

Ep #385: The Teacher Attachment Cycle: Shifting Parent Expectations



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 385.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly.

Well, hello, my empowered principals. Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. Hey, if you're new around here, we are so excited you are here. Welcome, welcome, welcome. I absolutely love this podcast. I love having these conversations with you, and I want to invite you to contact me.

I would love to ask you, what are the hardest things that you're facing in school leadership? What's a challenge you don't feel you can solve? What is a problem that you are noodling on that you can't see a solution? Or maybe it's just a situation that feels unmanageable.

With all that's going on in education, all of the conversations in education, perhaps it's staffing, perhaps it's the politics of education right now, perhaps it is a superintendent you're working with or another boss, perhaps it's your school board, perhaps it's, it could be anything.

It could be a legal issue, it could be a specific student situation, a specific staff situation. There are situations that we face as a school leader that feel complicated and overwhelming and unmanageable, whether that is you're physically not able to manage it, you're mentally not able to handle it or manage it, or emotionally you don't feel that you're capable of handling it or managing it, or something feels so out of your control and you feel defeated or you feel helpless in your ability to navigate the situation.

If you have something like that, I invite you to come in to the free group, the Empowered Principal Facebook group, join in our Facebook group and ask me the questions. I want to know what your struggle is. I want to help you

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in any way that I can. I honestly believe with all of my heart and soul that coaching provides a solution, a path, a way to navigate anything that comes your way. I believe it with all my heart.

I don't think coaching is the only answer on the planet, but I do believe it's a powerful answer on the planet. Strategies, tools, perspective, the wisdom, the knowledge, the courage to step in and to question and to be open to different trains of thought or new perspectives or new identities, ways where the old version of you couldn't imagine knowing how to handle something, but this newer version of you can imagine it being done, or you being able to navigate it in a way that feels good to you, that feels empowering for you.

So come on into the Facebook group, let us know. What is it that you don't think you can handle? And let me give coaching a shot. Let's see if I can throw something your way that will give you a tool, a strategy, a thought, an approach that can help you feel better about this situation or feel like you have some agency over your approach to handling the situation or coming up with a solution, okay?

Come on into the Facebook group. That's primarily where we're doing these conversations. There's a free Facebook group, and then if you're in EPC, there's a private Facebook group for EPC members. And that is where we hold all of our resources, all of our replays. I do special trainings and I offer them in EPC. You have special access, kind of a, you know, a paid access to all of my tools, all of my past trainings, all of my future trainings, all of that. So, come on into the Facebook group.

Ask me your questions. Let me see if I can provide that support for you, just to show you and for you to experience the power of coaching. Coaching has transformed my life in such a way that is very difficult for me to articulate into words because the transformation has happened internally. It's happened in who I am, how I perceive myself, what I believe about myself.

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I have gone through things in my life that I did not think I would be able to handle. Things that felt so scary to me that I wanted to die. And emotions that I had to feel and process that actually felt like death. I felt like I was going to die. I wanted to. I felt like just take me out of this pain. I can't handle it. But the truth was, I could handle it. And when I stopped telling myself, I can't handle this, I can't take this anymore, and I started to say, I can handle this, I can take this, I can handle this, I'm getting stronger, this is conditioning, I can do this, I can handle this. This won't last forever. When I switched my story that I was telling myself, I realized the level of empowerment that was available to me.

And through my personal experiences, I honestly believe there is nothing that I cannot handle. Now, it doesn't mean that there's no pain. It doesn't mean that I won't make mistakes. It doesn't mean I'm not going to fail. It doesn't mean that I won't feel negative emotion ever again or have another round of really hard times, so to speak. But it does mean that I am not going to be afraid to live my biggest life, to step into my empowerment, and to be the brightest, boldest version of myself and own who I am and not apologize for who I am, and show up in this capacity as the Empowered Principal supporting site and district leaders and state leaders. I've got some state leaders in here too.

However, I'm not going to dim my light because it, you know, it makes somebody else uncomfortable or because I'm afraid that I won't be able to handle it, that I won't be able to engage in disagreement or in discourse or conversation. Maybe somebody doesn't believe in the Empowered Principle or the strategies and tools and the concepts that I teach. That's okay. I'm open to hearing what it's all about. So I invite you in. I invite you in to say, can I apply coaching to this? But what about this? Or I tried to apply your coaching. I listened to the podcast. I tried to apply this coaching, and it's not working. What's going on for me? How can I make this work? Come on into the Facebook group. I will help you.

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I want you to experience the power of coaching for yourself. It's one thing for somebody to say to you, "Hey, do you know how amazing it feels to have a baby and to have your own child?" And if you have your own children, you can say, "Yes, I do understand that experience. I've gone through it. I've experienced it myself. It's amazing. It's incredible. I love it. There's no love like that. It's just so unimaginable not to have had the experience." But then if you were to say to somebody who maybe hasn't had a child yet, and you were to say, "Do you know what it feels like? It's like this and this and this." And if you haven't had the experience, it's different in the way you relate to it. You can listen to somebody else's experience.

Like, have you ever been on a roller coaster? If you've been on one, yes, you can say, "I've ridden a roller coaster. I've had that experience." I haven't ridden a roller coaster. I can watch other people. I can hear them screaming. I can see them laughing. I can hear, I can hear them, you know, either loving it or hating it or crying or being exhilarated. I can observe the experience. I can observe who they were before their first ride on the roller coaster and then after their first ride on a roller coaster. I can witness that, but it isn't my internal experience because I haven't had it yet.

And I want to offer to you that this Facebook group that I have, got about 2,500 of us principals in there, and we are discussing and sharing what it's like to be in the experience of empowerment, to be in the identity of an Empowered Principal, to come up against a roadblock and not know how to solve it, but have the belief in yourself to be able to overcome it. So come on in. I would love, love, love to have you guys in there.

So shifting gears here a little bit, I'm going to jump into the today's topic and talk about a coaching session I had. It brought it to my attention. It's not something I had thought about before, and when my client brought it to me, I thought, "Whoa, I need to have this on the podcast because I do think this is an issue that without awareness, we don't even realize we're facing it,

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but once you see it, it's hard to unsee." Okay? So, my client was saying to me, "Oh, you know, we have several staffing changes coming up." Lots of people are moving. There's going to be a lot of staff changes, like reassignments or people leaving and coming and going and all of that.

And she said, "I'm a little nervous about how the families are going to respond." And we got into a conversation about that. And I said, "Well, how do you think that they will respond?" And she said, "Well, they're going to be upset." I said, "Why?" And she said, "Well, because they want to have certain teachers. They're expecting that certain teachers are going to be in this grade level when their child gets there because they want this teacher or they want that experience." So, we have a lot of amazing teachers, and because there will be some adjustments, I think people will be upset.

And we just got into this very interesting conversation around this expectation. You know, if you go to, I don't know, let's think of a brand, like Nike. You go into a Nike store and you want to buy a pair of running shoes, and Nike is your brand and you love them and they fit your feet perfectly. You go into Nike, and you've been to Nike several times before and there was a favorite sales representative that you worked with in the store.

And let's say this lady's name was Jennifer. Okay, Jennifer. Jennifer was your favorite salesperson. You would go in and she would always hook you up with the perfect shoe and she would show you the latest and greatest and you always got the great pair of Nikes with her and you love her. She knows your feet, she knows your style. She's got you.

And then you go into Nike, you're going to get your new pair of shoes, and Jennifer's not there. And you're like, "Oh, where's Jennifer?" Oh, Jennifer got promoted. Jennifer's now working as a director or she's a sales trainer or she's a trainer of trainers or who knows? Jennifer went on and her career evolved. Okay?

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She moved or maybe she just moved towns. Maybe she went to the big city or maybe she went to a smaller town. Jennifer made a decision in her life and she made a career decision and a personal decision about her career and her experience. Jennifer loved you as a customer, as a client, and Jennifer made her own decision. Okay? That happens. We're like, "Oh, we're disappointed. Oh, bummed, we really miss her." Okay. Meet the next person and we go on.

Or your hair stylist, right? You have a hair stylist you love, and they get a big promotion or they get called to go to New York City and style the celebrities or something, right? In other situations, or let's say Target. You go into Target, and when you shop at Target, you have certain expectations. You expect to walk in and have an experience. You walk in and there's going to be a little Starbucks and there's going to be the registers and the people, and you're expecting a certain experience, but you aren't expecting that the exact person is going to serve you. But you are expecting a certain standard of service. Okay? I've been thinking about this.

In education, we don't think about people being people, teachers being teachers, and them having career paths and them wanting to move up and to expand or maybe they take a break because they're having a family. There's an outdated expectation in many communities that revolves around this assumption that teachers who are assigned in a particular position this school year are going to be in that position next year. And teachers who have been in that position for several years, there is definitely an expectation that teacher will remain in that position for the unforeseeable future.

Understandably, I understand that parents have thoughts and opinions and feelings about staffing because it impacts them. It impacts their children and it's their job as parents to protect and maintain the integrity of their children's education. I understand that.

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However, if you've been a principal for one year, what you have probably noticed is that for some parents, the teacher that their child is assigned or the classroom that their child is assigned to can create a significant amount of angst, especially when they're fixated on having a particular teacher or not having a particular teacher for the upcoming year. They get hyper focused on, I want this teacher for K and this teacher for first and second grade, and they have it picked out K through 12th grade by the time the child's 5, okay?

So, we were talking about this and it's interesting because I asked this principal that I was coaching. I said, "Have you had people backlash at you in the past?" You have a little nervous trauma coming up? Is there something being triggered in you? She said, "Yes. I've had experiences where teachers have moved or they've gone on leave or they've been promoted or they've got another job somewhere else or they wanted just a new experience. They had taught a certain grade level for a while. They wanted to try something new." And she said, some parents are highly offended when a teacher chooses to move a grade level or a position or maybe shift from full-time to part-time while they're raising their children or job sharing, whatever.

And we were talking about how interesting it is that in our profession as education, where the public has a very strong opinion about an adult's professional decision relating to their career path. They're very attached to what teachers should do and shouldn't do. They have the mental manuals as I call them, about what a teacher should and shouldn't do with her, his, their professional journey.

Most professions are not like this. They're not as complicated. If you're working at corporate Nike, the average customer, they don't care if you move up from an assistant director to a director position, or if you move locations. They care about the product, they care about the brand, they care about the quality of service they receive, the quality of care. They care

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about the experience that they have with the shoe and the sales process. When you walk into Nike, there's a brand. There's a feel, there's a vibe. Just do it, right? It's empowerment. You go in to get your Nike on, to get your empowerment on, to just do it. That's what we want. We want to have the experience when we walk in and walk out and then have this shoe honor the brand, honor how they're selling it.

It's not about the individual who's selling the product. It's about the brand and the product and the experience that you have as a customer of Nike. And in education, we have attached the experience that children have, students and parents have, families with the individual. Now, it makes sense if you look at it, you know, objectively or neutrally, we're like, it makes sense because the teacher in a classroom is the one person who creates the experience. They set up the environment. They are the ones who engage with the students. They're the ones who set up that classroom environment, the peer environment, the learning environment, the instructional environment, and the parental experience, how they engage with parents, the communication style, the method, what they share, how often they share it. All of that is pretty much in the individual control of the teacher.

So, people will get attached to the individual because of the individual brand of that teacher, the individual marketing style of that teacher, the communication style of that teacher, the teaching style, the classroom management style. A teacher has an individual style. So I was thinking about this, kind of meta, right? Where there in other organizations, it doesn't really matter if people change positions or advance themselves. It's really about the quality of service and customer care regardless of who's in the position. And in education, we're very attached to the service because we equate and connect that service, correlate that service to a particular individual.

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So as school leaders, we must navigate and balance the needs of our staff members who are humans, who are adults, who need to make decisions regarding their professional career and advancement and allow them that freedom and that agency to have the professional experience they desire to have, whether that's staying in the same position for 30 years or whether that's moving about every couple of years because they desire to learn and grow and evolve and change it up, or they want to climb the ladder and go from assistant teaching to teaching to coaching to leadership to whatever they want to do, superintendency, run for school boards. You know, there's all kinds of jobs in education, county level, state levels. You can be on boards, you can work for professional organizations that are in education. Endless, there's endless career opportunities.

And yet, when the public comes in and says, "We have an opinion about your professional journey," we can get caught off guard. It can be very jarring to the system, and it can feel like they have the right to their opinion or they have the right to tell you kind of what to do and what not to do. It can feel very uncomfortable for you as the leader to balance out the needs of the families and protect the rights of your staff.

So I was helping this client navigate this situation back in March. And one of the things we talked about was how antiquated the mindset is regarding our teachers, particularly strong, empowered, successful teachers that are well liked in the community, that they should be expected to stay in that position forever and serve for as long as the community wants them to because it works for the community.

And because parents are focused on that individual providing the service to their child and counting on that person to be the service provider for their child, when that expectation is jarred for the parent, when the reality shifts and it's met with change, parents can find it difficult to accept that the teacher that they expected to have, that they anticipated in having has

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desired to move on or has chosen to move on or is having a life change or is having a professional shift in their... who knows? Anything could happen.

But when it no longer becomes an option to have the individual that the parents want, they lose it. I dealt with this every year. Every year, there was a group of parents that would come in and be like, "I just want to talk to you about next year." And they were very sweet about it and they wanted to be nice and kind of kiss up and plant the seed in advance just to let me know. This is what they're thinking and this is why, or, you know, this is who my child is and this is the personality fit for them.

Every year that happened. And also, every year at class list posting time, we had a big lemonade social for the class list to be posted and every single year, you know, "I really want to talk to you about this. This isn't the right match. It's not going to be a good fit for my child. This isn't going to work for us." Meeting, meeting, meeting, I need to talk with you.

So their expectations did not match the reality of their situation. It caused cognitive dissonance and they felt like they deserved the right to have their expectations met by having this teacher. Now, some of them, the teacher's there and they just didn't get the teacher and you have to have a conversation about not always getting your way. We're going to give it a try.

So, this is not an unusual situation. It happens every year. You want to prepare for it, whether you're a brand new leader or whether you've been doing this 10 years, you know it's coming, okay? It happens in schools all over the place. As I was working with this client, what we realized is that there is something within our sphere of control. We have some empowerment here. We don't have to be just taking it every year and feeling like we can't control this and feeling like we can't get a grip of this narrative and this expectation.

So, I want you to consider this. As school leaders, we can start to update the mindset and the expectation and the conversations that we have

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around staffing to set a different culture around teachers' professional growth, teachers' professional decisions, professional expansion and evolution, and their ability to have free will and agency over their careers. I want you to think about this. This antiquated way of thinking is teachers probably did used to stay a little more stagnant. The K team was the K team and the fourth grade team was the fourth grade team and the sixth grade team was the sixth grade team, right? And you had high school teachers who taught math for 30 years. I had them. I look back at my yearbook. I saw it on Facebook where these teachers, they taught until they retired. They taught until they retired.

The world is more dynamic. The world is more mobile. And people have the freedom and the will and the free agency to expand and evolve their experience many times over. We are no longer a stagnant society. We are very mobile. We are very active. We're very dynamic. And as leaders, we want to bring this conversation to our communities and discuss it.

And we can navigate this narrative in a way that highlights the positive aspects of teachers who desire to evolve themselves and professionally grow and develop and to move themselves up. We want dynamic teachers. We want people engaging and being alive, not just rinse and repeat for 40, 50 years when one position.

So one of the things I suggested to my client was that she create this new narrative and share it with her community in advance, talking about it now. So this was back in March when all of the changes were starting. She had these conversations throughout the month of April and May, but we're setting a tone.

We're inviting people into a new mindset, into a new way of thinking about teaching, a new way of thinking about class assignments and teacher assignments. And this is true on both ends, like from the teacher's perspective, the leader's perspective, and the parent's perspective, where we're looking at the experience of the student, just like a customer, where

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no matter what grade level you're in or who's teaching, we want to have a standard of experience and we cultivate that, where our school is a brand, where our school, when you walk in, regardless of who's serving your student, you're going to get, hopefully, ideally, a similar experience, a standard of experience.

And then parents can expect, regardless of which teacher I have in, you know, the math department, I'm going to get the math experience. There's an expectation of learning that will occur regardless of who's teaching it. Or if you're in elementary school, in the first grade, no matter what first grade teacher, who's teaching first grade, our goal as a school and as a team is to provide a standard of experience, just like Nike does, regardless of who's selling you the shoe for the corporate, you know, world, for the directors or for the managers, what they hope to obtain. And of course, it's not perfect because we're humans. We train people to have, these are the standards, these are the expectations, and this is the desire.

And we want to celebrate and embrace the fact that teachers are moving and changing, and we don't know from year to year. Person A is teaching first grade this year, but they might be teaching fifth grade next year. And we honor and celebrate people who want to grow and learn. So as leaders, we have the option to set a new narrative when it comes to the expectations around staffing changes from year to year and create it in a way that is an empowering outcome, not just for teachers, but also a positive outcome for students and families.

And the key to sharing this new narrative with your community is to first think about how this updated perspective is better for them from their perspective. So, I think about this all the time, like, in order for people to get on board with something, they have to see the benefit of the change for themselves. Like, why would I change my mindset? Why would I change my belief system? Why would I change a behavior? Or why would I evolve my perspective if I don't see the benefit of it? If it doesn't serve me? I know

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that sounds like maybe people are being myopic or selfish or egotistical. It's none of that. It's just the way the brain works.

So what we have to see is in order for somebody to genuinely embrace a new perspective or understanding, a new mindset, they have to see what's in this for me? Why would it be better for my child to have, you know, teachers who change grade levels every two or three years? Think about the answer to that. Imagine teachers who are willing to move grade levels or they want to advance themselves.

Think of the quality of instruction. Think of the perspective building. Think of the ability to classroom manage when you've taught kindergarten and you've taught sixth grade. You know, I don't know exactly how it works in high school, but maybe you taught English, but now you're also teaching history or you teach math and you teach science, whatever credentials. I know single subjects a little different, but expanding your capacity to teach different grade levels, ninth graders versus 12th graders, very different breed of human, 14 and 18 year olds, right? And the same is true with kinders and fifth graders.

So a teacher who can engage in different grade levels, in different curriculums, in different mindsets, contacts, work with different people, it expands their capacity professionally for them, which is better for kids. And imagine if you as a parent felt that no matter who was with your kid, there was a level of competency, a level of standard. And if we don't get it right, just like if you go into Nike and there's a defect in the shoe or you had a rude, you know, salesperson or maybe someone was having an off day or somebody was brand new and just didn't know and your customer experience wasn't great. It's not that the goal is to be perfect and to always get it right. It's not perfection, it's intention.

And if somebody comes in, a parent and says, "Hey, this is not the experience I wanted. This is not working." Okay, let's work together to get it right. Let's, you know, see what we can do. Let's see what support we can

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provide to the teacher. Let's see what support we can provide in the classroom. What is it from your child's perspective? Do we do to enhance this experience? How can we solve this? And we look at all the ways. It shifts this focus from I have to have this individual to I want to create this experience. I want my child to have this experience, not this teacher.

So the reason a parent would want their child to have a particular teacher is because of the experience. Let's separate out the person from the experience, and then as a staff, talk about what's the experience that we want our children to have, our students to have, and our parents to have in every classroom, no matter what. Like there's a standard of experience as they are basically our clients.

So think about this as you're contemplating over the summer. I know you've just got a few weeks to go. Congratulations. But why would it be better for students if teachers were dynamic in their careers? Why would it be better for parents? How is it better for the school at large? The community at large when teachers are actively engaging in different capacities and that there are different assignments each year. Some people stay for a few years, some people stay for shorter time, longer time. That can even be dynamic.

But helping your community expand their perspective from the individual to the experience. So think about that over the summer, contemplate that. And what would you like your school experience to be, the set of standards, the brand you want to sell to your community? What's the level of service we're providing here regardless of the individual? One of the things I'm going to be taking EPC clients through in the fall is the teacher experience journey and the student experience journey and developing your approach to the upcoming year through the lens of the experience that you want to offer for students and staff members, and for yourself as well.

We're doing this for everybody, for us, for them, for the greater good. It has to be a triple win here. So, think on this. Let me know your thoughts. I would love to hear the comments that parents have made and how you've

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handled it. I'd love to get your insights and perspective and wisdom. So come on in again to the Facebook group. Tell us everything. I want to hear from you. I look forward to meeting you online. And I will talk with you all next week. Take great care of yourselves. Talk to you soon. Bye.

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