experience because there was the anticipation of the experience, what you thought it was going to look and feel like. Then there was the actual race day. That's a great story in and of itself.

But I'm curious to know for you, what is your identity after the goal, right? The actual moment of goal was checked off, but there's an identity shift in you. Let's talk about your identity as a runner in future terms. Like, is it going to be something you continue to do? Is it just something I've done. I've accomplished. It was a one and done. Is it going to be this balance? Like, let's first tell the story because it's so good about the day of. Then I'd love to hear your thoughts on your identity moving forward.

Wendy: Yeah. So as far as the actual race day, end of June, months and months of training and planning, I did my final longest long run, which was a full half marathon, 13.1 miles. Was so thrilled with that and was feeling like, you know what? I was consistently training. I showed up. I got to see the little chart on my app going up and up. I was proud of myself just for following through and committing to the plan.

At that point I had sort of said to myself, you know what? Regardless of what happens on race day, I know that I got this far, and I accomplished the

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training. At that point, even after having run a half marathon and running 20 something miles a week and four days a week, all of this, I will say that I don't know if I ever really took on the identity of and I'm a runner. I realize that sounds silly because if you're running, you're a runner. If you're running four days a week, you are a runner.

The same thing happened to me as a new AP as well, where I was like I'm still in this sort of mindset of I'm in this imposter syndrome mode, or I'm still transitioning from teacher to leader. I think I had to remind myself like if your job is an AP, and you come to the school every day and you're a school leader, you are a school leader.

So the same happened with the running of all right, I've gone through this training process. I'm a runner. I'm going to show up to this race. I accomplished this whole training cycle. I know I can run the distance. I'm proud of myself. Let's see what happens on race day. Regardless of if I make any special time or anything, I will have succeeded.

Of course on race day, it was pouring thunderstorms, a tornado warning. The trails were completely washed out with mud. All the rocks were extremely slick where people were slipping and falling. I think one girl had to get stitches because she had fallen at some point during the race, like at mile 10 or something.

So the morning of the race, I said you know what? The goal the whole time was just to finish and not get injured. That's exactly what I'm going to do, whether it's sunshine, rain, mud, freezing cold, regardless, heat stroke. We were sort of going in knowing that it wasn't going to be ideal conditions and knowing that the times were probably going to reflect that.

By the end of the 17 and a half that we ended up running, we're soaked through to the bone. Our shoes were muddy. Like every step was like, I had

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to take my glasses off because I couldn't see, obviously. The rain was all fogging up my glasses and the water droplets and everything. So none of that was what I had envisioned for how the day was going to go.

At the end, what we thought was going to happen was we crossed the finish line. We'd have a nice celebration. It was a camping situation. So we were going to camp out that night and have a fire and celebrate and have a few drinks with some of the other runners and connect.

Of course we get back to the campsite after running and we say okay, let's get out of these wet clothes and change. The tent is blown over. The poles are bent in half. We said I think we got to pack up and head home. That's exactly what we did. So none of that celebration happened that night anyway.

We go home. We had to cut our weekend short. We didn't get to hang out with my sister-in-law and my brother-in-law and my nephew who all ran the race as well and drove from the other side of the state, six hour drive to get home. We unpacked the car. We're hosing down everything because it's covered in mud. The next day I said we didn't really get to have our little celebration. We had gotten some fancy drinks or something, like a non-alcoholic cider, whatever.

We said, you know what? We're going to uncork this drink. We're going to have a little cheers. We're going to have a little moment, even if it's not at the finish line with the other runners in Western Pennsylvania in the middle of this town where everyone's doing the trail run. It's a whole big deal. I said we're going to have our own celebration at home because we still accomplished something. We still finished the race. It's still something to feel proud of.

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Coaching with Angela actually even enhanced that thought to say, not only did you finish, you finished in spite of probably the worst conditions possible and didn't get injured, didn't get discouraged. I'm sure there are people who saw the weather forecast and said you know what? I'll eat the \$50 registration fee and just say whatever because I don't really feel like going out for five hours in the pouring rain and getting soaking wet. We did it anyway.

Just showing up for the actual race and finishing the same way, just showing up throughout training that alone is something to be proud of. So we had to kind of create our own new vision of what the celebration looked like. We had to change our expectations of what the race was going to feel like in the moment. But we made sure to find a little bit of time to celebrate and to have that standing on top of the mountain feeling at the end.

Because I don't want to say that we were denied that, but it just didn't go the way that we envisioned, or we didn't have the weekend that we had planned. Yet we still accomplished something great. We still set out to run a certain distance, and we did it. So we said we're not going to miss out on our celebration. We're going to still have that moment for ourselves.

Angela: Yes. This is very important. Wendy and I just talked about this like this week. Celebration is very underrated, and it's very easy to overlook it. But it's the one thing that we actually want most when it comes to any goal, challenge, adversity situation. We want the celebration. We need to honor and acknowledge the hard work we've done.

It's like when you're in a classroom with a student, and they're struggling and struggling and then they get it. Oftentimes the kids kind of excited, they're kind of in shock that they got it. They're like wow, I just did that. You are celebrating the heck out of this kid because they stuck with it, and it

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was hard, and they couldn't get it. There were probably tears and torn papers and eraser marks. Then they get it. When we celebrate them, it teaches them to celebrate them. We as school leaders must celebrate little tiny wins, great big wins, and all the wins in between.

One of the things that you said, Wendy, that I also want to highlight is that you said you started with that one mile walking or half running. But you had an app that was reminding you of the progress. What your brain was doing was looking for all the evidence that it's working, and I'm moving forward, and I'm on track, and I'm growing. It is working. The process of learning how to run a, was it 15 mile, 17 mile race? Was you start with walking one mile.

In school leadership, the race is a race that never ends. Like there are some milestones, some beginnings and ends of school years, but your profession, it is the longest marathon of your life. You can look at the scrapes, the fails, the time that slowed you down. You can look at all of that and you can say well, I didn't make it this time and look for evidence to kind of bring yourself down.

Or you can look at the app and say I went from two to three today. Or like this was just the perfect running conditions this afternoon, or Saturday morning, like I really had a great time just running, just being free, like looking for all the little things to keep you motivated and keep you going.

I wish we had an app. Maybe I need to develop one where we were like looking for the milestones because it's easy to get bogged down in what isn't working in school leadership, but it's also just as easy to focus on what is.

Wendy: I think it was easier for me to see those small gains with this running journey because every day I would check off my, I had a physical



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counter, and I would draw an X. I know some people would take those gold foil star stickers and just stick them right on the 1.5 today. Check. I don't think I did that as much in my first years as an AP.

It's a good reminder that it might be my job to show up every day at work and be an AP, but I have finished four years now in the role, and I have grown. Maybe I don't always take the time to look at that, but even through the journey going from lacking confidence and maybe my identity not really catching up yet. I know that now when I think about my day to day, I feel more confident with decision making and my interactions with staff and with families.

I have fewer moments of sort of self-doubt and uncertainty in that imposter syndrome. The way I look at challenges now versus when I first started has changed. I'm less scared of not knowing something. I know that I'm still learning new skills, and it's an ongoing thing in life to be new at something. It's a pattern that's going to continue and just gets easier every time you do it. Embracing the challenges, going outside your comfort zone, reminding yourself you can do hard things, and it doesn't have to be perfect.

The same way I feel proud of myself for sticking with the running, I also feel proud of myself in the ways that I've evolved as a school leader. Doing things scared, feeling like a novice, going for it anyway. Then seeing on the other side once you've done it that it wasn't really about running the 25K. It was really about showing up every day and proving to myself that I could do the training.

Even as an AP, like getting tenure is one thing, but improving every year and doing things better every year and seeing the ways that things are getting easier. Wedding planning, it wasn't about the wedding. It was about

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the process of going through the planning and evolving my identity and my relationship with my partner.

In the future, I have goals of starting a family and becoming a homeowner, growing in my career. I feel a sense of confidence that I can do those things because I've taken the time to reflect on all these other challenges and seeing that I have done things before where I felt new and uncertain and moved through the uncomfortable emotions and gone through the process of coming to the other side of it. I think all of the different areas in which I've had different practice with this, it just feeds each other and helps it to become easier each time.

Angela: It's so true. The way we do one thing is the way we do everything. We can focus on one area of being new, one little push area, one little growth. This is something I'm going to invite you guys to do. So this podcast is dropping around mid to late September. It's the beginning of the school year. I invite you to decide what's the one area of growth that I want, that I really want for myself. What feels most aligned to me?

If you tune in, if you listen, it will come to the surface. Is it something professional? Is it something personal? Is it your health, your relationships, your finances, your relationship with your kids or your family? Or maybe you are single, and you want to date or you want to like expand your friendship circles or you want to expand your spirituality and connection with a higher power of your understanding.

Pick one because when you pick one and focus on that, you'll be able to see, just like Wendy did, you can apply the growth, the learning, the journey to all of the other areas. It's how you expedite your identity expansion and what you feel is possible. So maybe it's time management this year.

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Like in EPC, we have the six pillars. We've got time, balance, planning, relationships, leadership, emotional regulation. I also am adding communication. I think that's an essential part of school leadership. Yeah. Just like the art of and mastery of communication with ourselves and with others.

But pick one area and just try that for one year knowing it's going to expand the other ones. Then you don't feel so overwhelmed that you have to fix yourself or improve all of this all at once because that's where we jump right into the overwhelm cycle. Then we spin, spin, spin out. So Wendy, oh gosh, there's so much I know we could share, but do you have any like last words that you want to share with listeners, fellow principals just like you who are out there? What is it that you'd like to say and share with them?

Wendy: I think the biggest takeaway is you might surprise yourself with how much growth and how much you can get out of something that at first really scares you and makes you doubt yourself, but stay with it because whether that's taking a new job or accomplishing some other goal, there's so much that can come out of that process of discomfort. We've coached over the years about not wanting to feel that discomfort, and I purposely did something that I knew was going to bring that on, and I don't regret it one bit. I don't regret it one bit.

Angela: Yeah, I cannot wait to see what this year unfolds for you. Do you have any thoughts about what your push area is going to be for this coming year?

Wendy: Not so much the coming year, but the current moment, we're still planning a honeymoon, and that is a whole team process that there's a reason that you plan a big trip after you get married. You learn so much

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from going on a big international trip together, and we haven't even left yet, but the planning itself has been a very enlightening experience.

I think building on my health goals probably to get us to a place where we feel good about making other life transitions. I think feeling healthy enough to start a family, healthy enough to take on a challenge, whether that's moving or taking a new position. I think starting with a healthy foundation is going to help in all areas.

I kind of knew that going into the running process too I want to get to be the healthiest version of me that I can while I don't have kids, while I'm not in a new role, when I'm not making up another big life transition, knowing that it was going to set me up for success with whatever's next.

Angela: Yeah.

Wendy: Right now is the honeymoon planning, so I'll let you know how our trip goes in a couple of weeks.

Angela: I cannot wait to hear about it. I can't believe you're going. It's so exciting.

Wendy: Not to mention that 25K trail run is going to help us to hike Machu Picchu, so it's all connected.

Angela: Yes, oh gosh. This is where it all blends together, and it's such a beautiful experience to watch. I'm so honored to be your coach, I really am, and to call you a friend and to see you grow. I mean, it goes beyond words, like the emotions and the fulfillment I have in seeing you blossom and be this best version of yourself. You embody personal empowerment. You embody personal growth.

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What's so cool about it is that you take this with you for the rest of your life. You can't unlearn this, you can't unknow this, you can't undo this. It only expands you more and more. So I'm just so happy for you. Congratulations, not just on the run, but on the journey.

Wendy: Thank you. When we started, and I was 29, and you said, you're doing this work now because it's like compound interest, and it's going to pay dividends down the line. In four years of coaching, I'm already feeling different and seeing things differently. It just gets me so excited for how much more growth is ahead. With your support, it's been not always easy, but it's been a very rewarding journey. That's for sure.

Angela: So fun. It's so fun. Thank you for your time on the podcast today, Wendy, and for sharing your story with us. I really appreciate it.

Wendy: Thank you for having me. Best of luck with the new school year to all the other school leaders out there.

Angela: Yes. Yes. Happy New Year, everybody. We'll talk to you next week. Take good care. Bye.

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