

Ep #394: Asking “How”: 3 Ways to Shift from Questions to Action



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 394.

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. I hope you're having a beautiful week. I am so thrilled to be here with you today. I love summer. Can I just do a shout-out to the Summer of Fun Challenge? I love summer. I don't care where I am in the world. Summer is such a delicious season. And we are also gearing up for the fall.

So, if you are a school administrator, you're already thinking three months ahead, six months ahead, aren't you? So here we are in July, you're thinking about August, September, October, getting ready for staffing, onboarding, professional development, the first week of school, class placements, registrations, systems, school-wide systems, getting kids trained, getting teachers trained, all of that's happening right now. So, this is the perfect time to join EPC. We are starting in the beginning of August. That's two weeks away.

I highly, highly recommend that you join EPC for the upcoming school year. We run from August through May. EPC, the Empowered Principal Collaborative, if you're new to the podcast, welcome. The Empowered Principal Collaborative is a mastermind experience. It's a group coaching program. The experience that you have in this group is a combination of leadership development, professional development. It is personal development, expanding your capacity to manage your time, balance, planning, emotions, your leadership skills, your communication skills, your development of your vision and implementation of that vision. So we encompass teaching, learning, professional development, personal

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development, expanding yourself personally, because personal development is professional development.

So EPC is the full package. You get mentorship, you get coaching, you get professional development, personal development. We problem solve, we mastermind, we collaborate. We hold space for one another when somebody is going through a challenging time or a difficult situation. We provide that comfort. We listen. Your voice is heard. You have the bandwidth to share your expertise while also learning from other people's expertise.

I cultivated EPC so that you finally have a place to land, that school leaders have a place to discuss issues, the real issues that are going on, however you're feeling, what's working, what's not, what we need to adjust, why it's not working, what is our theory. Let's test this. Let's also expand our capacity to be courageous and bold and brave and innovative and hold those difficult conversations and share your ideas to evolve your school, to expand our impact. That's what EPC is about. So this is the perfect time to join.

Bring your colleagues, bring your friends. The more the merrier in EPC because we are banding together to have the courage to innovate, to create, to evolve, to expand, to adjust, to transform the experience for teachers, for children, for students, staff members, family, and for us, for us, for them, and for the greater good. It's a triple win.

So come on into EPC. I'll make sure the link is in the show notes. There are two options. You can pay in full and be done with it, or there is a monthly payment plan. So there's a 10-month installment plan. So you can do that as well. Anyway, I just wanted to remind you and invite you into EPC. It's going to be its best year ever. Every year, I do an extensive amount of reflection, contemplation, while I'm also learning and growing and evolving as a coach myself and reading up on and learning about the issues that

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school leaders face, working with people all across the country to enhance my ability to coach you. So every year gets better and better.

I apply these tools myself, and I have found that the more that I participate in EPC, the more I learn, the more I grow, and I see this synergy of people evolving together, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, equal and different, each bringing our own unique talents and experiences and expertise, but also a collaborative and a community win for school leaders at large. So come on into EPC. We would love to meet you, love to support you, and love to hear all that you have to share and all that you have to say.

So today, I want to talk about asking how. So often as humans, we ask, how do we do this? How do we do that? How did you do that? How did you do that? And it's a question that I have studied in myself and in my clients because I want to identify what's driving us to ask the how questions and what the how means about us, about the question, about the situation, and how we can adjust it to a more empowered question. So many times, I will get the question, how?

How do I plan? How do I manage my time? How do I prioritize? How do I delegate? How do I build culture? How do I build relationships? How do I communicate this information? How do I communicate in general? How can I possibly communicate this XYZ thing? How do I create balance? How do I trust? How do I deal with feeling disappointment, embarrassed, ashamed, incompetent, insufficient? How do I deal with that? How do I deal with other people? How do I handle X situation?

So I'm going to give you three options to handle the how questions that come up in your brain. Now, don't shame yourself for asking how, because it's a normal question. We wouldn't have the word how in our vocabulary if we didn't need it. But I want us to identify it and get very specific and clear with ourselves around why we're asking. So, when your brain offers you a how question, how do I? How did you? How do I?

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Option number one is to answer the question for yourself first. So when you ask, well, how do I plan? How do I prioritize? How do I build culture? Answer the question. How would you? How would you answer the question? If I knew the answer to this, my answer would be fill in the blank. And you can't fill in the blank with, I don't know. Play the game. It's just for fun. You don't have to actually do the thing. You just are playing the game with yourself. You're pushing your brain to answer itself.

What would I do? If I were the expert and I knew how to plan, how would I plan? If I knew, if I was an expert at building culture, how would I build it? If I was really good at communicating, what do I think would be the best way to communicate? How would I create balance? What does balance even mean for me? How do I trust? How do you trust? When are times that you trust? When do you find it easy to trust? How do I deal with these feelings? How have you been dealing with the feelings?

And here's the thing, you might write down all that you currently know, you might tap into a source within you that has expertise that you didn't even think of or that you did not tap into until this moment. So answer the question. Answer it. The wisdom is within you. You will be so surprised at what you come up with. Now, that's just option number one. Try your ideas out, see if they work. It's going to build up your confidence because you'll notice a lot of times the reason you don't ask yourself is because of your belief. I don't know. I don't know how. I've never done that before. I've never experienced that. How could I possibly know? Notice why you're asking the how in that scenario and why you're not answering the question. Okay?

All right. Option number two, shifting from how to what. So when your brain offers how, how do I do this? How do I do that? Shift to what. What outcome do I want to create? What outcome do I want from learning how to plan? What outcome am I creating when I prioritize? Or take any of your how questions and then ask what outcome do I want from this? So if you're

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asking the question of, how do I build culture and relationships? What is the outcome regarding culture and relationships that I am trying to achieve?

What do I gain when I trust? What instead of how? Because what this does is it shifts your brain into how is like the actions I take. What actions do I take to create this outcome? The how takes you back to what outcome am I trying to create? Not how do I create it? What is the outcome I want? And then from there, how will I know I've achieved it? What will it look and feel like if I've accomplished planning, prioritizing, time management, relationships, culture? How will I know I'm a good leader? What will it look and feel like? The answer to how is what. So identify and clarify for yourself what it is you're trying to create and why you're asking the how is based on what you want to create, what you want to accomplish, what you want to achieve, what result you want to create for yourself. Okay?

Then, option three. Option three is I invite you to only apply option three if you've tried option one and you've tried option two, and you've done both. So option three works best if you have tried one and you've tried two and you're still not feeling that you're coming up with the results you want. So you know what you want and you've tried some things to maximize your ideas and you've actually implemented them to see if they work. Versus, I don't know how. I just want what you have. What I see you having, I want it. How'd you do that? Okay?

So option number three is if you have clarified the what, the outcome that you want, and you have answered your own hows, you might decide that there's something outside of you that would help you answer those hows and clarify the whats. So you can research for the fun and sake of learning and expanding yourselves. Like for example, I might go online and observe somebody playing guitar, watching an expert play guitar, mentoring on YouTube, so that I can learn to play guitar, or that I can learn to fix something around the house. There's many times, I love YouTube. YouTube is a platform for me to know what I want. I want to fix this outlet.

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How do I do that? I don't know, and it would be dangerous to tinker around and figure it out. So I'm going to go ask an expert and I'm going to learn from them, but I'm going to learn from them with the intention of expanding my capacity, my skill set, my knowledge base. So it's still coming back to me being responsible and taking ownership of my transformation, my expansion. Okay?

So you can go out, research, learn, and then carefully give it a try, especially if it comes to anything with electricity was probably a bad example, but it's true. And you want to give it a try and see what works. Now, when it comes to your physical, mental, or emotional well-being, if there's something that is actually really dangerous or potentially traumatizing or painful, get an expert.

That's when you hire someone and say, I don't need to know the how. I don't want to know the how. I want to pay you to do the how and the what. Here's what I want. I want you to do the how. That's okay too, guys. But for the sake of this argument, we're talking about when we're asking people, how do I do create this result for myself? I see you have the result. How did you do it? Or how do I do it?

Now I want you to think about this. Why are we asking the how? One, it's we don't believe we know how, that we don't know how. Somebody else knows how, but we don't know how. So option one covers this. We think we don't know how, but we haven't dug in deep. Do we actually not know how or are we trying to surpass the exercise of digging in deep and wondering and seeing and exploring what we do know? Okay? So if you think, well, I just don't know how. I don't know how. Option one will cover that. Explore what you do know.

The second thing we think is we're not sure of the outcome we're trying to create. So option two covers this. You're like, wait a minute. What am I actually trying to do here? Clarify that first before you ask the how. Sometimes we're not even sure what we want. So we'll ask somebody,

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well, how do you do that? And they'll say, what is it exactly you're trying to do? And then we say, uh, I don't know. I'm not actually sure. Number one, get clarity on what you are trying to create or what outcome you want to accomplish. And then number two, explore how you think that might happen. So options one and two cover the lack of belief in ourselves or the lack of clarity of what we want.

And then option three is when we know what we want, we've clarified, and we've tried a couple of things here or there, and we say to ourselves, but I've already tried everything. Everything that I know, I've tried. Well, have we really tried everything we know? Have we given it enough time? You have to discern that for yourself. But option three, when you go out into the world and research, let me learn, let me explore. I want to figure out how, or I decided that I don't really need to know the how, that I can delegate that to somebody else who does know the how, because I'm very clear on the what I want. So when you delegate or when you hire somebody, you have to know very clearly, here's what I want.

I'm actually dealing with this right now. I've got a couple of contractors like tree trimmers coming out to the acreage where I live, and we have to be able to tell them exactly what we want. There's hundreds of trees. What do we want? Which trees? Why do we want the those limbs cut? Right? What is our goal? We have to be able to articulate that to get the result we want. So the same is true at school. If you want to delegate something, you have to be crystal clear on the outcome that you want to be able to articulate it and delegate it and then allow that person time to create the result. Okay?

Now, when we've decided that we have clarified what we want and we've exhausted our capacity of how we might do this, we've tried this, tried this, let's say you've tried lots of things, and now you're looking outside of you, we want to be clear with ourselves and be onto ourselves about why we're asking how. Now, I looked at myself for these answers. I asked myself, when do I ask how? Why am I asking how? And is there anything I'm

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avoiding taking ownership or responsibility for when I ask how? Here's what I found.

I have found that I want to circumvent the discomfort of either, number one, exercising my own mind. Number two, clarifying what I want to do. Like I don't want to take the time or the effort to clarify what I actually want. Number three, I want to avoid the discomfort of the effort involved in researching and reading and learning, because learning is a form of discomfort. It's hard. It's clumsy. It takes time. It takes effort. It takes brain power. And my mind's like, but I don't want to do all of that. I just want it done. And I don't want to have to take time out of my day to learn it. So I have to decide, do I want to pay to have an expert do it and I don't need to learn or do I actually want to learn to expand my skills?

And then finally, when we ask how, we are trying to circumvent the discomfort of trying and failing, trial and error. We're afraid to try something new. We're afraid of trying and failing. We're worried about what others will think of us if we are clumsy and we try something new and it doesn't work the first time and we're failing. We're worried about what we're going to make it mean about ourselves if we try and fail. We're worried about what other people will think. We have an intense desire to get it right the first time we try. So we will go to other people who we believe know how and can articulate how, and we will ask them, how did you do it? How do I do this? What are your ideas? Instead of asking ourselves, what are our ideas?

There is that is the difference from empowerment or disempowerment. Empowerment is I have it within me. And when you feel disempowered, like, I don't know how. I don't have the capacity. I don't have the knowledge, the skills, the bandwidth, or I don't have the emotional regulation or the emotional bandwidth to sit down and do this. Sometimes, and this is a positive one, sometimes we will ask how as a means of connecting and collaborating with other people.

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And I actually love this. There's nothing wrong with this. If we're truly connecting and collaborating, which means that we are contributing equally, like we are both participating in give and receive. We're not simply asking somebody else to do it for us or to tell us how to do it so we don't have to do the work. That is different.

When you're saying, hey, let's figure this out together. Let's go on this experiment, this journey, this exploration together. Let's try and figure this out. This is the goal we want. Here's what we want, here's why we want it, and now we're going to test some theories and we're going to do it together. What do you think? What do I think? Let's collaborate in figuring out the how together. That is a form of connection and collaboration and bringing community together in unity towards solving a collective problem or handling a situation collectively. And this is where mentorship and coaching are most effective.

So when a person is being mentored and they connect with their mentor for the purpose of learning and expanding their own skills, while at the same time, they choose to discern for themselves along the way, this is when the learning integrates into that person's identity. They learn for the sake of learning to expand their skills, their mindset, their ability to handle anything that comes their way, which then expands their identity of who I am and what I'm capable of. My self-concept of who I am, my self-efficacy of what I believe I'm capable of, creates an identity. Those two in combination create your identity. Who am I and what am I capable of? That's my identity. And I want to continually evolve that identity. I'm now I'm capable of this and this is who I am. I used to be this, but now I'm this. I used to not know how to do this, but now I know. These are people who take ownership for their learning and the expansion of their skill set just for themselves.

And they might study with another person and invite them along the journey or seek out their expertise to expand their own expertise. While conversely, there are people who look for mentorship and they see that mentor as the

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expert. They put the mentor on a pedestal and they see themselves as a person who's the student, who's the neophyte, the person who doesn't really know anything, and you are just there to guide them. And they look up to the mentor. Tell me what to do. Tell me how to do it. But that person doesn't expand their identity. They don't expand their belief in themselves that they now know how to do it and that they can apply decisions and action and skills and self-regulation into their lives and into their careers.

So there are and you've probably experienced this with students. There are students who identify as a learner and they use teaching, they use school as mentorship for themselves to expand their identity as a student. You've seen teachers. There's teachers who take it upon themselves to learn. They might ask and collaborate, they might ask how, but they do it from a place of wanting to expand themselves versus being spoonfed, just tell me how. Just tell me how to do it. You tell me how. You solve this for me. That doesn't give people empowerment. They're just saying, just tell me what to do and I'll do it. But it doesn't expand their skills, their minds, it doesn't evolve their identity. Can you see the difference?

I see this in coaching all the time. There are clients who hire me to just tell them how to do the job. But then that makes me responsible for their success or their failures. And then I have clients who come to learn and apply the coaching in the way that works for them. They use self-discernment to identify what they want, why they want it, and how they want to evolve themselves and apply their coaching and customize it and customize the concepts that I teach them to fit into who they are and the outcomes they want to create for themselves and their school.

And I've seen it as a client in other programs where there's people who want to be spoonfed the answers and have the mentor or the coach or the expert do the work for them. And in that case, like when you have somebody who's skilled, like a laborer or a skilled laborer who's coming in to work on electronics or plumbing or tree trimming or, you know, you might

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have construction going on at your school. There are people that you just pay to be experts. They're not mentoring you. You're not learning how to put in new carpet or to replumb the school or to add whatever, new electronics or put in smart boards. You're not there for the installation and maintenance. That's not the skill sets that you're choosing to evolve yourself in. You could do it if you wanted to, but most likely, you're trying to expand your leadership capacity.

That's what EPC does. We expand your leadership capacity, not because you don't know how, but we help you trust yourself and tap into the part of you that does know how. We empower you. And then I teach you how to empower your staff and empower your students. Because in full transparency, I see aspects of our school system, our current system that hinder empowerment, that actually discourage empowerment. They want teachers to just be told what to do and do it our way. And we want kids to just, we want to be able to just tell them, do it this way. Just do it this way. Don't question, don't ask, don't ask, just do it. Right?

That's not the kind of adult we want out in the world. We want somebody who's empowered. And we have to have the courage to take ownership for our own personal and professional development, our own expansion, our own evolution of our identity, so that we can with integrity, invite teachers and students to do the same. Instead of us being up on a pedestal where we are responsible for solving all of the problems, we empower others to take ownership of figuring out the what they want to create and how they want to create it in their own approach, and then letting go of the insistence that they do it our way. It feels very scary to empower people because we're afraid that they'll do it their own way. But isn't what we want the result? Isn't what we want the outcomes versus the how?

So it's an area worth exploring and we're going to be exploring this concept in depth in EPC this coming year. I really want to push the boundaries of our thinking, the boundaries of the limitations and rules and expectations

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that have been placed upon schools. If we want to evolve student outcomes, if we want to expand and we want to increase student outcomes, we have to understand what we want, why we want them, and explore other hows, because the hows that we've been told aren't working for all kids. It's not working for us, it's not working for them, staff or students, and it's definitely not working for the greater good.

So we are going to push the boundaries and really explore this concept of how. Reflect on the times that you've asked how and explore your intentions behind those how questions. See what comes up for you. I invite you into EPC. This is the perfect time to join. Can't wait to meet you. I will talk to you next week. Take good care of yourselves. Bye.

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