

Ep #390: The Rage of Injustice



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 390.

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. So good to be here with you today. One of the things I love about this podcast, and one of the things I value in this particular educational podcast, is that we talk about the full human experience. We talk about leadership, we talk about mindset, we talk about skillset, we talk about how to engage with people.

In EPC, I teach time mastery, balance mastery, planning mastery, regulation mastery, relationship mastery, communication mastery, and leadership mastery. We talk about school leadership. We talk about test scores, we talk about teaching, we talk about learning, students, families, all of it.

And we also weave into this conversation the human experience, the entirety of it, the full spectrum, because you are a human on the planet having a human experience. And your personal life, your personal emotions, impact you professionally, and your professional life and your professional emotions impact your personal life. There's no true compartmentalization when you are one human.

Now, it might be in the background, you might put it on the back burner, but it's still lit. It's still there. It's like a computer when there's a program running in the background. You might not be using that program actively on your screen, but it's still taking up energy. It's still taking up memory. This is the same with our events in our life. When we're at work, it's not that we never think about our kids or our partner, our spouse, our loved ones, or that

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situation that you're dealing with a friend or a family member, or maybe you're caretaking for a parent like I am right now, and a grandparent.

My sister and I are both caretaking right now. I am temporarily moved to my home state of Iowa to help my sister in her time of need. It's really funny how divine timing works out, where I have been going through all of these major changes in my life. I've been moving, and just when I settled down in Nashville, my sister really needed me. So, I said, yes, I will come home. I will support you.

And there is no way that what's going on in my personal life doesn't energetically impact what's going on in my professional life, which is why I am so transparent about my personal life, my professional life, because I know I'm one human having one human experience.

So today, I want to dive into one of the human experiences that we have. I'll relate it to school leadership, but you can apply these concepts, this conversation to anything where you might feel this emotion. So, as you know, if you've listened to this podcast, or if this is your first time, emotions are running the show here. How we feel impacts our decisions and our actions, and the approach we take in our lives, in our leadership, in our conversations, in our connections, in the way that we do everything. Emotions are in the driver's seat. So, we need to create awareness about how we are feeling, what we are feeling, why we are feeling it, what's fueling those emotions, what's generating them, which is our thoughts.

And being aware of those emotions, that emotional state, and our mental state, meaning our thoughts, our belief systems, the values, what's driving us, our perceptions, our interpretations of things, those thoughts and interpretations and perceptions and belief systems generate emotional energy in our body. And this vibration in our body is the fuel of our decisions and actions. And the thoughts are the fuel of the emotions.

So, one of the emotions that I have experienced both professionally and personally over the last couple of years is the experience and perception

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and thought process and emotions around injustice, what I perceive to be an injustice. And there are many, many forms of injustice. So, I just want to say right off the bat, I'm not claiming to be an expert in other forms of injustice. I can only speak to my experience, my own version, and my perceptions of injustice.

So, what I can speak to is that I know injustice as a woman, as a female. I have felt that I have been treated unjustly, unjustly, whichever way that is correctly pronounced to my teachers out there. There has been injustice in my life perceived by me as a woman.

I know financial injustice. I know relationship injustice. I know there are other forms of injustice: racial injustice, just all kinds of discrimination that could be considered injustice, legal injustice. There are many forms. As a principal, as a district leader, as a state leader, as I'm working with some states. Isn't that cool? I love it.

As a principal, we are faced with injustice, the experience of it, the perception of it, the emotional rollercoaster of it. And some of the injustices that we observe, that we witness, that we experience, that we face as leaders, some are very covert, but some are blatant. Some are extremely overt, intentional, designed, part of the system. Some are big, some are small. But I'm imagining that listeners out there, all of you, can relate to a form of injustice.

You might experience it professionally with your superiors, or maybe your colleagues. Someone gets a promotion over you because their husband knows a guy who's a friend of the superintendent. That kind of thing. Someone gets a raise and not you. Someone shares your idea and gets praise for it at the leadership meeting. And you're like, hey, right? Or they take it to the school board and they get the gold star for whatever idea was yours. It happens. You see it with students and families, for sure. Families familiar with the system, familiar with their rights, familiar how to get what they want in the educational system versus families who are not familiar with the system. Parents who weren't given access to knowledge of their

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rights. Families who don't know how to communicate or navigate the channels to express what they need and what they want. Injustice. Doesn't feel fair, doesn't seem right, doesn't seem appropriate.

You also might experience forms of injustice personally. I've experienced it in many ways and in some incredibly painful ways over the last couple of years. But most recently, I have experienced a form of injustice that feels so egregious, so flagrant, so malicious that it has been so difficult for me to process it. It was so painfully unfair to my brain that I could not let it go. I just couldn't find a way to let it go. Thank goodness for coaching and therapy and mentorship. It takes a village to raise a coach. It takes a village to support a school leader. It takes a village to live this life on this planet.

And I've researched this. Research indicates that our brains have a biological basis for caring and attaching to justice and fairness. It is rooted in our need as a human for social cohesion and cooperation. I wanted to know the root of why this felt so painful and why I was so attached to it. And then I realized, oh, it's not just me. It's wired in me for justice. One of the universal needs that humans have is love and belonging. We desire to be in agreement and in alignment with other people. This is why we people-please. We get caught in these traps of attachment to needing connection and agreement and alignment and love and belonging.

And when someone or something occurs that generates conflict and an unfairness, our brain finds it exceptionally difficult to allow it to happen or to let it go, to be able to reconcile it somehow, some way to make peace with it. And while biologically we are wired to focus on fairness and justice, we seek it. We seek fairness, we seek justice.

The human experience contains unfairness and injustice in our world. It's there. It's a fact. It's a part of our life. It's not something I have found that we can delete, eliminate, and just completely absolve from our experience. I have found that for me, it is one of the most challenging forms of cognitive dissonance I have ever experienced.

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The discomfort in our bodies when we are experiencing the emotion of injustice is very, very intense. The nervous system when in dysregulation almost feels uncontrollable. Have you had that feeling? It feels like you're going to crawl out of your skin. You're either so angry or you're so upset or you're so uncomfortable or you're so alarmed. You're so frustrated, you're so saddened.

And according to the scientists, the doctors out there, when our nervous system is in this level of dysregulation, as awful as it feels, we are designed this way on purpose. Our nervous system is designed to be so uncomfortable to get us to take action, to move.

When our bodies are in fight or flight and our mind perceives a threat, what it's doing inside, chemically, neurologically, it's telling our body to go on the defense by either fighting back, fleeing to get away from the danger, or freezing and shutting down altogether. It's designed to feel this way to get us to protect ourselves, to try and stay alive.

So, when we are experiencing injustice, our brain doesn't understand the difference between a physical threat out in the world. Danger, danger, there's a bus coming, get out of the way, move your bones out of the way before they become under the bus and crushed. Or there is a threat of safety, emotional safety, mental safety, the threat of inequality that feels very threatening mentally, emotionally, financially, psychologically. Our freedom feels in threat. Our independence feels in threat. Opportunity feels like it's in threat.

And when we are experiencing or witnessing, observing a form of injustice, this is what my coach described to me as a sacral rage because we are wired for fairness and justice as a collective, as people, as a society. A rage so fierce, so intense that we're afraid to even feel it because when it bubbles and we're trying to contain it, we're afraid that if we allow ourselves to feel that feeling, we don't know if we are going to be able to handle ourselves. Are we going to remain in some form of control or are we going

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to lose it? Are we going to cause harm to self or others if we allow this rage to fully express itself?

We fear that we will not maintain control, that we will not stay safe. And also, we fear if we unlock the lid and we open Pandora's box of rage or anger or whatever form of injustice you're feeling, whether it's that intense grief and sadness, whether it's defeat, whether it's discouragement or the rage, we fear it will never go away. That once we open it and unlock it, it will have a life of its own and it will take over and consume us.

That has been my experience. I was afraid to feel it because I thought it would never go away or I thought I wouldn't be able to handle it. I thought I would hurt myself, whether that was screaming so loud I hurt my vocal cords and wouldn't be able to podcast, or whether I, I don't know what I thought I was going to do. Hit people, hurt people. You feel like you want to. And I see how when left unchecked, when people are feeling intense rage and they don't know how to handle it, they don't have a mentor, a coach, a guide, a therapist, a psychologist to help them process that level of intensity of emotion. This is when crimes of passion can occur.

I could see my brain going to a place where it was so angry and so enraged that it fleetingly thought horrible thoughts. And the funny thing is, because I'm a coach and I have a mastery of my mind and pretty good mastery of my emotions, I was able to watch my brain go to the deep dark ugly places, think the horrible thoughts, and then play them out. Okay, let's say that were to happen.

Let's say you were to actually do that or something were to happen or you got the, the body wants, the brain wants to do revenge, right? You get revenge, you get justice, you, you get it in the way you think is going to feel good. How does that actually play out? Well, not so good. It's not what you actually want. You don't actually want somebody to be in pain. You don't actually want to hurt somebody. You don't actually want their demise or you don't want to go to jail for having reacted to your emotions. Play it all out.

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You can feel and process your emotions of rage and injustice in the privacy and safety of your home or your bedroom or wherever feels safe in your house without ever reacting physically to it. You can feel it without doing anything about it. You can feel without having to do. And the emotion, this is why it's such a skill, an art to allow emotion without acting because the body's wired.

The reason we have the intense emotion is to take action, to do something, to run, to fight, to defend, to protect, to flee, to freeze. We're being told from within our body, do something. Go, move, do something, anything. Get this emotion out, do something. And so, it's very hard to feel it and to not do. To acknowledge it, to allow it, to validate it, but not react on it.

Our society is no stranger to the rage of injustice. It's the injustice that we feel when we are personally held responsible for something completely out of our control. Kind of like test scores. You're ultimately responsible for test scores, but you have a limited amount of leverage and control over the test scores because you don't have control over the humans taking the test, nor the test writers or the test reporters or the score people or the teachers teaching to the test, or the curriculum people. You don't have control over any of that. You don't have control of the will of the children. It feels like a form of injustice when you feel that you're being held responsible for something outside of your control, and yet it happens. So, what do we do about it? How do we reconcile that?

It's the injustice that we feel when we've been wrongly accused or blamed for something. And we want to defend and explain and justify ourselves. We get caught up in the loop of what we're going to say and how we're going to prove ourselves. And we can get down into the rabbit hole on this one. And it can consume our mind, our energy, our attention, our focus, our spirit, and take away our attention and focus on leadership, on learning, on teaching, on evolution, on growth.

It's the injustice we feel when we were overlooked as a qualified candidate because somebody internally was already preselected. And they didn't tell

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you that, but you can feel it. I've coached dozens and dozens of people on interviews and through the interview process and how to get hired. Most of them will come at some point and say, "I know I did a really good job on that interview, but I didn't even get a second call back. It feels like they already had somebody in mind." It's the injustice we feel when the system fails students, families, and educators.

It's the injustice we feel when a school shooting occurs and nothing is done in response to protect staff and students. It's enraging. It seems hopeless. It feels helpless. We are most enraged when we feel disempowered. The injustice occurs as a form of disempowerment. We feel disempowered. When we are empowered, we can advocate for justice. When we feel disempowered, we don't feel that we have the ability to, the capacity to, the empowerment to advocate for justice. It's enraging.

There are systemic issues, which is a whole another topic for an entirely different expert. But I'm here to share my experience: the rage, the defeat, the discouragement, the hopelessness, the helplessness. And I'm also here to share that in my experience, there is a purpose to these emotions. They don't show up for no reason at all. They don't come out of the blue. There is a reason.

These emotions have fuel. They are your thoughts, your perceptions, your interpretations, your belief systems. But these thoughts, interpretations, belief systems, they have wisdom, they have guidance, they have knowledge, they have insights for you. The emotions that we feel in moments of injustice is an invitation. Even if the invitation is only to acknowledge the injustice and to validate your emotional experience.

Because sometimes the invitation isn't a solution. It's the invitation to learn how to make peace internally, to bring closure internally, to validate yourself, acknowledge yourself, express the emotion internally, and then to be able to let it go. Even though the injustice still occurred and the injustice did not get reconciled.

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The anger, frustration, sadness, grief that you feel, it doesn't mean that there's necessarily a solution. It doesn't mean that there's not a solution, but it doesn't mean that there is one. But the emotions are here to remind you that in the midst of the struggle and the injustice, you still have access to your personal power. You have permission to feel however you want to feel. You have permission to express the rage in a way that relieves you from the pain without causing harm to self and others. You can trust that there is a way to express your anger, your grief in a safe manner. You can trust that acknowledging and expressing the anger is what actually helps you clear space for wisdom and insights that are available through the anger, the grief, the sadness, the frustration.

When you are in the experience of injustice, it can be very difficult to determine your next best step because you aren't thinking from your prefrontal cortex, which is the part of your brain where the reasoning, the planning, the executive functioning occurs. You are in your primal brain, your amygdala that is firing off. Run, help, stop, do something, take action. Allow yourself to acknowledge and feel and validate those feelings in the privacy and a safe space to be able to feel those emotions without having to take the action.

Maybe you go to one of those rooms where you crush everything. I think they have those rage rooms or whatever they're called where you can go and break things. My son actually, his roommate took him to one. He said he didn't think he would enjoy it at all. He said it was the most gratifying experience. If that's you, go to a rage room, find one. I know they have one in Nashville.

But if you need additional support, there are people who specialize in this. If you need specific assistance, there are therapists. You can find them online, hopefully local to you, but if not, there are people who have online businesses that can provide support. There are coaches. You can reach out to me and I can connect you with a coach that specializes in this type of internal emotional work.

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You don't have to go this alone. I couldn't go it alone. I had to seek professional help. I had to get guidance. I had to process in multiple ways. And it's not all reconciled, but I am in a space where I feel my personal power taking over, my empowerment coming back in what I can control, in how I can perceive the situations that I have experienced so that I can interpret things in a way that serves me better, that feels better to think, that feels better to interpret.

So, if you need support in this, you can reach out. I can definitely provide you support, but if you need expert support, there is online support. There are humans you could talk to in real time, in real person. But I invite you to consider that, number one, rage is a part of the human experience. Injustice is a part of the human experience. And the capacity to learn how to acknowledge, validate, process, and then reconcile and release the emotions that come with injustice, they are also available to you.

And on that note, have a wonderful day. Oh, my dear empowered principals, I love you. I respect you. I cherish you. I appreciate you. And I want you to know you're not on this journey alone. None of us can do this work alone. We are here for you. I do wish you an amazing week. Take good care of yourselves and I'll talk with you next week.

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