

Ep #373: Your To-Do List



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

Hello empowered principals. Welcome to episode 373.

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.

Well, hello, my empowered principals. So happy to be here with you today. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast.

I want to dive right in. This is going to be fairly short and sweet. I was coaching one of my clients and we got into the topic of her to-do list. And I want to invite you, as you're listening to my voice, to take a moment and think about your to-do list.

I'm sure that no matter where you are, whether you're in your office or you're on a walk or you're driving or you're listening to this and you're far away from work, you can visualize your to-do list. Is it on your calendar? Is it on your desk? Is it on your computer? Is it in a notebook? Is it on a notepad? You know exactly what it looks like. You know exactly where it is. You know the pen you use to write with it. You know the to-do list intimately because you are so connected to it and involved with it every day.

Okay. Now think about that list and I want you to tell yourself what the purpose of that list is. What is the purpose of your to-do list? And if you think about it, for most people, a to-do list is a list that captures all of your thoughts. There are thoughts about things you need to-do, things you need to complete, things you'd like to get done, things you hope to get done, things you feel pressured to get done. And the to-do list captures the thoughts from your brain and puts them onto paper or puts them onto your computer screen.

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

So a to-do list for most people is simply a brain drain. It goes from the brain onto paper and this action that you're taking going from brain to paper it's a task or it's an action line that I recommend everybody take, particularly if your head is spinning and your head is trying to hold all of that content in your memory, right? So the list is what helps you capture everything in your brain and it puts it down onto paper. And I'll say paper, whether it's computer, digital, or actual pen and paper, but it's a placeholder for those thoughts.

It's a placeholder for your desires, things you want to-do, actions you want to take, projects you want to complete, conversations you want to have, appointments that you want to make and then meet, people that you want to connect with, all of the things, right? Personal appointments, professional appointments, meetings, observations, conversations, check-ins, picking up your kids, getting over to the dentist, getting your best friend's birthday present purchase, planning your husband's birthday party, calling your mother, talking to your sister. I mean it's on and on. This is why we create to-do lists because our brain wants to explode with all of it swimming up in our mind.

So the to-do list captures all of it and puts it down on the paper. I just call this a brain drain. So most people have a to-do list and it's a brain drain of all the things that they want to-do, need to-do, would like to-do, feel like they have to-do. Okay? And the beautiful thing about our lovely brain is that as soon as we drain it out, there's a moment of like, ooh, that feels good. I think I got everything. And then a few minutes or a few hours later, it fills back up. It's like the cup that never empties. It will fill up the cup again with all new kinds of thoughts and things you need to-do, or it will recycle the water that was in the cup before and fill it back up with the same thoughts.

So you look at the list and you're still thinking about the same things that are on the to-do list. And so we either add more things to the to-do list. Oh, I forgot this. Oh, what about that? Or we think further into the future. Okay,

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

I've got this month covered. Now, what about next month? And then wait, what about six months from now? And all of a sudden, our to-do list is growing longer and longer and longer and longer. Now this to-do list might be helpful. It might give your brain some reprieve from trying to hold and memorize and remember all of the things you want to-do.

So it can give you some relief, but it can also, when you look at it, especially if you've been adding on and adding on and adding on, or you have the same things come up on your list over and over and they're not getting done. So it either feels really good to be getting the things done and to getting it out of your brain, or it feels like crazy stress every time you look at it and it brings up anxiety, stress, worry, doubt, fears, resistance to having to get it all done. But the to-do list in and of itself tends to be simply a placeholder. And it doesn't do a lot more than that as it stands, than just as a to-do list. Okay?

But what do we love to-do? We love to put things on the to-do list and then go do something that's on the list and then check it off or cross it off. It's incredible how addicting that is. Something as simple as checking a box or striking a line through that task. Have you ever done this? I've done this so many times. I did something that wasn't on the list. So I wrote it on the list so I could write strike it off the list. Have you ever done that? It's so crazy satisfying. I don't know why, but something as simple as a check mark or a cross out, it feels so good. So good that we keep creating a to-do list.

But I want to go into the to-do list problem so I can help you create a to-do list that actually is productive. Because look, some things are on the to-do list day after day after day after day. Work out, work out, work out, work out, take a walk, take a walk, take a walk, take a walk, call a friend, call a friend, go to bed early, eat healthy, you know, whenever, get your newsletter done. There are things that are on the list that we're like, we have such good intention, we really want to-do them. And then we don't, and they're on that list on repeat over and over, but we don't really question it, why we're not

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

doing it or it shouldn't be on the list. So there's that. And then there are the things that we just keep adding, hoping that they'll get done because they're on the list.

Have you ever done that? Like, so we either get the things done on the list or we don't, and they tend not to fall off the list. And the ones that we do get done, we feel super good about it, gives us this great big wave of dopamine, and we feel very productive on the days. The thing that we put on the list, it got done. We feel good about it. We get to cross it off the list and then it's over. And then we look at the other things that were like, oh, and then the list feels bad again. Have you noticed that?

So because we stop at brain draining the to-do list, which is just like blurting everything out onto paper from your brain, here's everything I need to-do. We blurt it all out and then we just leave it there. And it's this kind of jumbled mess. It has no rhyme or reason. It has no value assigned to it. It's just there. But when it's on the list, everything feels important. Everything feels like a priority because it's on the list.

I want you to consider the purpose of that list. Why do you create a list? And how do you feel about your to-do list? This really matters. Some people look at their list and they feel great about it. They know the purpose, it serves its purpose, it's productive, they use it efficiently and to create the outcomes that they want. Some people, the to-do list is all they need to get things done.

So ask yourself, how do I feel about my to-do list? When I'm looking at it, does it feel good or does it not? It's very clear and it's very simple. You don't have to make this complicated. It's either going to generate feelings of like calmness, clarity, certainty, like productivity, or it's going to generate feelings of anxiety and stress and doubt and worry.

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

So if your to-do list doesn't feel good for you in any way, shape, or form, then it's time to change the way that you approach your to-do list and leverage it in a way that maximizes your productivity and that feels good for you. So the to-do list is simply the very first step of proactively planning your productivity.

And what happens for a lot of us principals out there is that we don't want to-do the remaining steps of the planning, which includes prioritization, delegation, and calendaring. We don't want to-do that part. We don't like it. We think it's going to take too much time. We get stuck in indecision. We complicate it by making everything a priority, and we don't want to delegate. We don't want to give things up, and we don't want to have to calendar it because it feels like now it's set in stone and we get all squirmy if an emergency comes up or something happens and it's on our calendar and then we didn't do it.

When we don't honor our calendar, there's a feeling of disappointment or a feeling of guilt. We feel kind of guilty if we don't honor what we ourselves put on our own calendar. Can you see it? Okay. So just notice how much emotion comes into play when you interact with your to-do list. The emotion is the biggest part of it. I know that sounds like insignificant but it's the most significant.

And I teach an approach in EPC for task management that's efficient and productive. And the technique itself, the process that I created, it's not really rocket science but it does take the to-do list to the next level and the next level and the next level. It goes much deeper than just blurting everything out and doing a brain drain on a piece of paper. The technique itself is not rocket science, I promise you.

However, coaching your mind and managing your emotions around your to-do list and all the tasks you need to get done can feel like rocket science when you're in the moment. Managing your time, managing your energy,

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

managing your interactions, managing how much effort you put into a task or how much time you're going to give to a task or what you're willing to delegate, what you're not willing to delegate.

The amount of time you spend just thinking about your to-do list but not doing the to-do list. Think about the minutes that you spend just thinking about the to-do list or looking at the to-do list or worrying about the to-do list or wondering how you're gonna get the to-do list done. We spend so many minutes at work contemplating about the to-do list versus prioritizing it, delegating it, calendaring it and let's go right.

It's the emotion that's holding you back or the fear of some anticipated emotion in the future. That's holding you back. We have a lot of thoughts and feelings around delegation, around prioritization, around calendaring, around honoring. And we also have a lot of thoughts and feelings about the obstacles that come up. Things like interruptions, emergencies.

Now look, if everything is an emergency, if every single day you're having emergencies and putting up fires, they're no longer emergencies. We have a management problem. So there are true emergencies and there is a need for interruptions at times. But we tend to use them as an excuse, as the reason why we can't calendar, we can't plan, we can't prioritize and delegate.

We think that school leadership is so full of emergencies and interruptions that it's impossible to actually plan and honor the calendar. But I'm here to dispel that myth. What makes time management, balance management, planning management, what makes all of that so difficult are the threads of emotions and thoughts that we have and the relationship that we have with time, the relationship we have with ourselves, the relationship we have with others.

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

Those get intertwined into our ability to take a to-do list from a brain drain and prioritize it. And what can we delegate? And what can we constrain? What can we say no to? What can we put on the back burner? And then what needs to be on the calendar this week, next week, and then three months from now. And then when it comes time to-do the thing that we're set out to-do, do we honor that? Do we actually do the thing when we said we would do it?

Are we in a relationship with ourselves where we have our own back, where we are honoring the very thing we said we wanted to accomplish. That's a whole another level. This is why you can get the best time management system in the world. You can get the prettiest journal and planner. You can have multiple calendars on your computer, but if you don't follow them or honor them or take the time to plan them proactively and really build up that relationship with time and planning, there is no system that will work.

There's nothing external that you can implement that's going to help you feel better around your time and to build a better relationship with your time. Okay? So in March, I'm going to be hosting my annual Empowered Principal Spring Training Series. I'm gonna teach how to develop a plan for the last months of school, all the testing, all the celebrations, all the graduations, all the promotions, all the end of year, yada yadas, all the hip hop hoorays. In a way that feels manageable and enjoyable for you.

Enjoy the end of the year, whether you end in May or you end at the end of June. Enjoy the last two months of the year. Don't run yourself ragged. There's a way to prep and plan for that now and to delegate more than you ever thought possible and to actually be present and enjoy the celebrations of the end of the year and looking at the accomplishments, focusing on what worked, focusing on all the hard work and the effort and acknowledging it, validating it, celebrating it, versus running on empty, not sleeping, overworking, overexerting, overscheduling yourself back to back,

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

not eating, not getting any rest, feeling like you can't even comb your hair, you know what I'm saying? Making sure that your shoes match, right?

So I hope you'll join me in March. I'm going to be covering all things time management, planning management, balance management, but I'm also going to talk about the things that come up in the spring. March and April are heavy hitters with HR stuff. Things like making staffing decisions, how to tell people that you're letting them go from a place of authenticity and love, and then how to hold space between the time that you tell them and the last day of school.

Because very few professions have this where we tell an employee, "I'm sorry, we're not going to re-select you for employment next year, but we'd really like you to give it your best for the next three months, even though you know you're not coming back to our place of employment. Have a nice day." Yet here we are in education, having to tell people in March that they're no longer reelected for next year. And then please do your best and get through testing and celebrate the end of the year and don't be sad. Be happy and please do your best between March, April, May, and into June. Thank you so much for your service. Goodbye. That's how it feels. We have to hold space for that.

Ourselves, for them, and the embarrassment or the shame or the frustration, whatever they're feeling. So there's how you're feeling about it. There's how they're feeling about it. And then the whole staff has an opinion about it. So how to hold space gracefully for all of that. We're going to talk about that in the Spring Training Series.

I have developed a very authentic, gentle approach to navigate this so it feels more comfortable for you, for them, and for everyone around you. And if you want more, come on in to EPC. You can get started right away at EPC. Doors are open in March. And the link to register for the Spring Training Series.

Ep #373: Your To-Do List

And by the way, when you join EPC, you get free access to all of my trainings, all of them. And I teach them in EPC. So you don't have to double down on your time. I will cover these concepts in EPC, but I also do trainings for people who are not in EPC who just want to a la carte purchase specific trainings.

So you can purchase Spring Training, you can purchase the Mastery Series, you can purchase HR stuff, you can purchase Emotional Regulation. I have the Mastery Series all separated out. You can purchase them a la carte. You can purchase them as a bundle and just join EPC because you get the best value. It's only \$19.97 and you get access to everything.

So for those of you who are new to me and you want to try something out, you can do a la carte or if you are ready to dive in, you get a full year into EPC for one price. Come on in, we can't wait to meet you. Love you so much, thank you for the work you do. Have an amazing week. Talk to you real soon. Take good care. Bye.

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