

# Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

## **Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning**

Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 396.

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 happy to be here with you today. It is the end of July. We are gearing up for the upcoming school year. I am so excited for 25/26. EPC is launching next week. You still have time to join us. Come on in. We would love to support you throughout the year.

The content I have created for this program this year, I'm so proud of it and I'm so excited to share it with you. It is the best of the best of my work. I have done some deep, deep work personally, professionally, and I really feel like I'm aligned. I'm really engaged. I'm really on track and really tuned in to the needs and the support and the conversations that principals who really want to take themselves and their schools to the next level are having.

So if you are interested, if you're eager, if you're excited, if you want to be the best version of you as a principal, EPC is your place. Come on in.

All right. This is the time of year when you are planning. You are mapping out your school year. This is the perfect time to have this conversation because you've probably been sitting in district-level meetings or all-hands meetings, or you are about to. Perhaps your district goes on a retreat. Maybe you have an admin retreat or you have these long planning meetings, conversations about the year. And the district will tend to roll out their initiatives.

## **Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning**

So this message is actually for district leaders and site leaders, but site leaders, I know sometimes you can feel very disempowered or you feel a lack of control or agency over the initiatives. Perhaps the district rolls them out and says, "These are your marching orders. You need to implement these seven initiatives, and we're doing this, and we're doing fidelity checks, and we're doing walkthroughs, and we're going to do all the things."

I'm going to cover that in depth in EPC, but this is an overview of the approach that we take to planning, the approach that we take to goal setting, the approach that we take to problem-solving and creating a road map, a year-long plan, a three-month plan. I want to talk about this because we aren't generally tuned in to what's driving our approach to planning.

So we're going to dive into that, just introductory level today here on the podcast, and we take it to the next level. We go really deep into this in EPC. So, I want to highlight the difference between everything planning and anything planning. Most of us look at our school, our district, the needs of our community, our staff, our students, our families, and we see need. We see lack, we see need, we see the need for improvements, the need for change, the need for adjustments, and as people with big hearts who are here to serve and here to help and here to improve the experience for our students and our staff, we want it all to happen right here, right now. We want to fix all of the problems this year.

And we know, mathematically speaking, we could not have enough time, resources, energy to fix all of the problems. And in reality, there is no fixing everything. There is no perfection here. So we know that. If you were to sit down with me and have a conversation or you were in EPC, you would say, "Yes, I get that it's not supposed to be perfect, but I kind of want it to be, right?" So here's the truth. We feel an urgency, we feel the desire, we feel that urge to fix and change and improve.

## **Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning**

And we want it all to look smooth. We want it to feel smooth. We want everything to just function without a lot of distress, without a lot of conflict, without a lot of hiccups or problems. It would be lovely to walk into school where there's a day where everything just hums. And you have those days, especially if you've put good systems in place, you have strong relationships, you are consistent in your communication and in your protocols. When you have those things in place, you can experience days where everything is blissful. The kids are on track, everything is functioning as you would desire it to be, okay?

And because we are in the business of humans and developing humans, the truth is that most days involve interruptions and hiccups and disturbances and behavior issues and emotional and mental regulation issues and behavior issues. So the truth is that there are several things that come up during the school year. And at the beginning of the year, this time of year, we have a lot of excitement, enthusiasm, energy around, we're coming in, we're going to make this year better. The experience, I want it to be better than it was last year because, good Lord, we know last year was rough. And this year, we want it to feel better.

Or the district will say, "Okay, we've looked at the data, we've done the research, we've analyzed this, and here are our theories and conclusions about the initiatives we are going to roll out for the year." So some of the typical goals: student attendance, student engagement, behavior management systems, tiered interventions or extensions, like STEAM, STEM, reading intervention, math interventions, special education processes, protocols, test scores, of course. Test scores are a big one. Instructional leadership approach, what we're going to do as instructional leaders. Are we going to do walkthroughs, observations, learning walks, pacing guide expectations, lesson plan expectations? You know the drill. Sometimes we'll have parent engagement or communication goals.

## **Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning**

The district will determine initiatives based on their interpretation of the data or what the school board wants to see, what parent input, maybe staff input, if you're lucky enough to be included in the initiative building process. But typically, it falls into these data points: student attendance, student engagement, test scores, special education results and, you know, data, that kind of thing, intervention data. And they will create theories around that data and then develop an approach to that. That's what an initiative is, right?

So, in the beginning of the year, we have all of this excitement and energy and we believe we can tackle it all. But the truth is that you can. You literally can improve anything you want this year, but not everything you want. With the everything planning approach, we try to tackle all of the problems in all of the areas. We want to increase student attendance, we want to increase student engagement, we want to increase test scores, we want to increase teacher fidelity on whatever it is we're doing instructionally. We want to increase our special education results. We want to increase our intervention results.

And what happens is year after year after year, what we notice is that teachers feel burned out and discouraged and they feel defeated. Same with our principals, same with our support staff and students. Our expectation is we want you to learn it, learn it well, learn it fast, learn it perfectly, do really well on a test so we can feel good about ourselves as educators, so that you can look good as students and we can celebrate and everybody can be happy.

But trying to sell the idea that people must improve in all of the areas is setting yourself up and others for failure, frustration, disappointment, but worst of all, discouragement and resentment. Because when students feel discouraged and defeated, they don't want to engage in learning. When teachers feel chronically criticized or judged or they feel discouraged at their test scores and they have resentment and they feel defeat, people's

## Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning

will to teach goes down. Principals, same with you. We have all these initiatives and you need to check all these boxes and do all these things and get your school up and running. You need to fix all of this year. They are setting you up for failure.

So district leaders, if you're out there listening to this, be mindful. Your district really can accomplish anything it wants this year, anything, but not everything. Because if you think about achievement, achievement occurs based on how a person feels. When they're setting the goal, how does it feel? Does it feel attainable or not? Are they genuinely interested in accomplishing this goal or not? Has it been bestowed upon them or do they have skin in the game? Are they invested in the goal?

So how the goal feels as it's being set matters. And then while you are in the work of accomplishing the goal during the school year, the day-to-day work that's required to accomplish the goal, how does it feel? Does it feel on track? Are we still invested? Or are we just doing it for the sake of compliance? What is the intention and what is the feeling around the goal while we're doing the work of it?

The most tangible example I can offer you is I used to be a long-distance runner back in my 20s, 30s, and 40s, and I would set a goal for a race. I had to feel that goal. I had to want it from the very outset. Why did I want to set that goal? What did I want out of it? And then I noticed how I felt in the training for the goal, the training of that race.

So if I signed up for a race and I wanted to get a PR, you know, my personal best, right, and I wanted to experience a pain-free run, let's say, depending on what the goal was, why I set the goal, what the intention was. Sometimes having a race, it just kept me motivated enough to maintain training. Sometimes that was the only reason I signed up for a race. It's like, "Oh, it's a little 5K. It's going to make sure that I get up and run every morning." If I was doing a 10K, I was like, "Oh, I think I want to try for my PR, my personal best." And if I was running a half marathon or a marathon,

## Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning

that was like an extension goal, like testing my limits, testing my boundaries, and ensuring that I was balancing training with safety and pain-free running, okay?

So when you're thinking about a goal, think about what it feels like before, during, and then what do you think you're going to feel at the end? So when you're goal setting, when you're having these conversations in July and August of this year, be thinking about how a goal feels before, during, and after. Because what we do, and the reason we feel urgency, is we want people, we want things to change. We want test scores to change. We want data to reflect change, improvement change, in all of the areas because we think that once the test scores are up, once attendance is up, once behavior referrals are down, when all of those data points are where we want them to be, we think that education's going to feel better. Like life's going to be a little easier, it's going to be a little better, we're going to be a little happier.

However, this is founded upon the false premise that perfection will eliminate pain, that if things are better in our schools, if the scores are better, if the data reflects better, that we'll feel better, that life will be better, that we will eliminate pain from our experience, which is why we feel the urgency. We think that life will feel better, school will feel better, our career will feel better when these data points reflect back to us what we want them to. So is it actually true that if we improve everything, that we will not experience discomfort, pain, disappointment, guilt, shame, embarrassment, failure? Is that true?

Or is it true that we come in and do this work to connect, to support, to develop, to collaborate, to engage in life, to be alive as an educator, to engage with students, engage with teachers for the process of developing humans, for educating humans, and for the experience of connecting and collaborating and learning together? Knowing that there will always be hiccups, there will always be bumps, there will always be problems that

## Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning

come up. No matter what we fix, there will be another one. And in knowing that, we can explore how to get out of that loop of urgency that we feel chronically trying to fix everything.

So the district is going to determine their initiatives, and then as district leaders and site leaders, we want to explore the feelings that come with these goals and plans, trying to plan for everything versus saying, "What's one thing we really want to tackle this year?" And in EPC, I'm teaching a course on this. And in fact, I am teaching planning mastery next week, actually.

So if you are interested in signing up for Time Mastery for the Empowered Principal, we are meeting next week. That is an a la carte option if you aren't ready to join EPC. You can participate in this program separately for the cost of \$111. It is a three-part class. It will be held on August 1st, August 5th, and August 7th. So I think that's a Friday, a Tuesday, and a Thursday. And I'm going to walk you through the planning mastery process, how to plan your next 90 days, how to plan out your year without it feeling overwhelming, without it being as stressful, so that you can feel empowered as a leader, so that you can feel confident that you are getting to the priorities, that you're getting everything done, okay?

We're going to talk about that in Time Mastery. If you want to sign up for that, the link will be in the show notes. And we'll talk about how to get out of that loop of urgency. When you feel this chronic urgency to get this done right now and get this figured out and tackle this and this is where we overwork, overexert, overschedule, we exhaust ourselves and we feel burned out. And then we go into the underwhelm cycle where we're just, "What does this matter anyway, right?" We go from overwhelm to underwhelm, overwhelm to underwhelm. It's like we're bouncing between all and none. We want to live in the land of and.

So planning your year focused on the one thing. If there's one thing that you could accomplish this year and feel good about it, what would that be?

## Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning

What's the one priority? It's not to say you're not going to have other smaller goals or other tasks. You're still going to have deadlines and things you need to complete and observations and you're still going to do all of the things. But this guilt trip that we give ourselves all year long, we have this laundry list of things we want to get done. We don't get to them. "Oh, I should do that. Oh, I didn't do that. Oh, I should do that. I didn't get to that. Oh, I feel so bad. Oh, I should work late. Oh, I should go in this weekend." That kind of thing, we want to reduce that stress for you, okay?

So come on in to EPC. You'll get everything in EPC. Or if you want to taste, if you're brand new to the world of the Empowered Principal and you want to just check out Time Mastery, you can purchase Time Mastery for \$111. It's a three-part course. I will walk you through the pre-planning and then the planning and then overcoming obstacles, okay?

Have a beautiful school year. Welcome back. Congratulations to all of the brand new school leaders out there. Remember, you guys, you are going to be able to join the Essentials for School Leaders. I will be running that program again this fall. I will list the dates as soon as we have those secured, but I will be running Essentials for School Leaders in later September, early October.

So get you through the kickoff of the year, join EPC to help you with the kickoff of the year, or you can take Time Mastery just to get yourself situated, ready to go. And then Essentials for School Leaders will happen towards the end of September and into October, okay?

So with that, I bid you a wonderful, beautiful week. Enjoy the school year. I can't wait to hear all about it. It's going to be extraordinary. Have a beautiful week, and I will talk to you guys next week. Take great care. Bye-bye.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*. If you enjoyed this episode and want to learn more, please visit [angelakellycoaching.com](http://angelakellycoaching.com) where you can sign up for weekly updates and

## **Ep #396: Everything Planning vs. Focused Priority Planning**

learn more about the tools that will help you become an emotionally fit school leader.