

Ep #384: Why School Leaders Gain Weight and How to Lose It with Jena Damiani



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 384.

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.

Angela Kelly: Well hello my empowered principals, happy Tuesday and welcome to the podcast. I have a very near and dear friend to my heart as our podcast guest today. You have heard her lovely voice before. This is Jena Damiani and she is a friend, she is a client, and she is a soap maker by the way. And she's also a life coach.

So, we are going to talk about all the things. You're going to get a sneak peek into our innermost conversations today. We just decided to jump on and share all of the tea with y'all today. So, Jena, welcome to the podcast.

Jena Damiani: Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here.

Angela Kelly: And there's a special reason why I had Jena on today. We didn't just decide to chat with you all. Jena is a certified life coach for school leaders and she specializes in weight loss. And we're going to talk about that today because I know for me personally, Jena, when I transitioned from teaching into school leadership, I gained over 20 pounds. And that was something I never saw coming. I did not have a struggle with my weight as a teacher.

I didn't use food to comfort myself as a teacher. I'm thinking back in real time here, I taught kindergarten. We had some pizza, we would have birthday cake. So I had snacks around, I always had snacks in my room, but I wasn't going home and eating my stress away or I didn't recall being attached to food. But something shifted when I got into school leadership.

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The stress went up, the volume went to volume 10 and I think I was numbing out a little bit there.

So, can you speak to us about this? So, you're a client of coaching, you are a coach, you're certified and trained as a coach, so you have the capacity to see both ends of this and you're in school leadership. So, can you enlighten us on what's happening when we go into school leadership and we start diving into the sweets, the treats, maybe the wine?

Jena Damiani: Maybe the wine? It was not a maybe for me, but yes, absolutely. Yeah, so quickly to share my experience in terms of weight, transitioning from teacher to principal. I had a little bit of a different experience. I won't take you through my entire history, but I had my third and final child and I was off for a year on maternity leave. I was still a teacher at the time and I got into the best shape of my life and I felt strong and healthy.

And then I went back to work and life hit me and adulting and all the things. And I started to gain the weight that I had worked so hard to lose over the year that I was off. And then when I transitioned into school leadership, my bad eating habits went with me into that leadership role, but it emphasized it. And you know how everybody always says when you go to college, you gain the freshman 15?

Yes. And I don't know if this is a thing or if my friends and I are that clever that we came up with it, I don't know. But we were, it's the admin 30. Because I gained 30 pounds. Yes. Rapidly in a year. My first year of leadership, I gained 30 pounds. It sounds like you gained maybe 20. And it feels like it happens overnight. Of course, we know it doesn't. But I broke down some reasons why I think that happens. So, if you're ready, Angela, I say let's start talking about...

Angela Kelly: Yeah, I want to dive into this because it feels like it happens to you, first of all, and it feels like it happens overnight, which we know it

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doesn't, but our minds tell us that. And I also think it's a slippery slope. I feel once you start on the path, it feels so much more difficult mentally to get out of the loop.

And so I would love to personally hear what your thoughts are on this because I'm not, I don't think about weight loss. I don't solve that problem for school leaders and that's why I wanted you to come on today is to help us with this because I do think a lot of people struggle physically with their physical health.

And then there's body image on top of that and how they're feeling about themselves and this spirals down. So I do think it's a very important topic for school leaders because if we want to be at our innermost empowered state, that matters physically, mentally, and emotionally. And I think this is a component that we haven't addressed, at least here on *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*.

Jena Damiani: Yeah, I'm happy to. Because I mean, to all the principals out there, it is a hard job, but it is necessary. And I truly believe anybody who's out there in a principal role is there because they want to do good by their community, support teachers, students, all the things. But you can't do that if you yourself aren't taking care of if you're not healthy. So, thank you, Angela for the opportunity to talk about this because I am very passionate about it.

So, I, because it's a good point, I've been on both sides of it. I have also lost 30 pounds, so I lost my admin 30. I have some more weight to lose from weight I gained before I became an administrator. But I try to with my students break things down as simply as possible. Kind of what we do when we're teachers, right?

And so I was able to pinpoint basically the top five things. Before we can solve a problem, we have to know how we got here. So, these are the top five things that I would say is what makes it so easy to gain weight when

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you're in a leadership role. So without further ado, I'm going to start with the first one, Angela. Are you ready?

Angela Kelly: Okay, let's go.

Jena Damiani: None of these principals is going to be shocking, but I think it's important to take a step back and recognize what you experience in a work day. And so the first thing is you are in a high stress environment. That's not to say that there isn't some stress with teaching, but I'm sorry, it is not at the same level as when you're a leader. So, the fact that you go from teaching in your one room of whatever, some hundreds in a school, right? You are now in charge of the entire school.

So it's constant decision making, constant discipline issues, staff always need you, unexpected problems you can't ever anticipate, and that in and of itself leads to emotional eating. Which is the reason why we gain weight. But the reason we're eating is because of all of the things that we are now having to suddenly deal with that we did not have to deal with before. And no matter how good your principal certification program was, nothing prepares you for the role. Would you agree with that, Angela?

Angela Kelly: Oh. 2,000%. There's theory and then there's what happens with boots on the ground and it is not the same. You cannot theorize your way through a day, a week, a year of school leadership. You can't.

Jena Damiani: No. And it is perfectly normal when you are feeling stressed to want to eat. It's a way that - it's honestly a very easy way to calm your body. Food is very easily accessible. And that's certainly what I turn to. And the interesting thing was that I would work the entire day and not eat because I was doing all the things, whatsoever, and I wouldn't eat at all during the day.

So in my mind, I'm like, I'm going to lose weight in this job. I'm not even eating during the day. And that couldn't be further from the truth because

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then I'd go home at night, I'd eat dinner, but then I'd be snacking or having the wine at 10:00, 11:00 at night. Which is not going to lead to abs, unfortunately.

So, I got in this habit of snacking and drinking in a way to unwind from this otherwise what I would describe as a grueling day, right? Before I had all of the mental tools that you were able to teach me through your program. I would argue if you're overweight because you're stressed, you're actually quite smart. That's the way that our brains are wired to survive. So it's not that there's anything wrong with you. I don't know anybody who loses weight moving into an admin role. Quite frankly. Do you, Angela?

Angela Kelly: I mean, the only people I can think of are people who when they are stressed, their reaction is the opposite. Which there are people out there like that. I don't think it's the norm, but there are people. But even so, I know there are situations in my life where I have lost a lot of weight quickly because I was under stress, but it was a different kind of stress. And in the school leadership role for me personally, I like the way that you said this because coming home to the food.

I was the same way. You go 100 miles an hour from the time you get there till the time you leave. You're grabbing a Diet Coke or you're grabbing a granola bar or something. And then you get, so you're thinking to yourself, I haven't eaten all day. But what I found is after the nourishing meal that you, if you have an actual dinner or a salad or whatever you eat for dinner, that's more nourishing. The snack, the wine, for me it was dependent on the day if it was a gin and tonic or a glass of wine, but it was, there was something that felt comfort.

It felt I could relax, unwind, and it was safe to let go of the front that I had to put on every day. Almost the armor that I was wearing all day long, being strong, making decisions, being in boss energy, going and I had this armor on and I could finally take that weight off of the school day. And sit by my

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fireplace and look at the fire, sip my wine or watch a movie, whatever we were doing as a family that night.

And it felt so warm and cozy and fuzzy, a warm blanket wrapped around me that I didn't look at it as overeating. I didn't think of it as giving my body something it didn't need. What my heart was saying and my mind was saying was, I need this more than anything else right now.

Jena Damiani: Yes, I deserve this. I honestly feel like I woke up one day 30 pounds heavier. I didn't realize it was happening in the moment and I think that you so perfectly described why. It doesn't feel even a bad habit in the moment. It's, I deserve this. This is what I need. I worked hard today, so now this is my time to unwind.

Angela Kelly: Yes.

Jena Damiani: And it feels good. It does take the stress off for a little bit. You do have a little escape for a moment. In what you're feeling, especially, I've coached with you, Angela. We've been together for six years. Isn't that crazy?

Angela Kelly: I know it's crazy, right?

Jena Damiani: But I can't say enough about Angela. If you're a principal and you're not working with her, you need to be because she's amazing. And I can't say enough about how much she's taught me and how much better I feel in being able to navigate emotions and it's helped me beyond the principalship, but absolutely.

So, this leads into the second thing that I identified of why it's so easy to gain weight when you're a principal. And that is the non-stop schedule. So when you're a teacher, again, I'm not saying at all that teaching is easy. We know it's not.

Angela Kelly: Definitely not.

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Jena Damiani: But when you're a teacher, you have a contract time where you begin work and you have a contract time when you end work. And you don't have to work prior or after that for the most part. I mean, are there some exceptions if you have a meeting or whatever, sure. But in the general day-to-day, you know when you're working, you know when you're not. Your weekends are free, your evenings are free. And you also have a scheduled lunch, you have a scheduled prep. A lot of teachers work under contracts, so this is protected time through if you're part of a union.

So, you go from this very structured, predictable schedule, specifically with your time, to then you're an admin. And it feel you work 24/7. Your phone can ring at any time. There's expectations that you're checking your email. There's expectations that you're working evenings. There's no allotted lunchtime. You're often eating while you're doing something else to get food into...

Angela Kelly: You're monitoring lunchtime is what you're doing.

Jena Damiani: Yes. Yeah. Or, we already said, you're not even eating lunch at all. You're watching other people eat. And then the off chance that you have a couple of minutes or if you're driving back from district office because you had a meeting and you're going back to your onsite building, you're driving through the fast food line. Because that's the realistic thing in your mind to do because it's quick. You can get back to class. You can get back to the school. And that shift in schedule, I think can create such an easy way to gain weight.

Angela Kelly: So true. I did not even acknowledge until just now how often I ate out two reasons, now that I'm thinking of it. Number one, the fast food was for the speed, right? And I could eat it in my car between the fast food restaurant and the school, so there was no downtime. I would shove it in. And I'm not even fond of fast food, but you get in a habit of it's easy, it's fast, it's convenient. You can expedite getting food into your system.

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But the other reason, now that I think about it, is it was a midday treat. If I did eat lunch, it would be another form of a little break or a reward or I deserve this. Sometimes my secretary would say, hey, we're ordering the local taqueria, what do you want? And I'm, oh, I'm good. And of course there would be this whole tray of food at my desk. And of course I have to eat it because it was delicious, but...

Jena Damiani: Yeah. Well, see now that's where I'm also different. There were no better words spoken than we're ordering out for lunch. Yes. And I'd order a cheesesteak and fries and I'd wonder, I don't know how I gained all this weight. I can't believe it. Why am I not feeling well? I can't imagine why I'm not. It just... And this is funny because Angela, you don't have the list that I have, but everything that you're saying leads perfectly into the next thing.

Because reason number three of why it's easy to gain weight as a principal is because of this food-centered culture that we have in schools. Now, we already know this as teachers. There seems to always be treats in the office or in the teacher's lounge. And as a teacher, hey, listen, it can be easy to snack on those things and have those extra calories.

But again, you only have certain times during the day that you are off. And the rest of the time you're in your classroom, you're busy, even if you're thinking about the cupcakes that are in the teacher's lounge, you can't go get one because.

Angela Kelly: Donuts. Yes.

Jena Damiani: You're teaching. Whereas, yes, as a principal, you can move around a lot more freely, but you have access to these treats. All of the time. And it's very easy to start grabbing all day long snacking. And usually it's not a veggie platter. Usually it's something along donuts or cupcakes.

Angela Kelly: Ice creams.

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Jena Damiani: Yeah, something sweet or something salty, typically not figure-friendly foods. And when we're stressed out and I didn't Here's the other thing. I wouldn't have packed my lunch because...

Angela Kelly: No.

Jena Damiani: I would wake up late because I'm tired. You know, and then I'd rush to school.

Angela Kelly: Trying to get three children out the door.

Jena Damiani: Yes, that too. And if I'd be hungry and then I'd end up eating whatever food's around, which, there's always a birthday happening in a school. We know this. Someone's birthday is always occurring and there's always snacks.

Angela Kelly: Yes.

Jena Damiani: So then, reason number four, it is easy to gain weight as a principal. Is lack of motivation. And I mean this with zero judgment, but you're working long hours, you're sitting in meetings, you're dealing with non-stop problems. The last thing I felt doing when I got home after a day like that was putting on my sneakers and getting my rear end out the door to go for a walk or run or well, okay, I don't run. Who am I kidding?

But I didn't want to go exercise. That was the last thing on my mind when I got home. I certainly didn't want to wake up earlier than I already was and work out in the morning. So, when I was in this cycle of overworking, not managing my emotions, eating and drinking when I shouldn't be, late at night typically. I did not have the motivation to be able to change anything. I was in a very unfortunate cycle.

Angela Kelly: Was it because we thought we didn't have any more energy to give? I mean, when I would come home, I felt there was no more energy to give to a walk or to even the mental energy to think about making

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healthy choices. It was I had hit my plateau of my capacity to be disciplined, if that makes sense.

Jena Damiani: Yeah, no. I think for me, it was a little bit of I honestly wanted to numb out a little bit, I think. I wanted to escape on social media, scroll on social media, and escape whatever negative emotion I was feeling from the day, escape the stress. There's also the piece that if you have a young family, if you still are in if you have children and they're in activities, you're also coming home, you're cooking your family dinner or you're cleaning up the dinner or both, or somebody doesn't have clean underwear, so now you got to do laundry. Someone has soccer practice. So, there's also that piece where you work your full-time job, but then you also come home and you've got your family life to handle, which makes you more exhausted.

Angela Kelly: Yeah, really. Yeah. And in that case for me, that is true too, but I was a single mom, so I was when I was on the days, the week that I had him, it was 100% on. And then I had the week that he was with his dad. This is when he was younger. Eventually he lived with me full-time, but in the beginning, I was all or none. But even on the weeks where I was not, I was more socializing because I couldn't socialize as a single woman when I had my son.

Because I was doing mom things or we were doing boy scouts and we were doing all of his events. And then the other week would be my non-mom week where I was out. And that's when I would go out for happy hour with girlfriends or go on a date or go to the movies with a friend or something to get out of the house and to be in that adult energy.

And again, you said, the culture at schools, and I think the culture in adults is it revolves around happy hours or going out for dinner. It revolves around food and drink. And that is how we are programmed, what we are programmed to believe is pleasure, would you say?

Jena Damiani: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

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Angela Kelly: Yeah. So it's, it's the pleasure of the friendships and the outing, but it's also coupled entangled with this pleasure of having a glass of wine or having appetizers and snacks. Or if you come home, grabbing the popcorn and the M&M's. That's what we used to eat all the time. We would have popcorn and M&M's together when we're watching movies. And that was on top of dinner.

Jena Damiani: The other thing, you said happy hour and that maybe remember that when I would do that as a principal, there was a comfort in commiserating with other admin who get it. Because there's also the other piece to this where you don't feel understood, especially if you're a building leader who's the only leader at your site. Can feel lonely. And so when you're with others who can relate or they're they know the people that you work with and they can provide some sort of comedic relief for you, that is nice to have.

Angela Kelly: Yes.

Jena Damiani: But you're so It is nice, but in the same breath, that with happy hour is not a good, was not a good mixture for me because I was eating wings.

Angela Kelly: It wasn't a net positive gain. You would go and it felt good initially. It's almost when you eat candy or ice cream, the initial feels good, but then your tummy doesn't feel so good afterwards and you're, that was not a net positive. I felt the times where I went out with colleagues, sometimes it was, I left energized and happy that I did it, but a lot of times. What I think commiserating is actually net negative. It pulls your energy down and it confirms and it reaffirms that things are so bad and whatever.

And we did it as teachers. We blah over happy hour as a teacher. And now as an admin, you don't go out very often as often with your admin. But when we did, it was the same thing. Blah, blah, blah. And then you go home and it's, ew, that felt yucky. It wasn't uplifting or inspiring or

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energizing. And now on top of it, I ate a bunch of fried cheese sticks and nachos or something.

Jena Damiani: Absolutely. Again, no one's getting the veggie platter at the...

Angela Kelly: No, you're getting margaritas. Come on. We're being honest on *The Empowered® Principal Podcast* today.

Jena Damiani: We are being real. And then the fifth reason why it's hard to gain weight as a principal. Which is similar to the lack of motivation that we already talked about, is the mental fatigue, the amount of mental fatigue. Everyone has experienced mental fatigue. But in my opinion, experiencing the difference between that in a teaching role versus that in a leadership role, I wasn't prepared for the level that it was.

And the amount of decisions that you make in a day. Forget about willpower. Forget about wanting to stick to a healthy meal plan. You're looking for the comfort foods. And I was not prepared for the level that I would experience with that. And the other piece, which we've already said, is that other principals are experiencing the same thing as you and are doing the same things as you.

So as I look back and reflect, a lot of my - I loved the people that I have worked with, both as a teacher and as a principal. But we didn't necessarily help each other out because we both were having the same problems and solving the problems the same way because we didn't know any other way to do it.

Angela Kelly: Which made it more comfortable for you to do it in that way. So if other people were eating and drinking and you were eating and drinking, it normalized it, the behavior. And it didn't call out the habit, it actually confirmed it. What's the word I'm looking for? When it solidified that.

Jena Damiani: Confirm, yeah.

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Angela Kelly: Yeah, that's the behavior that is normal.

Jena Damiani: It felt very normal and we all gained weight and it was for a moment, I was accepting that this is how it was. And I was settling for, oh, well, this is what I signed up for. I want to be a principal, so I'm gonna gain weight.

Angela Kelly: This is the price you pay.

Jena Damiani: Yes. And that's such nonsense, but I was subscribing to that for a period of time before I learned better. So those are the five reasons that it's easy to gain weight, but then I also identified five reasons it's hard to lose weight. Can we transition to talking about that?

Angela Kelly: Yeah, let's transition because I hope there are five ways why it's easy.

Jena Damiani: There are, but we're going to start by talking about why it's hard. We're going to normalize why it's hard because too many people take these five things that I'm going to tell everybody and they make it mean that they somehow it can't be done. They can't that they're - have to settle. And there's no rule on what number has to be on the scale or what size clothing that you're wearing. Every person decides that for themselves.

But I can tell you that I would look in the mirror 30 pounds heavier and I didn't recognize myself or I'd see a photo of me. You do have your photo taken fairly often in a leadership role and I'd be, oh my gosh, is that what I look like? It just it didn't feel right to me. It didn't feel right and I didn't feel good. I did not feel good. I was pretending everything was fine and I was putting on a happy face for my colleagues at work and even my family. But there was something inside that I knew this was not what I wanted.

And so I feel a lot of principals are in this boat where you maybe are past the point where we talked about how you go unconscious and you gain all this weight, you don't even realize it. That's stage one. Then in my opinion,

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stage two is when you have the realization, okay, whoa, I gained this weight. I don't want this weight on my body. And now this stage is where principals try to lose weight and typically fail at it.

So here are again, I take the five things from doing the job, from coaching other people. These are the five reasons, top five reasons why it's hard to lose weight as a principal. So the first one is lack of time because in our roles, something always feels urgent. And the first thing that we tend to put to the side when something seems urgent is our own agenda, our own priorities.

So that could be things from meal prepping to exercise or any self care, even if it's I'm going to commit to giving myself 15 minutes of time to eat my lunch. That can very easily be pushed aside when a teacher shows up in your doorway and thinks that they have an emergency.

Angela Kelly: Exactly.

Jena Damiani: You know, and the truth is that of course there are times where it is urgent, it is an emergency and we have no problem not eating in that time. There's a fire in the building, you're obviously not going to keep eating your salad. Obviously. But 99.9% of the time when someone comes to you with what they think is so urgent, it isn't urgent at all. It might be urgent to them, but it doesn't mean that they can't wait 10 minutes or whatever the circumstance may be. So it's this thought that you don't have the time and that you need to respond to all of the other people's what they deem as urgent. I'm sure you can remember this, Angela.

Angela Kelly: I mean, oh, yes. It's the idea that your lunch time is less important than whatever's walking in the door. And you don't want people to feel bad to think that your lunch is more important than them. So whatever you're eating, it should be put to the side because it's less important than the person in front of you. And look, as a coach for school leaders, if that's

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your style and that's your approach and it works for you and it feels good, that's one thing.

However, if you're not feeling the way you want to feel in your body, and part of it is that you're not able to eat all day or you're consistently munching because you don't sit down and have a 15, 20-minute window to eat something that feels nourishing and fulfilling to your body. Then it's time to look at what is it in my mind that's making me believe I don't have 15 minutes in my day to prioritize my lunch.

I mean, this sounds such a minuscule thing to think about as a leader, but it has a massive impact on your identity, on your body image, on how you feel about yourself, on just your self-efficacy in you as a person and you as a leader. It's these little things that gnaw at us and without awareness, you find yourself 30 pounds heavier or you find yourself fatigued all the time.

Or you find yourself in this low grade dissatisfaction and you're not sure how to put your finger on it, but it's because there isn't a time and a space where you are the priority or your lunch is the priority. And if you can't be the priority for 15 minutes a day. What does that mean about who you are and how you feel about yourself and what you believe about yourself and what you think? And so it really is much bigger than I should be polite to the person who's coming in while I'm eating my salad. It's so much more than that, Jena.

Jena Damiani: Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely. And it's a mindset shift, right? Because if we've been telling ourselves all this time that the minute somebody or no, this is my favorite, the open door policy. We've been telling ourselves that we have an open door policy. We somehow make that mean that we can't have simple requests like a 10-minute lunch to ourselves where we can close our door and we're not interrupted for 10 minutes. It's somehow we get it twisted. In an effort to want to do well, we sometimes sabotage our own health.

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Angela Kelly: Yes. I'm just going to say it. I hate open door policy. Stop it. Renegotiate that with yourself. Here's the deal. This is a side note, but I have to say it because I can't stand it. When you decide to communicate when it's best to reach you. When can teachers reach you? They can reach you before school and after school. They can reach you probably at their lunchtime, which some maybe your lunchtime. And then they try to reach you at their recess time or their prep break or whatever.

Now, they are going to come at you at all times of day if you don't say, this is the best time to reach me. And these are my office hours, or this is the time where if you want to drop in, if you have something that's less than 15 minutes, you can drop in from this time to this time, designating times for drop in versus a 24/7 365 open door policy. Because if you think about what that means, open door policy means I'm a doormat. Please come in and walk in through my door at whatever time, whatever you need, whether it's relevant or not, whether it's an emergency or not. And let me set aside my entire life to serve you.

That is not an empowered principal. And to be honest with you guys, teachers don't like it. They want to know. When can I come and actually get your attention? So I don't have to watch you eating your salad or I don't have to feel like I'm putting you out. It's much better to tell people, this is when you can reach me. And the fact that you give yourself 15 minutes to eat a lunch before you go in and do lunch duty or before you go out to recess or before you go to that meeting or whatever you're doing with the rest of your day.

It indicates to your brain and to the people that you're leading that you have standards and boundaries. It sets a precedent, not just for you, but for them. It's for the greater good. Just trust me on this. I know it sounds silly, but it does change the energy and it changes the interactions that you have with people on your campus. Sorry for that. Sorry, I didn't mean to rant off, but...

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Jena Damiani: No.

Angela Kelly: I value this so much because you're never going to eat lunch if you have a true open door policy, never. Because they know to get you at the lunchtime.

Jena Damiani: Yes. Well, and it'll make it that much harder for you to lose weight. The other thing that I underestimated because with Angela being my coach, she coached me on this. And so I was working on building in this time for myself within the day. And what I realized is that teachers are watching and it gave them permission to really enjoy their lunch and not feel like they have to stop eating because a parent emailed and they have to respond right away.

It really created and modeled the healthy boundaries that in theory everyone should have, but some of our teachers that are similar to us in terms of they're wanting to work and help and they're having a hard time turning it off and prioritizing themselves, by you modeling that, it is also helping your staff. So it's a double win.

Angela Kelly: Yeah, that's a really good point. We need to give everyone permission to take 15 minutes to themselves. It maintains the sanity, people. It really does.

Jena Damiani: It does. Yes, it does.

Angela Kelly: A little goes a long way.

Jena Damiani: So then the second reason why it's hard to lose weight as a principal is that we tend to have all or nothing thinking. A good quality of educators is that we strive for excellence, but that can work against us when it comes to losing weight. Because we don't see results immediately. It's something that we have to have consistency over a period of time to see results.

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And so because of that, we think the minute that we can't or don't do something perfectly, it becomes an afterthought. Oh, I can't pack my lunch every day because I only did once this week. And then we move on and go back to our comfort foods and happy hours. But at the same time, we're still in some emotional pain because we do want to lose weight. We do want to be healthier.

And then that leads into number three of why it's hard to lose weight, the emotional overload, which we've talked already about this. But when you're dealing with students in crisis. When you're being told that staff morale is down. When you're sitting in a district meeting and they're laying out their expectations of you and you're feeling very overwhelmed and wondering to yourself, how am I going to do all the things? That's going to lead to stress eating and drinking. That's how we got overweight to begin with. We've got to break that cycle. We have to be able to respond to stress in a different way. But until you have the skill set to do that, you can learn, anyone can learn, but until you learn the skill set, that emotional overload makes it hard to lose weight.

Angela Kelly: It's tough because emotional regulation, emotional maturity and expanding our capacity to feel our emotions instead of what we call buffer them or suppress them or avoid them and try to circumvent them. When you can lean into an emotion, even if you do it for a minute and you say, I'm disappointed with today. Today, there was a big disappointment or I was discouraged or, oh, we missed the mark, we wanted to, we didn't hit our target scores or our attendance is down or something horrible happened to a student or a staff member. And you're feeling the weight of that and the responsibility of that as a leader.

Look, when you go into school leadership, you don't drop your emotions at the door. When you're a teacher, you feel all the feels for the kids. That backpack comes with you. You can't detach yourself emotionally. You're still a human in the leadership position. But there's more emotion coming at

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you. You're holding space for teachers and staff and families and community and your district administrators and yourself. And then you go home and then you have your own family and your friends and your children and your parents and your all of that.

So it's this gentle stretching. It's when you're doing yoga and you're gently stretching your muscles to stretch a little bit more and handle a little bit more. It seems to me that's what Jena, you're saying is this emotional bandwidth is an art, it's a skill, it's a practice. That we do yoga, you never perfect yoga, but you practice it daily.

Just like with eating, we can practice feeling a little bit more and not eating as a reaction to our emotions. Even if we hold off for five minutes and I used to play this game where it's, I'm going to wait five minutes for the wine. And I would say 50% of the time, it passed. The urge passed and I was, no, actually I'm okay now. Because it was, well, the feeling's still there and it passed. Other times after five minutes, if I still felt the urge, I was, I'm still going to choose to drink tonight. But it felt different. It felt I was in control more than it was happening to me and I it was out of my control and I was eating the popcorn or pouring the wine or whatever. Does that land at all with what you teach your clients?

Jena Damiani: Oh my gosh, yes. Absolutely. And I can totally relate too with just my own experience, for sure.

Angela Kelly: Yeah. So we just, we're here to let you know guys, emotions are the hardest thing you do. And if you are responding to reacting to your emotions with food, you are not alone at all. And it's normal because it's such a comfort. And we don't always nail emotional bandwidth. Sometimes we are at our capacity. And it's okay if you have a night where you give into that urge, you're human, it's normal. We've got you. And as Jena said, it's not all or none, it's not about perfection, it's about creating awareness.

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Jena Damiani: Well, that's how you get anything to change. You have to be aware of it first before anything can change. So I hope that even if one person listens to this podcast and has that light bulb of, oh my gosh. If you had that moment of feeling they are reading my mind, then you're already better off than someone who's still unconsciously snacking and staying up too late to try and numb out from the day because that means that you've now become aware. And once you're aware of something, then you can take action to change it if you want to.

Angela Kelly: Yeah, exactly. Good. Okay, keep going. I love this list.

Jena Damiani: I have two more things. Yeah, so the fourth thing that makes it hard to lose weight as a principal is if you don't have something that is a habit, something that you know how to do and that you use for time management. Because the truth is, schedules are always changing. You've got your personal life combined with your work life. And there will always be something happening when you're a school leader. That's not going to go away.

And if you don't have a tool to be able to manage your time. Then forget being able to have structured meal plans or to plan your meals or to plan your workouts. All of that's going to be so much more difficult. And a lot of the people that I work with when they come to me, once they get this down pat, they see a lot of weight loss results. So don't underestimate having something to do with time management. And I know that I thought I was so good with time when I first started working with you, Angela. And I have I remember that you coached me many times on my time management. You remember those days, don't you?

Angela Kelly: Yes. We were co-designing the ideal time management because there's two parts of time management by the way. There's your relationship with time, your thoughts and your feelings around time. There's the relationship you have with time and then there is the execution of the planning. So there's two components of that.

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We talk about that in EPC, but with Jena, Jena was one of my very first principals, you guys. So she's near and dear to my heart. But yeah, we were co-creating a relationship with time in combination with the execution of how she planned her time and prioritized her time, but also constrained, right? Not trying to make everything a priority and not trying to solve everything all at once. So there was a work in progress.

Jena Damiani: It's so nice of you just to word it like that, but...

Angela Kelly: Yes. But look at the strides that I've made. Look at me now.

Jena Damiani: You're pro. I can have two businesses and still work full-time and have three kids.

Angela Kelly: I just want to say that. Did you hear what she just said? She went from not being able to manage her time, so she said, which she did do beautifully by the way, but she has three children at home. She works full-time as a principal and she's running two businesses. And she's married, which is another full-time job.

Jena Damiani: Yes. And I promise you, I'm very normal.

Angela Kelly: And her husband is in school administration, right, Jena?

Jena Damiani: Yeah, he's a principal too. And I love to sleep nine hours. I don't typically get nine hours, but if I could, I would. And on the weekends, I love to sleep in. So I'm not somebody who's only sleeping four hours a night. Okay, Angela, this last one, I saved the best for last.

Angela Kelly: Okay, tell us.

Jena Damiani: Because I do - you have taught me so many things over the past six years, but I would say this is probably one of the best tips or best things you ever taught me that, not to sound cheesy guys, but truly changed my life. It's also a reason that if you aren't doing this, it can make losing weight hard as a principal. It is if you don't plan fun.

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Angela Kelly: Yes.

Jena Damiani: I remember Angela, you said to me, or actually, maybe it was even one of your podcasts. It may have been both. I know you coached me on it. You said to me that I shouldn't wait for fun to find me, that I have to go create the fun.

Angela Kelly: Yes.

Jena Damiani: That was the my first year as a principal and a few days later it was they, my school at the time did a Halloween parade. I was leading an elementary school. And so I purchased this blow up unicorn costume that everyone thought was so hysterical. And so all the kids came to school in their costumes. And we did a parade on the school grounds.

And there was a student, I'll never forget it, who was a blow up dinosaur. And he I started running to him. The school that I was a very long hallway and he was at the end of the hallway and he started running to me. So I started running to him and somebody played music. I don't even know how that even happened. Music started playing and we danced together. It's such a fun memory now looking back.

But there's a very simple example of I wasn't even going to dress up for the parade. I went from in this cycle of again, I was I it was I was coming from a good place. I was trying, I wanted to be a good leader. I wanted to do all the things, but I was quite honestly, I was burning out, right? And gaining weight at the same time. And you said that to me and that night I ordered the costume on Amazon, put it on and then I had the most fun that I've ever had probably since I've been a principal, that was such a fun day. And so that is the truth in all the things that are happening in school leadership. The last thing probably on your mind is planning something fun, but don't underestimate it because if you're not having fun, it's probably hard for you to lose weight.

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Angela Kelly: What's the point? What is the point?

Jena Damiani: If you're not having fun, you're probably stewing in the stress, in the problems. That's not to say those things are going to completely disappear, they aren't. It's learning how to have those things in your life as a principal and still have fun. And it feels you can't have both, but Angela taught me you actually can.

Angela Kelly: Yes. Oh, I love that. That's such a good way to end. And because here's the truth, fun is not coming through the door. You know what I realized? I remember thinking, I'm in the big leagues now, it's time to get serious. And I got very rigid and very serious and I didn't have time for silliness and I didn't dress up for a while either.

And you know what? My job was not very fun at all. I was being too serious. I was taking things too heavy, too seriously. And finally I just - actually it was one of my colleagues. It was lighten up. What's happened to you? You were so fun and now you're such a bummer.

Jena Damiani: Yeah, maybe it's part of it is, I think especially for females, it can feel like in order to be taken seriously, maybe you need to not be as bubbly, you need to be a little more stern or who knows. I mean, there's so many factors that are at play, but I am telling you. If you plan fun, watch how much better you feel, watch how much less you think about food. Try it principals.

Angela Kelly: This is so true. Because think about this. The reason you're eating is you're seeking pleasure. The brain, the motivational triad of the brain is to seek pleasure, avoid pain and make things as easy as possible. And if the only pleasure that you're giving yourself or allowing yourself is to eat when you get home, you're not even giving yourself the pleasure of lunch. And the only pleasure in your day is to snack at home all night and there's no fun throughout the day or nothing pleasurable to look forward to, you will default to seeking that pleasure through food.

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And what I have found is when I'm doing things that are genuinely fun, or I one of the things I love to do was make plans on a Wednesday night, mid week. Have something fun to look forward to because that anticipation of the fun is half of the fun is the anticipation. And then do something on the weekend that's fun. Have some things you're looking forward to and you'll notice a shift in how you feel. Because we eat based on how we're feeling. Would you say that's true, Jena?

Jena Damiani: Absolutely.

Angela Kelly: I mean, there's a difference between the sensation of being hungry, the actual sensation of hunger, and then the emotional vibration of I'm uncomfortable and I want to comfort myself with a little snack.

Jena Damiani: Yeah. Some chips.

Angela Kelly: Some salsa. A strawberry margarita perhaps? Yes.

Jena Damiani: Oh, yes.

Angela Kelly: Okay. So Jena, let's talk about weight loss for school leaders. I want to let the listeners know where they can find you, what's going on in your world of weight loss for school leaders, and tell them all the things. What's going on for you right now?

Jena Damiani: Right now, I have a program called 20 Pounds Down. I'm almost at my two year anniversary, which I can't believe.

Angela Kelly: Oh wow.

Jena Damiani: I know. So all of my students who have gone through the program have lost 20 pounds. The ones who have not yet gotten there are all at 17. That's the minimum weight that my clients have lost. I have two over 30 pounds. It's amazing. And so I want to create a group to go through my program 20 Pounds Down, but that it's specifically geared for principals,

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led by a principal, so it's someone who understands what makes the job so taxing, who can teach you how to get out of that, get out of that cycle.

It's built for real life leaders that I understand the long days and the high stress and the unpredictable schedules. And so I created a program around how I did it. I lost now it's 30, but at the time when I created the program, I had lost 20 pounds, working full-time, doing all the things that you are all doing. I'm no special unicorn. That was my Halloween costume a couple years ago. I'm a very normal person who's trying to make it at work like everybody else.

The reason I say that is because if I can do it, I know anybody who wants to do this can do this. You have to be shown the way. Weight loss is a skill, and like any skill, anybody can learn it. And so that's an exciting new development for me in my business. I'm on Facebook and Instagram. My business name is The School of Best Self. So Instagram handle is School of Best Self.

Angela Kelly: We'll drop that link in the notes for you guys.

Jena Damiani: Oh, thank you. Thank you. I have a lot of free workshops and webinars that I've done that you can start to listen to if you want to learn more. And then if you'd like to join me, I would love to have you. But I also can't say enough about working with Angela in EPC and being with like-minded people who are doing all of the things that school leaders do. So I would like to offer something special, Angela, if...

Angela Kelly: Yes, we have a very special, once in a lifetime offer for you guys. We were concocting this just before we jumped on. And we're so excited and so delighted to be offering, there's going to be a combination offer here. For those of you who would like to join EPC. So this podcast is airing in May. And I believe, Jena, you can tell me the details, your program, your summer program is going to run June, July, August. Is that correct?

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Jena Damiani: Yes, we start June 1st and we go through the month of August.

Angela Kelly: Okay. So it's a three-month program for school leaders, 20 pounds down. I just think this is so magical of you to do, Jena. I want to tear up thinking about it. So listen up guys. For those of you who are interested in joining EPC in the fall, we will be opening back up in we end on Memorial Day, and we take June and July off to reboot and recoup. And then we start back up in August.

For those of you who sign up early, if you sign up before June 1st for EPC, The Empowered Principal Collaborative, and of course, we'll put the link to sign up for EPC in the show notes, Jena is going to let you attend 20 Pounds Down for free.

Jena Damiani: Yes. I hope you take us up on this. I would love to have you.

Angela Kelly: You're going to get a year of EPC and 20 Pounds Down for the price of joining EPC. Because Jena is a miracle worker and she - let me tell you this, Jena is a one on one client. Jena is a client in EPC, so she's in EPC. She'll be your colleague in EPC and we mastermind and we EPC this year has been epic. I cannot wait.

And I actually am going to host an EPC session where we are podcasting as an EPC group. Because I think the dynamic is magical this year. It's been epic that the energy and the ideas that are coming and the support. Oh, it warms my heart. So Jena's in that group as well. And if you join before June 1st into EPC, you're going to get a full year of mentorship and coaching and support and masterminding, but you're also going to get 20 pounds down. I mean, an incredible offer. So, Jena, can you tell us a little bit more about 20 pounds down? How does it work and where would they sign up and all of that?

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Jena Damiani: Absolutely. So, if you are going to take us up on this offer, then you would sign up for EPC and then Angela, I would then through your list, invite them, invite them for free to that. So that's what we'll do. That's how we'll work that. Okay. So the only thing that you would have to do is sign up for EPC, and then I will send you the information, the login information, all that good stuff for free for 20 Pounds Down.

So 20 Pounds Down is a program. So it includes a course that you can access. It's through an app. You can, of course, use your laptop, but you can download the app and listen on the go from your phone. And so it's a self-paced course. You get instant access. It's short lessons to teach you the skill of weight loss. I try to keep things as short and concise as I can. I mean, like all of you, I was a teacher before I was a principal, so I'm I think I'm pretty good at teaching.

So I'll teach you the skill of how to lose weight. So you'll listen to those lessons on your own time. And then in addition to that, we have a private Facebook group that you can join to be a part of where you can always ask questions. Share wins, connect with other people who are also working to lose the weight. I also have a weekly coaching call where you can come on the call. I do some teaching, but then you can also ask questions. I can coach you. It's meant to make sure that I'm supporting all of my people in my group. So that's a little bit more about 20 Pounds Down.

Angela Kelly: Oh gosh, I love that so much. Thank you so much. Jena, thank you for your time today. Thank you for being on the podcast. It's going to change lives. I feel it's going to save lives because without your physical health or your mental health, your emotional health, you cannot be the most empowered version of yourselves. And we want you guys living the fullest life possible.

We want you to enjoy your professional life and your personal life. And we want you to sleep better, we want you to feel better, we want you to be 20 pounds down so that you can be in the energy of empowerment and

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creating the memories of a lifetime and living the best experience possible. So Jena, thank you for being such an integral part of EPC and being here today on the podcast. I mean, I think this is your third time on the show?

Jena Damiani: It is.

Angela Kelly: Is it? Holy wow. We talked about her as a first-year principal and then we talked about all of her growth and now here she is. Certified life coach. She has another business called The School of Scents, right? You have to follow her on Instagram. They are the cutest little gifts. You could get them for your teachers, you could get them for your peers, your colleagues, darling.

So check her out on Instagram School of Scents. Shameless plug, I don't care. I love the soaps. She sent me some for Christmas. They are so cute. The packaging is crazy. But the scents are incredible. I love it. So anyway, you are a miracle, you're an angel. I love you. You're my friend, you're my colleague, and I adore you to pieces. So thank you for all you do in the world. And I'll see you in EPC.

Jena Damiani: Thank you so much. Love you too, Angela. And I owe a lot of where I am in my life to you and all of the things you taught me.

Angela Kelly: Let's go celebrate together.

Jena Damiani: That sounds good.

Angela Kelly: Okay. Take good care. All right, everybody, have a great week. We'll talk to you next week. Take care. Bye.

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