

# Ep #428: Impartial Accountability: Holding Everyone to the Same Standard



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

## **Ep #428: Impartial Accountability: Holding Everyone to the Same Standard**

Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 428.

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 enjoyed last week's conversation with Maggie and Eric. I had the best time with them, and it's so near and dear to my heart, the concept of bilingual education. I do hope that you found it valuable and that you are able to use some of those conversations to spark conversations in your school with your students and that you can bring some of those strategies into the community in which you are serving. So, I hope that was helpful.

Today, I've got a hopefully short and sweet conversation to have with you around accountability. So accountability is a popular topic this time of year because it's all things HR. We are in the spring season of school leadership. We are finalizing observations and evaluations. We are making decisions around staffing, and I have been coaching many principals around the idea of holding people accountable and ensuring that their accountability is impartial.

So, there are people that you lead who you might feel are quite easy to hold accountable. One, teachers who are doing their job are easy to hold accountable because they hold themselves accountable. So you are literally just in alignment. You guys are on the same frequency. You're holding yourself accountable. This teacher's holding themselves accountable. You work in collaboration, they work in collaboration with their team or their department, with parents, with the students, and the conversations that you have with these teachers around accountability are very inspiring and they're expansive because it's how do we hold ourselves

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accountable? How can we help others to embrace accountability and self-accountability and ownership of their learning experience, of their teaching experience, of their collaboration experience, their connection with students, with other staff members, with families, with parents, conversations, communication, all of that. The accountability is intrinsic for this group of people.

Now, there are other people where maybe they're new. They have a lot of will. They're eager, they're excited, they're enthusiastic. They want to learn. They want that feedback. And the accountability with them, again, is very collaborative because they're saying, tell me what I'm doing well, tell me what I don't know, I want to learn, I want to grow. And these staff members, when you're holding them accountable, it doesn't feel scary. It feels like a conversation, a collaboration where you are working with them. You're sharing with them, but you're sharing it with them in a way that is empowering and supportive and expansive and engaging. So they are feeling like you are giving them wisdom and knowledge and mentorship in your holding them accountable.

And these are the people where if something comes up and you say, hey, were you able to get that document completed, filled out, signed, returned, submitted, whatever. Let's say they forgot something. They're like, oh, thank you for the reminder, and they're on it. So the accountability, and it can go both ways. Perhaps there's something that you said you would do and you forgot or you got distracted and they come to you and say, hey, were you able to review that email or to sign this paperwork that I need? Oh yes, thank you. There is a mutual understanding of accountability, even when it's somebody who requires mentorship, guidance, coaching, and reflection and questions where they can contemplate on their own and take ownership for that accountability that you're offering.

Then you have people where you need to hold them more accountable. Perhaps they are less aware. Perhaps they aren't in reflective mode where

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you are sitting them down, having conversations and asking them to be more self-accountable, to be more reflective, and your accountability approach might be more direct where you need to offer them questions, contemplations, things to consider, things to reflect on, things to adjust in their teaching style or in their communication style or collaboration style or classroom management, some aspect of teaching, or if it's paraprofessional, the same thing applies. But there are people who require more coaching, more mentorship, more accountability conversations, but you don't feel afraid to have them. It just might require a little more time or effort on your part.

And then there are people where we know that they require us to hold them accountable, that they aren't meeting a standard or they do need some feedback or they need guidance, reflection, mentorship, and leadership, and they are not meeting the expectations. And you find yourself uncomfortable with holding them accountable. So I've been coaching on this a lot because the other three tend to be less intimidating for a leader, whether you're new or veteran, holding somebody accountable based on your own experience with accountability can feel a little scary and intimidating.

So, when you're feeling those emotions around accountability and being impartial with your accountability, which means you're treating everybody equitably and fairly when it comes to holding them accountable and expecting people to meet the standards of the position in which they are serving, when you find yourself feeling a little squirmy and a little resistant to holding somebody accountable, now it's time to self-coach. Now it's time to hold ourselves accountable to what's coming up for us. So this is the moment where we take a step back and we look at what is coming up for us.

So for this group of people, and it's usually just one or two persons. You're not typically afraid to hold everyone accountable. Now, you might be if you

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are a brand new leader or you are younger. I've had this happen where people are like, I'm so young, I can't hold veteran teachers accountable when I'm 20 years younger than them. That is a self-coaching issue. That's a great reason to join into EPC or to sign up for one-on-one coaching so that we can build up your capacity to hold everyone equally and impartially accountable.

So let's just talk about if there's this one person that you're a veteran principal or you don't feel afraid of all accountability, but there is one or two people that when you think of holding them accountable, it sets you back. It kind of makes your stomach go churn. Doesn't feel good. You don't want to do it. Let's just dive in. Think about what's coming up for you. Why don't you want to hold them accountable? What are the feelings coming up? There's a reason you don't want to. There's a reason your nervous system says, no thank you. Let's back up. This doesn't feel safe. Holding them accountable does not feel safe to me as a leader. You want to explore why. How is it impacting?

Because I'll tell you this, when you don't explore this concept, and we dive deep into this in The Empowered Principal Collaborative because it comes up so often. It comes up all year long. And the problem is when we get to the spring, if we haven't been impartially holding everyone equally accountable, then when it comes time to have staffing conversations, if we haven't been documenting and we haven't been communicating and we haven't been holding people to a standard from the fall until now, and then it comes up, they'll say, "Wait a minute, where is this coming from? You haven't brought this up all year. Why now? Why when it's time to make decisions around staffing?" And that can be another reason why you don't want to hold people accountable because you recognize that perhaps you haven't had the conversations early enough. So here you are in the spring, what do you do about it now? Because it can feel very, you can feel a little guilty or you can feel, this is why you might feel afraid. It's like, I know I haven't accurately documented or I know I haven't adequately

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communicated. So notice how it's making you lead. When somebody feels intimidating to you and you are their leader, it does impact the decisions you make and the actions you take in terms of leading them.

So, just explore what's coming up for you? Why are you feeling this way? And is it getting you the result you want? So I was just coaching somebody recently and they're kind of mad at themselves at this point in the year because we've coached on this multiple times and on this staff member multiple times and the documentation's somewhat there, somewhat not there. The conversations are somewhat there, somewhat not there. And now it's time to talk about staffing again, and the person's feeling unsure because one, the data isn't there to be the foundation of the conversation, and then it becomes about emotions, not about the math. And number two, the person doesn't want this person in the position again. However, it becomes a conversation around, do you want the position or not? And is there something else for you or not versus, here is the data that is explicitly showing you not meeting the standards of this position. Doesn't mean the person's a bad person. It doesn't mean that they are not good for any job. It just means in this position, the standards aren't being met.

But the feelings that come up for us as the leader revolve around our thoughts, our actions. Did we take enough action? Do we have the evidence, the data to support this conversation, the decision? And did we do our part to be leaders that held people accountable on an equitable scale? And look, this is really hard. How do you define equitable? How do you define like, you know, impartial treatment when everybody is a little bit different? You are differentiating, but your body knows. You know when you can say to yourself and look yourself in the eye in the mirror and say, yes, to the best of my integrity, I've held everyone to, you know, the standards of the teaching profession, the standards of the positions, the standards of the paraprofessional, whatever job it is that they are serving in.

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So, where are you feeling a little off and why? And just be honest with yourself. A lot of times we don't want to be honest with ourselves because we realize perhaps we didn't have the capacity to hold them accountable this year. And we might have to put up with them being in another position one more year. Or perhaps we didn't have the understanding of how to hold them accountable or how to document their situation. Sometimes it can be that the relationship is personal and so personal and professional lines get a little bit blurred. It happens because you're humans and you're working together, especially if you're in a small town or a small community where personal and professional is intermingled, but even in a big district that can happen.

So, the other thing to consider is if you're feeling unsure, what fears are coming up? What do you think will happen if you hold this person accountable? How do you think they'll respond? Why do you think they'll respond that way? What is your fear? And if they do that, what could happen? And notice the ripple effect that your brain thinks will happen if you have these conversations, hold these people accountable or document their performance.

Because there are people out there who will do things to wiggle out of accountability. So that can feel scary. They can talk to other people behind your back or they can, you know, rally the troops and get people upset or, you know, fire up a conversation with parents or community. They can go to social media. There's a lot of things that we're afraid of. We're afraid of that social scrutiny that can take place. And the way to ground yourself and to put the roots into the ground is to stay in integrity, and the way you do that is to align to impartial accountability.

So if you have feelings around accountability. So let's say for example, you have been held accountable and perhaps it was a negative experience, whether that was in your childhood or in your young adulthood or even as a school leader, as a teacher, if you've had a negative experience with a boss

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who has held you accountable but has done so, if they've been partial and been unfair to you or they've been harsh with you, or they have mistreated you in some way or created fear and intimidation in their accountability approach, you might have fears around holding people accountable because you don't want to be that kind of a boss. That's another reason people will shy away from accountability and being impartial. They don't want people to think that they're a mean boss or a bad boss or a harsh person or that they are treating them unfairly. So you might back away if you have had negative experiences with accountability. So, really exploring what accountability means to you, what it looks like, what it feels like, what you want it to look and feel like both for you and for the person who's receiving the accountability.

And here's what I'll say. This could go so much deeper, but I wanted to bring it up so that you can just be aware to explore this on your own, see what comes up for you. If you want more support, of course, reach out, sign up for one-on-one coaching or group coaching and join us in EPC as we have these conversations because these are the things that hold us back from expanding the impact our school makes and the empowerment that we offer for staff and students.

So, but here's what I want to say. Be really graceful with yourself. Accountability is a topic and a facet of leadership that requires us to grow individually so that we can expand our capacity to hold people accountable. And we have to work through our discomfort and walk through what we think and feel, especially when it comes to particular individuals, but also our own experiences. We want to calm ourselves and be able to make peace with what accountability is, why it's important, the value of it, and to almost sell ourselves, like get on board with the purpose of accountability, and then what does it look like to be a leader who implements impartial accountability?

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So, a lot of thoughts around accountability. These are some of the things that are coming up and I wanted to offer them to you. Work with that this week, explore that for yourself this week as you're driving home or driving to work. Just ask yourself some of these questions, you know, what's coming up for me? How does it feel? Have I had negative experiences? How do I want to be holding people accountable? Why? What are the fears I have around it? Explore this and share with us what's coming up for you. Please join the free Facebook group that we have, The Empowered Principal community. We would love to have you there.

If you did not get the chance to join the Aspiring School Leaders workshop, which I held on March 7th, if you didn't get a chance to join that live, just simply email me. We'll drop my email in the notes and I will send you the link because it was a free workshop. So if you're an aspiring leader, want to learn more about how to get into school leadership, which you would be amazing at, I want you to join us because this is a topic, learning how to hold yourself and others accountable, not from a place of fear and intimidation or worry that something terrible will happen if you do so. It's an expansion of your identity and an expansion of your impact as a leader. So, explore this. Let me know how it goes. I'd love to hear from you and I will talk with you more about it next week. Have a beautiful week. Take care. Bye.

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