

# Ep #380: Balance School Leadership and Life: The Empowered Principal® Approach with Jeff Linden



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Angela Kelly**

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Hello Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 380.

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.

Jeff Linden: All right everybody, today we have a special guest. This special guest is somebody that is near and dear to my heart because they kind of helped me out as a principal throughout my journey. So I'd like to welcome to the show, Angela Kelly. Welcome Angela.

Angela Kelly: Hi there, Jeff.

Jeff Linden: Hey Angela, I wanted to kind of get things started here with just kind of talking about your journey in education. So, tell me about how you got into education. What is the reason that got you to become a teacher in the first place?

Angela Kelly: Wow, that goes back a few decades. So, you know, like any kid coming out of high school, the big question is, what are you going to do with your life? And for me, I actually need to start back into middle school. I was in middle school. I was attending a brand new middle school. My family had moved a lot. And there was this presentation in our theater, and it was called Upward Bound.

And it was a program that was designed for students of families who had not - they're the first generation of students to potentially go to college. So nobody in my family line prior to me had attended a four-year university. And you also had to meet certain requirements financially. So my family fit these financial goals. And by the end of eighth grade, I signed up for this program called Upward Bound.

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It was at Iowa State University. I was born and raised in Iowa. And it was the game changer for my life because I don't know that I actually had sites on going to college. I didn't really contemplate what my future would look like. It was that life was just happening and I was just going through the motions of being a kid and going to high school. And then this happened, and I started thinking about my future, actually thinking about what I wanted when I grew up, the kind of career I wanted to have. And I went through Upward Bound for five years.

So from the summer of eighth grade clear through the summer of the year I graduated. So five summers, instead of being the kid who, you know, went to movies and hung out with her friends and went out on dates, I was going to college. I was going to school through this program. The first couple of years, they are prep courses to prepare you for the rigor of college.

And then the last three years, you start taking actual classes with other college students while you're in high school. And then you have an intense amount of preparation and support and tutoring to ensure because if you're going to get anything lower than a C, they kind of pull you because they they realize you might not be ready.

So, I was able by the time I graduated high school, I had a semester of college credit. And that was so invigorating and so motivating. I had this momentum going where like I started to identify as somebody who could actually go to college and get a degree. I have to highlight that because that program really did change my life and I credit the Upward Bound program too, creating a vision for my adult life and my future. So I have to give a shout out to Upward Bound.

And then when I got into college, I actually... my dad was like, well, you should go into finance. That just sounds very prestigious and you're really good at math. And I took one semester. I hated it. I was falling asleep in the class. I remember in economy class, I slept through a quiz. It was just bad. It was bad news.

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And I was sitting down with some friends over the summer and they were asking how college went. And I said, well, it's okay. But I wasn't fired up. I was more fired up about the social scene and being, you know, away from family and being a little independent college student than I was actually my future and learning.

I had a very profound conversation about what did I want to do? What did I love to do? And in that conversation, it came up like, I love kids. I babysat from a very young age. I loved being around kids. They lit me up. And I loved school. So I think the combination of truly loving school as a student, I always played school, I played the teacher, and combined with my, you know, young adult love for children. And I would say too, I'm really wanted to improve the experience of school for students.

And not that I had a bad experience, but, you know, I grew up in the 70s and 80s, so there were things that we could do to improve the experience of students and the emotional experience that students had in addition to the style of learning that we did. So that really, those combinations of events in my life drew me into teaching.

And the minute I shifted into from finance into education, it was like lock. I knew right then, I was locked, loaded, this was my life. I loved it, ready to go. And that was it. I never looked back. And I ended up getting my early childhood credential along with my elementary, you know, teaching credential.

Jeff Linden: All right, as a teacher, how long were you a teacher?

Angela Kelly: I taught two years in Minnesota. So I graduated from Iowa State, we moved up to Minnesota. I taught pre-K. It was a birth through grade age five, early childhood program. I was the teacher and the coordinator for two years there. My husband and I moved out to California in '95. And I taught at the same school for about 15 years.

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So I taught primarily kindergarten, it's my love language is kindergarten, and I also taught first grade. And then I became an instructional coach. I was a reading specialist. So I did, you know, different seats on the bus, but I was definitely elementary. Really profound love for early literacy and early childhood development and just the social emotional development of children.

And I really loved working with parents. That's why I chose kindergarten because you can just, you get to bring them in and you get to cultivate them and their experience. And that was really important for me to set the stage for these families to have a positive experience with their school and to really love the school that they were sending their children to.

So, I did that for 15 years. And in the meantime, I'm going to say like around 12, 13 years into teaching, I felt this desire for more, but let's be honest on the podcast here. You know, when you're a teacher and you're like, it's teachers, they have their mindset and perspective and then admin.

And as a teacher, you're looking at the admin like, I don't know about that. I don't know if I want to go to the dark side. I don't know that I could handle it. You know, deep inside I was like, I don't know if I can handle it, but on the surface it was like, I don't want to be like one of them. I don't want to have to work like that or, you know, I just you have thoughts and opinions about it because you've never experienced it. So you can only imagine, you know, what it would be like.

And we go both ways. We imagine that it's going to be amazing or we're going to have this big impact and what, you know, it's going to be better than ever. It's going to, oh, we're going to get out of a classroom, we're going to be able to walk the campus and we're going to have all this freedom and power.

And then you also think about, ooh, that looks really hard and they're the ones who stay last and they're the ones who eat last and they're the ones

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who, you know, take the heat and I don't know if I can handle that. Am I capable of leadership, actually leading a vision, a school, a community? And so that I was feeling it and it was just kind of, I was keeping it on the inside. Well, my superintendent at the time was offering this program.

So if any of you out there listening are teachers or site administrators or district administrators, which I'm sure there's a bunch of you out there listening, this program was another, like I think about these little milestones in my story that at the time, I had no idea the impact they were really going to have, but I could feel like it was a calling to go into that.

This second little milestone for me was this program, we called it ELA, like it was like basically it was a leadership development program and my superintendent had the brilliant idea of like cultivating leaders from within the district and not always trying to hire somebody outside who didn't know our culture or understand, you know, our vision. And it was a two-year program.

We'd go once or twice a week and it was pretty intense, actually. It was more than I thought it was going to be, but it was a profound group of people with of my own peers and we talked leadership and we talked straight leadership. We didn't sugar coat it. We talked about how it actually felt to be a leader, the real challenges, the work-life balance issue, time management, how do you get planning in, just how do you keep it all together emotionally when teachers this and that? And it really gave me perspective and insight.

But the best thing it gave me was I went from thinking I'm not cut out, it's not possible to like, I think I can actually do this. Did you have that moment, Jeff?

Jeff Linden: Yeah. So in my journey as becoming a principal, honestly, I was a teacher in the classroom for 11 years as a math teacher and coached football, wrestling, track, you know, did all those things. I love it.

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You know, I love the connections with the kids. It honestly wasn't until I got into Omaha where I was actually, I moved went from Millard North High School as a teacher to Ralston. And the main reason I went to Ralston was because of Dr. Adler, who was the superintendent at Ralston.

My main question was, could I get into your leadership academy if I come over? Because at the current district I was in at Millard, I had to wait three years. And I did not want to wait three years. I kind of wanted the training because I felt like it would be good for me to be able to have some more background in becoming an educational leader. I had my credentials already. I had curriculum masters and I also have my educational administration masters. And so I was like, I need to have something more like leadership academy, maybe it'll be make me more marketable.

And so I spent two years in the Ralston Leadership Academy with Dr. Adler, which was a great experience and that kind of propelled me into becoming a principal and having some experiences and some just insights on what that's like. So kind of very similar pathways there.

So tell me more about like, you know, you're going from a teacher into becoming on the dark side now, right? Coming a principal, you kind of talked about that, you know, piece where you went into like a leadership academy and how did that propel you? What was the next step to making that transition from teacher to principalship?

Angela Kelly: I went through the program and it was two years. So, yeah, it was like an academy and we graduated out of that. And then shortly after that - so there's this period of time and I was in California at the time. I lived out in California for 30 years. So my career really spans primarily in California. You know, you had to go through the motions of getting the credential. And because I already had a Master's degree, I could go through kind of a, it was like a shorter term credentialing program offer because they were in need of administrators.

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So they had this kind of like limited time bonus, if you act now, you can go through this program through the county or the state and add on your administrative credentials. So I did that. And then I, you know, you have to take the test and I remember driving down to Santa Cruz, California and taking this test and it was just old school like handwritten six hours straight of just writing and writing and I thought, oh gosh, I hope I passed this test.

And you're just like a kid again, like waiting for your ACTs or your SAT scores to come back and it came back and I had a nearly perfect score and I was like, what? Oh my gosh. And I thought, you know, there was the celebration moment. I'm like, gosh, I'm ready for this. And then I thought, it's one thing to write it down on a piece of paper. It's another thing to live the experience and to be in it, right? And Jeff, you know that. That is definitely true. There is the theory of leadership and there's the life of a leader and there's the leadership, I think day-to-day, right?

Jeff Linden: Yep.

Angela Kelly: Yeah.

Jeff Linden: Yeah. And I know like for me, transitioning from teacher into becoming a principal, did I really know what I was getting myself into? Not really. I just knew that was my next step. And for me it was like, I was looking for that person to give me the opportunity. And I did a series of interviews because at my time, there was a lot more competitiveness becoming a principal in Nebraska at that time because, you know, everybody that was a teacher that wants to get into a principalship was trying to get into those or you're competing against other candidates that might have some more experience.

So getting into it, you know, it was hard, but once I got that opportunity, that's when I was trying to make the most of it. And so that's part of like, for me, becoming a principal, I had the education, I had the academy, I had all this knowledge. Now I had to put it in practice. And that's the part that gets



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tough because there's not a lot of professional development out there for principals and for people that are just get stuck on an island because my first principal ship was out in Southern Valley.

It was, you know, out in the middle of South Central Nebraska. Our school was set in a cornfield basically. I mean, we had our conference principles, we had our - in Nebraska, we had educational service unit, which we go to to do some professional development, but there wasn't a lot of ton of stuff out there.

And then for me, about two years in, I started searching for professional development. And that's kind of when I ran across your podcast, *The Empowered Principal*. So tell me something about, you know, going from that principal leadership, what was that like? But then transition into getting into becoming the empowered principal person you are. Like you basically help other principals manage not just the stresses of the job, but also their life.

And so kind of tell me about your principalship a little bit, but then kind of go into you becoming the empowered principal, which you actually wrote a book, *The Empowered Principal* by Angela Kelly. Yeah. Which kind of is the basis to what you do now. So kind of tell us about that journey.

Angela Kelly: Yes. So fast forward to my first principalship. I got tapped on the shoulder by the superintendent. And here's what I want to say about this for the listeners out there. If you're an aspiring leader or you're even considering, you're listening to this podcast with Jeff because you're thinking about becoming a leader and he's inspiring and you're like, oh gosh, Jeff can do it. I want to do it. I want you to know this.

Like it's an identity conversation with yourself. Like feeling capable, being capable. So if you're not in the position yet, I want you just to imagine what it would look like, what it would feel like, you know, what the experience would be and start to step into even in just your mind, just kind of role play

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what it might feel like to be a leader and get yourself into that identity of being a school leader. That's going to help you transition. It's going to feel easier to actually cross that threshold into being that.

So in my situation, my experience was I got tapped on the shoulder. It's your time. You've got to apply for this. I actually applied to be the AP of a middle school because I thought AP would be easier transition into leadership. Well, I didn't get that position. I was, you know, really sad at the time, but my superintendent said, I have other plans for you. And so he hired me as a first-year principal to open a brand new school, a brand new campus. So...

Jeff Linden: Brand new principal and you got a brand new school? Let's talk about adding on the stress. I had enough issues with just the construction and putting a new Hvac last summer and getting the building ready and I'm going in my seventh year and that was enough stress again to do that. I could not imagine being a first year principal opening a new building and tell me more about that.

Angela Kelly: Yes. Well, I'll tell you those first two years. So I was opening a brand new site. So it was a brand new group of people, brand new community, brand new physical building. So I was dealing with construction and I love to tell the story. It was back to school night. It's like a week into the brand new school year. It's my first five days on the job with people on campus.

Back to school night, parents are coming, children, campus is full of people. And the office calls and she said, Houston, we have a problem. She said the main water pipe broke and there is raw sewage running down the central campus. So I had to be like, okay, everybody to the side. But I mean, metaphorically, that's how I felt. I was literally waiting through all of, you know, the newness and the craziness of school leadership.

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And these crazy moments were happening. And but, you know, all humor aside, it was the hardest two years of my life. I was a single mom at the time. My son had just transitioned into middle school. He was a sixth grader. And I was a single parent trying to operate a brand new school and, you know, I had to really set the foundations. I had to create the site council team and, you know, this all of this, all of the teams had to be developed, vision, all of that. And so that was not the empowered principal moment that I was having. That was like probably the most disempowered two years of my life.

And there were some moments I just felt like it was happening to me. Like the job is coming at me with a fire hose. I can't keep up. I was staying so late at work, having other people pick up my son, other people take him to his events, going in super early, staying super late, working nights and weekends. And I really thought, how did I get myself into this? And I don't know how to get myself out of it. And that's what I really felt like, I had no power.

So, fortunately, the district assigned me a mentor. And by the way, I forgot to mention that not only was I a brand new principal at a brand new school, they only allowed me to work there three days a week and they had me working at the district two days a week to fill another position that was, yeah. So I was spread a little too thin.

So all of that to say, if I've gone through that, I'm sure somebody else listening has been through that too. So we feel you, we hear you out there. And you can only do so much, right? Everything gets watered down. So you do the best you can. But I had a moment, the second year into my school leadership where I thought, I don't know if I can do this. And that's when I was searching online for help.

And you're right, Jeff. That was the first time I noticed there's a huge gap in support at the admin level. It's, hey, you got hired. We're so happy you're

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here. Here are the keys, go figure it out. But please don't come back to the district asking for support because we're too busy dealing with other things.

And so you really are figuring it out on your own and it's very isolating and it's scary. There's a lot on your plate, a lot of responsibility and you're thinking about students, staff, community, you know, of course test scores come in and scare the, you know, the jeebies out of you. But at the end of the day, I was desperate to be successful. I wanted to want the job. I wanted to want it and I wanted to be good at it. And that's when I literally Googled where to look for help.

And, you know, you can go to a conference, you can read a book, you can talk to your peers. That was about what was available. And I love going to conferences. I love socializing, I love learning, but there is you go and you're motivated and inspired and then you come back into the realities and it's hard to integrate what you've learned for the long haul, like integrate it into your identity as a principal, your methods and your approach into leadership.

And so the next, how long was I a site leader? Two years at that school. Then they moved me back to my home school. Now, I am the boss of my peers of 15 years. So, I don't know if you've experienced that. I think a lot of principals become the leader of their peers. There that is an interesting dynamic to have to navigate.

And so again, there wasn't internal support. I sought support outside, but what I found was life coaching. I didn't know what life coaching was, but I knew I needed one because my life was a big mess. I was not feeling like I was doing anything well, being a parent, running my household, being a good principal, being an instructional leader.

So I found this person, Dr. Martha Beck, and I signed up for her program, not to become a life coach, but to learn what it meant to coach my own life.

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I wanted some empowerment back. I wanted some agency and I wanted a sense of control somewhere along the way.

And from her, I learned just some techniques to just kind of regulate myself emotionally when I was overwhelmed or to stop and take time for myself to just literally make sure that I'm drinking water, make sure that I am, you know, eating lunch, making sure that I put time limits on the amount of work that I did.

So I started playing around with this idea of I'm a human in a school leadership role versus I'm a school leader and that's my only identity because that job's never done. We all know that. The same goes for students. If there are students listening to this, you might just think like the studying's never done, the learning's never done. And on one hand, you're right, because we are lifelong learners, but on the other hand, there needs to be something more than studying, learning, test scores, achievement, and that there needs to be living. So there's all the doing, but then there's also the living.

And that's where I got my first little breath of fresh air like, I'm going to be a human in this job, not just a robot trying to keep up with the demands and the wildness of school leadership.

Jeff Linden: Yeah. So you're talking about just, hey, yeah, I'm a school leader, but I'm also a person, right?

Angela Kelly: Yes.

Jeff Linden: So how does that mindset going into it? Yes, I'm a school leader, but yeah, I want you to see me as the person who I am. How did that help you build connections into your principalship and your leadership when you started discovering those things through your life coaching experience and your journey on that?

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Angela Kelly: It was profound because what I did was I started paying attention to what I needed as a person. You have physical needs, right? You need sleep, you need food, you need movement and exercise, you need rest, you need to have pleasure and playtime in your life. You need this full experience.

So the more I tuned into me, the more I started realizing that we are more connected than separate. That was the profound change where I started seeing teachers as just fellow humans, as fellow people on the planet. And I started thinking, we're all here for the right reasons. We're all here doing the best job we can, trying to figure this thing called education out, trying to figure out life. We're all here.

And we all want to feel good. We all want to feel included, significant, important, valued, connected, appreciated, cherished. We all want to feel the same feelings. And so that, when I realized what we're striving here, what we're striving for in education is human development. We're striving to, you know, support our young ones, our students with tools and skills to navigate the human experience, not just the learning, not just academics, but their body, physically changing and developing and growing and their, you know, their ability to interact with their peers and to build friendships that have meaning and fill their hearts with joy and fun and laughter and memories.

And same with teachers, like teachers go into this for the right reasons. And if you believe in that and you believe that your story is more similar to their story than separate, we aren't admin and teachers, we're humans, we're educators. And that team, when I saw that we're a team, we want the same things. We want kids to be happy and successful. We want them coming to school.

We want to feel good about ourselves as teachers, whether we're an admin, whether we're the secretary or the nurse or the counselor or, you know, tech support or bus driving or maintenance, we all want to feel good

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about who we are and what we're contributing. And that's when I realized equal contribution but different, equal value.

So our contributions, whether you're a teacher, whether you're maintenance crew, we all are contributing something valuable, it just looks different. So we're more together than separate. And then I started teaching that with kids and they would come into the office and have their disagreements and have their conflicts. And I would be able to start talking with them about the similarities and how we want to feel the same way and what we really want is to feel good about ourselves and our connections with people.

And then from there it just it started rolling. I started getting how to be a leader, which was connection and similarity over separation and disconnect. That's when in 2015, I was looking like, how do I get more of this? How do I become a stronger leader, a better leader? And you know, Jeff, again, there's a little bit out there for school leaders. Like it was starting to percolate, like there's organizations that provide incredible learning connections. I love it.

And there was just this little piece for me personally that was missing. And that's when I found The Life Coach School. I went and got certified in 2015. And I applied those concepts for two years as a principal. Then I got promoted to the district level. I was the RTI coordinator for the entire district. We were able to build a really robust academic RTI and behavioral RTI program at my site. And then I was supposed to go and help my fellow peers do the same at their schools. Well, one year at the district office is if you've ever moved from site to district leadership, ooh, that's like a whole another level of perspective.

And I was like, okay, I can do this. But I did. I felt disconnected from kids. So I spent a lot of time at the sites. And what I learned is that principals were coming together in the district at the leadership team meetings. Everyone had a smile on their face. Everyone was saying everything was

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great and this is what they're going to do and problem solvers. And then when I go back to their sites and we close the office door, the truth came out of how they really felt and the struggles they were facing and the pain they were in and the insufficiency that they felt.

And the disempowerment they felt, they felt a lack of ability to inspire and create influence and impact in their school as a leader. And it's because that identity and leadership skills and all of that was missing from the conversation. It was be this task manager, like, and I'm sure you run a school because you went from a small school to a big school, right, Jeff?

Jeff Linden: Yeah, I went from a school with about 75 students to 1,000.

Angela Kelly: Yes.

Jeff Linden: So I made a pretty big jump. And kind of the great thing was is when I was getting ready to make that jump, that's when I found your podcast, what you're doing. I think we had like a free consult and we kind of worked through some things because I was getting frustrated because I was looking for at the time, how can I become a better leader, but also, I need help because something I'm doing is not working and what is it?

And I think that's when we talked about, you know, a lot about your mindset. You took me through the STEAR cycle, we did some brain drains and we were really able to focus in on kind of what I needed to do to get into, you know, the right mindset for that, to show people my value, show people that, you know, envision myself into their school and how do I do that? And so we worked a lot on that.

And of course, I was following you on Facebook and I listen to your podcast and so I was just kind of falling along because I needed something to kind of help me through the journey because you're right, when you talk about, you know, go to these conferences, you network, you do these things. I even go to, you know, our regional state conferences, our regional



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meetings and things like that, but then you go back and then you're on your own again.

So what can you get daily? And I think that's kind of where you're kind of fitting into that piece to where you can help principals on the daily with becoming a better leader, but also being the best version of themselves. So, honestly, this podcast was is a derivative from working with you because knowing that there was not a lot out there, my goal with this podcast is basically to connect people with other people, but also tell other people's stories, but also try to help other principals in these situations or in these leadership roles to be the best they can be.

And if I can help inspire and give them some nuggets of knowledge here and there, that would help them so they don't have to go through some of the hard things you had to go through or other previous principals had to go through as well because I think you're going to go through some dark times as an educational leader, but to have somebody kind of support you through that, it is an important piece.

And I find that's kind of where what you're doing now going from your district leader role. Now you're the empowered principal guru, life coach, you kind of, you know, help people with that and you stay pretty busy doing that. So talk about that transition. You talked about, you know, I went to become a life coach. You were starting to implement practices.

I think the one thing you really kind of talk about in your book is, you know, your mindset, your thoughtfulness or just how do you think, you know, your brain works and your STEAR cycle kind of... So kind of talk about the STEAR cycle. What is it? Why is it important to help you become an empowered principal?

Angela Kelly: Yes, of course. I first have to do a shout out for Jeff because Jeff and I worked together as one-on-one client and also he was a member of my group coaching program at The Empowered Principal Collaborative.

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But what I want to highlight about Jeff was how quickly our conversations went from just talking to him implementing.

And I don't mean so much like he didn't add more to his plate, he adjusted his approach. He didn't add to his plate, he adjusted his approach by like broadening his perspective. And it's funny to have some conversations recently and I listen to all that he's done. I listen to the podcast. I follow him on social media, but your perspective and the way that you tell stories and the way you connect with people.

And just the other day we were talking about, you know, how we support fellow adults to have conversations and conflict and to resolve those as adults. We have to be able to hold space for them. And I just think Jeff does an incredible job of implementing mindset plus skill set and that supportive approach and that really the belief that, hey, we're all here to feel good, to do our best. We are on the same team. I see that in your work, Jeff. I see it in your posts, in your work, in the conversations that you and I have. And this podcast is really a manifestation of that work that you have done, right? I was there to initiate those conversations with you and to provide that awareness and get to get you feeling aligned to what you value and who you are.

But from there the momentum was all use. So Jeff is an incredible leader and I'm I couldn't be happier that he started this podcast because he has so much wisdom to share with you guys. And what I love is this is just the beginning. So I have to say that because I respect him, I appreciate him and this work that he's doing. He's not just talking at you in this podcast. He's living it and sharing his stories and experiences with you in real time. So I really honor and respect that.

So back to the question was how I transitioned. So that one year at the district, I saw people suffering is really what happened. I saw my peers suffering and it pained me. It ate me and I thought, we really are the same. Like, I felt that way too. I thought I was alone and isolated. I thought it was

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just me. I thought I was the one who was insufficient or I didn't have what it took or I wasn't charismatic enough or smart enough or, you know, organized or disciplined enough. But I see that it's the job.

And so if it's not the people that are the problem, and the job is the job, it's just the reality. If we can't go out and change what the job is, but it's not us, then what? And that's when I realized there needs to be a way for people to take their personal power back and to feel empowered in the job even on the hard days or even when the test scores don't land where we'd like them to or even when we're working with a kid who's really struggling to regulate emotionally or working with an adult who is really struggling to regulate emotionally.

And why don't we just have a space where principals can talk about this? Talk about like, I'm barely emotionally regulated right now, let alone being able to help somebody else regulate emotionally. We expect kids to emotionally regulate, yet we sometimes don't have the capacity to do that ourselves.

So just in my own observation of me and through The Life Coach School, I came up with my coach calls her work the Model. And I took that and ran with it and created the STEAR cycle. But it's just a tool, not just, it's a powerful tool. It is a tool that helps you observe what's your brain is offering you, your thoughts and just observe them kind of give a little distance between you and your thoughts to create that space so you can write them down onto paper or, you know, type them up. And you can - that's what the brain drain is where you can just like, wow, like what is going on for myself right now?

And I've shifted a little bit like I wrote this book when I was a baby coach, a brand new coach. And, you know, it was like my pride and joy at the time. And I'm writing another book right now actually to...

Jeff Linden: Yeah?

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Angela Kelly: Yes, breaking news. Okay, I will. But I'm just, you know, the combination of this work has really expanded my capacity to coach and to offer support for people. But in this book, I really focus on using the STEAR cycle as a tool where you look at your thoughts. But what I realized is that the emotional experience we're having is truly the compass.

So you still look at your thoughts, but what I would offer to you now is, what are you feeling? Being able to identify because sometimes you're feeling all worked up and you don't know really what's going on inside. And you're going to have a brain drain. Trust me, like if you're upset or you're frustrated or you're overwhelmed, the brain is going to go, well, there's this and let it drain all out.

And eventually, you're going to be like, okay, I got I said my peace and you'll feel a little release of energy there. But that practice gives you some space in your mind to say, okay, I've acknowledged how I'm feeling. I'm overwhelmed or I'm upset. Here's why. So what are you feeling number one? Why are you feeling it? That's the brain drain. All the thoughts are going to pour out. And then you have some space there to be like, huh, okay, I'm acknowledging that I'm overwhelmed or I'm really upset right now. Valid, fair enough. Now what? And you can look at the thoughts.

You separate them from your mind because they kind of just one, they go on repeat, they loop over and over and it feels like there are 200 thoughts when actually there's probably 20. They're just on repeat and loop and then they get all jumbly and entangled in your mind and you kind of go down these rabbit holes, but putting it onto paper, it finite them. You start to see like there's only so many.

And then you can say, okay, here's what I'm thinking. How is that feeling? Which one of these feel terrible? And which ones feel a little better? Let's lean over there. And that's what my next book is going to be about. It's called Feel Good Goals. It's about the goal here is to feel good. And we use

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this process to like lean back into what feels more aligned, what feels true, what feels good.

What do we want to believe about ourselves, about others, about our school? So that's the gist of The Empowered Principal is how can I take back, empower myself to feel better, to learn what's working, what's not, what do I want to shift and do differently? But also, this is another secret, is that if you're having a thought that feels terrible, like, I'm not good enough or I really messed this up or, you know, I'm a failure, I'm insufficient in some way. We all have the not enough thoughts. When they feel terrible and you feel like you're in so much pain, the little secret is that they're not true.

That's just your brain's way of saying like, hey, you know what? I don't want you to feel the pain of failing. So I'm going to just tell you in advance, don't even try because I don't want you to fall down and, you know, scrape your knee. I'm going to protect you and keep you safe. And the brain can't differentiate between real pain and perceived pain. So it's just it's going to freeze you and say like, please don't try this at home. This could result in pain, whether that's physical pain, emotional pain, mental pain, psychological pain.

We're so afraid of pain. But if we lean into it and we're looking at the STEAR cycle and it's like, ooh, I'm really feeling some pain here. Like, let's say we failed. Let's say we did. And we acknowledge it. It's better to validate that, acknowledge it and lean into it and be like, you know what? And this is true.

I think I taught you Jeff something called the land of and, where it's like, this might be true, but also equally true is this other side where you can start to feel better. So even on those hard days, it's like, yep, today was hard and... what's equally true are these other things that are good. There's the duality of our jobs. There's really hard days.

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I just moved here to Nashville and in real time, I don't know for those of you who know, there was a school shooting recently just this past week. And there is a principal out there and a family, multiple families who are in the biggest pain of their life. And to me, losing a student on my watch is one of the most unimaginable things. And that principal is in so much pain and we can feel compassion for that principal. And it is like probably our biggest nightmare and fear as a principal is losing a student on our watch when it's our job to protect them and also knowing we do our best, but we aren't in control of the world.

And so then it becomes, how do I navigate this heartbreak, this pain? And pain is pain, right? Whether you've lost a student or you've lost a staff member or whatever tragedy of any kind that's happened at your school. And hey, if you haven't had a tragedy, don't feel bad that you haven't had one.

Whether it's like an IP that didn't go well or a parent that got upset and left your school or there's different kinds of pain. We all experience it. So acknowledge your pain, lean into it and just know people like Jeff are out there. And Jeff spent through pain too. He's been through really hard times and really hard conversations. He's had to lead people. He's had to coach people up. He's had to coach people out. So you do both, but your willingness to expand your capacity to feel pain also lets you expand your capacity for joy. And that's the duality of this job.

So that's really what I do in a nutshell is I help people navigate this thing called educational leadership. I help you navigate the hard stuff emotionally, mentally, but I also help you visualize and learn and expand your potentiality and your possibility about what you can be, what you can experience.

And hey guys, at the end of the day, we're all here to support, to love, to have a good time and to create memories, to create success stories, to be proud of ourselves, our students and the work that our teachers and our

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team are doing. And that's your legacy. That's what you want to leave behind.

But here we are today, Jeff, this will be a memory locked in time, an experience that you and I are creating. And then tomorrow this will just be a memory and it will be a beautiful memory. It's one that we want to lock in and remember this forever. But all of us are doing this. We're all out there at our schools.

You're present in the day and that tomorrow, the next day, this day is a memory. So that brings me to just kind of, I know we've been talking so long here, but wrapping up this podcast episode, it's really about intentionality, who we want to be, not perfection. We don't even want perfection, that would be very robotic. We want to experience it all. We want to have the capacity to experience it all. And that's something that I see Jeff modeling, not just as a school leader.

Jeff models it as a husband, as a friend, as a father. I see him on his Facebook, guys. So he can't hide. I know. He's doing the work here. But, you know, this is really my story is I'm just leaning into how can I help people experience this job in the most profound, empowered way so that you can enjoy your life. You can enjoy, you can have balance. You can work hard and go home and play hard. You can get the rest you need and put a lot of effort in. You can have both. And believing that it's possible to have both is where we start.

Jeff Linden: Yes. And that's really what I love about the work that you're doing is how you're helping principals not just manage the job, the task that at hand, but also how can they just be a someone that can enjoy just being, you know, a husband, a father, a good friend, you know, somebody that's, you know, we are people outside of this job.

We're not just, we just don't go home and do nothing. We got interests, we got things we like to do. And so you being able to tap in, I think you're the

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only person I know that has the experience being a teacher, a principal, a district admin, but then this life coaching adventure you're on where now you're helping people navigate that job, navigate how to find the joy out of it because like you said, it's a tough job.

There's going to be, you know, great days and there's going to be good days. I always say because I'm not I'm a non-traditional educator. I worked in a factory for three and a half years and I always tell people the worst day in education is better than the best day of my factory job. So I just enjoy what I do, but at the same time, I think it's that mindset that we come in with, but also having someone like Angela Kelly here to help you navigate is something that, you know, I would encourage principals and educational leaders to tap into.

So Angela, tell us, you know, what you're up to with The Empowered Principal? You know, how can people connect with you? You know, how can they reach out to you? I'll probably, well, I'll put some your email or some connections down in the show notes so people can easily find you in the podcast, but, you know, how can people connect and get in touch with you if they're really thinking about, you know what? A lot of the things that I heard today resonates with me and I really want to learn how to have that work-life balance. How can they connect with you?

Angela Kelly: Yeah, absolutely. So I jumped into this job around, I think 2017. So I've been coaching for the last eight school years. And I started with one-on-one coaching. As Jeff knows, and then the demand expanded into, I do have some one-on-ones. I don't coach, you know, a ton of one-on-ones anymore, but I do coach one-on-one with some principals.

But the majority of people are coming into The Empowered Principal Collaborative, which is a group coaching program. And what I love about that is the synergy. It's the you don't feel alone. Like one-on-one is where we have those confidential, private conversations. And I do offer one-on-



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one sessions to the members of EPC if there is something confidential in nature or sensitive in nature that we need to discuss offline.

But what's so great about the group is the collective wisdom, the collective desire to feel good, to improve, to expand their impact on their schools, to also to like not take it all on themselves, like to lighten that load, to not feel alone. I thought teaching was isolating because you're in your classroom by yourself, but you have your colleagues, you have your grade level team or your department team.

And then you get into admin and for me, 550 students, you know, 27 teachers, you know, about 70 staff members at my site and one admin on campus. That felt isolating. And I was like, okay, there's got to be a place to go mingle and have some conversations and have a little bit of fun and actually just lighten up about it, laugh about it. Like some of the stories, you cannot make these up and you've got to be able to have a place where people understand you and they can laugh and have a good time. So EPC, The Empowered Principal Collaborative is my group coaching program.

So if you are interested in learning more, number one, you can just listen to the podcast and kind of get to know me, *The Empowered Principal®* podcast. You can pick up the book, audio, it's on Audible, it's on, you know, you can buy the hard copy if you want. And then you can find me on my website, [AngelaKellyCoaching.com](http://AngelaKellyCoaching.com). But *The Empowered Principal* is where I'm at. I hang out primarily on Facebook and Instagram, but you can also find me on LinkedIn.

Jeff Linden: All right, Angela, it was really great to have you on the show today. You know, it's fun to listen to just your journey as an educational leader and how you became the empowered principal you are today. And I really appreciate the work you're doing because it's meaningful and it's, you know, something that we as educational leaders need. You know, I hope today's podcast helped someone out there today, get connected with you to

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help them become a better educational leader. So thank you for being on the show today.

Angela Kelly: It's so wild to be a guest on a show. Like I have my own podcast and I spend my time being the interviewer. And so it was a blast to be here with you, Jeff. And I'm excited to actually share this interview with my audience as well for them to hear your story, but also, I don't know that I've ever really shared my story to this depth. So it was really fun and just thank you for the privilege and the honor of being here today. I had a lot of fun. Take care.

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Hey you guys, calling all first-year site and district leaders. As you know, I hosted a free master course for those aspiring to land a job in school leadership. This was a four-day course that covers what you need to prepare yourself before, during, and after the interview process. So for those of you who are interested, you can find the YouTube links below in the show notes. The Aspiring School Leader series is completely free.

Now, for those of you who landed that job, I have a brand-new program. Let's make your first impression in school leadership your best impression. Let's lead your school with confidence in year one and nail your first year as a school leader. You've got what it takes to make an impressive first impression, so come on in.

I've got a brand-new program called Essentials for New School Leaders. It is three months of professional and personal development to give you the strategies, the mindset, and the skill set to lead your school to the next level of success.

There is a gap between the time you get hired and the time you start your contract. Let's get ahead of the curve, three months in advance, you'll be

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ready to go on day one of your brand-new contract. Join Essentials for New School Leaders. For more information, click the link in the show notes.

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](http://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.