

Ep #430: How to Stay in Your Power



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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Hello, empowered principals. Welcome to episode 430.

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. How are y'all doing out there today? Happy Tuesday. Welcome to the podcast. So happy you're here. I'm happy to be here. And I love this topic. This is a question that has been coming up with clients, with in EPC, and I think it's a great topic for the podcast. And I hope that you can implement it immediately.

I get asked this question often, and the question is, how do I stay in my power? Your brand is empowerment. You talk about empowerment. Yet we're human, and of course, we slip in and out of feeling empowered and feeling like we have power, like we have agency, especially when there are things that are upsetting to us, that are outside of our control, people's behaviors, people's words, people's actions, things that are going on in the world, things that are going on in the school systems, things that are going on in education at large, things that are going on in the country, things that are going on with families and students, and superintendents and district offices. I hear you.

So what do we do to stay in our power? What do we do to stay in our power? So, let's talk about what that question means: staying in my power. How do I stay in my power?

Here's the way that I see it. Staying in your power is understanding the conflicting messages between fear and courage. So when we're in our empowerment, we're feeling courageous. We're feeling aligned. We are feeling certain. We are feeling safe. We are feeling focused. We're feeling sufficient. We are feeling possibility and potential. We feel courageous. So when you take a leap and do something out of courage, you are in your

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empowerment. When you feel good about yourself, your decisions, your actions, when you feel aligned, when the actions you take, the lifestyle you have, the career that you have, the decisions you're making, when all of that feels in alignment with what feels true for you, the values that you value, your philosophy on life, when all of that feels in alignment, you get this little sweet spot of empowerment.

Then you have conflicting messages. So there's courage, encouraging you to have courage, and then there are messages of fear in your mind. What will happen if this? Look what happened last time. So you use the past against you, and you leverage this fear. You have these messages of potential pain. So there's past pain and potential pain. That is fear. It's the opposite of feeling safe. It's the opposite of feeling empowered because you lack safety. You feel like you lack agency. It's when you're doubting yourself, that you failed, you're disappointed, you're upset, you're angry, you feel out of control. There's fear that something bad is going to happen.

So you have this ebb and flow between fear-based thoughts and courageous based thoughts. And what is fear, right? Fear is the amygdala, the part of your brain that keeps you alive. That's its job. The amygdala is telling you to refrain from action, to stop, to defend yourself, or to flee, or to freeze, to not do anything, to placate people, to try and create safety. Because when you feel safe, you're not feeling fear. It's the remedy, right? The remedy of fear when you're feeling afraid is to find a way to feel safe, whether that's physical safety, emotional safety, psychological safety, financial safety, social safety.

Those different kinds of ways that we feel safe. We feel safe when we have money. We feel safe when we have shelter, when we have food. We feel safe when we have transportation, when we have a car, when we have gas to put in our car. We feel safe when we have a job, when we have a savings account. We feel safe when we are with our family and friends. We feel safe when we're in an environment that we are familiar with. But there's lots of times we don't feel safe. If we're in another country and we don't

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understand or we don't know the rules and regulations and the policies and the lifestyle. We feel unsafe when we're not with our people, when we're in a group of strangers, or we go to a conference and we don't bring anybody with us and we don't know anybody, we might feel less safe. We might feel some fear. We might feel unsafe financially if we, let's say, one of the cars died, we had to buy a new car, we had to, the heater went out and it wasn't a planned expense. Sometimes that can stir up feelings of fear.

Like when our kids go out and they learn how to drive, oh my gosh, the fears about what could happen and we project those futuristic fears on the woulda, coulda, shouldas, what are going to happen, what happened in the past, or if I made a mistake in the past, I never want to make this again. Just notice, there's a conflicting message that bounces back between fear and courage, okay?

So fear is the amygdala. It's just firing off and it's going straight to your nervous system: fight or flight, immediate, now, action. That's when, have you ever been in driving the car and something flies in front of you or you have to stop all of a sudden, your heart's pounding and you have that rush of adrenaline? That's just your body doing its job, keep you safe. It helps you react in subhuman time because its job is to try and help you stay safe. Not get into that car accident, not hit the box that's flying across the freeway or whatever, the person that cut you off. That adrenaline rush is just your body functioning as it should.

Courage requires you to use a different part of your brain, your prefrontal cortex. That courage, it has to override the fear's commands. The amygdala is giving commands. This isn't safe. When you go on a roller coaster, the front part of you is, have the courage to get on the roller coaster. You're safe. There's all these regulations. It has safety bars. It has safety belts. It has the over the shoulder safety harness. I'm sure engineers were qualified to - your brain has to override the fear, but your body is like, "I'm going to die," right?

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So there's a different part of the brain. So there's two parts of your brain communicating. The amygdala is safety, safety, safety, safety, safety at all costs. Stay safe in the cave. Don't go out. Don't talk to the people you don't know. Don't drive the cars you don't know how to drive. Don't get on the roller coaster. Don't go for the job. Don't, don't, don't. Don't do anything. Just stay safe. But the courage requires you to communicate with your body in a different way and to override the fear.

Now, you must have enough awareness to identify that you're in fear, to know when your body's actually reacting out of fear, and to understand your own personal signals. So your body has signals that it communicates. It uses your emotions. It uses feelings. It uses literally vibrations in your body. So you're going to feel things in your stomach, or you're going to feel them in your heart, your chest area, or you're going to feel tension in your shoulders, your back, or your neck, your jaw, tension headache. There's different ways that your body communicates with you. Getting in tune with that and understanding the difference between when am I feeling fear and is this fear a legitimate fear?

If something's chasing you, you're not going to negotiate with yourself and think, "Oh, I have the courage to turn around and fight off this leopard that is chasing me," or a mountain lion, if you're hiking and a mountain lion comes across your path or a bear, you're not going to stop and negotiate, "Is this a real fear or not?" You're just going to move. You're going to do the thing you need to do, and you're going to kick in to let that fear drive your definite need for safety, okay? Or going down a dark alley. When it says no, your intuition is like, "Uh-uh, that doesn't feel safe. Don't do it." You make the decision.

Other times, you go to work and this conversation feels very scary. And your body's like, "I don't want to have this conversation. I want to avoid this conversation. I don't want to do anything with this conversation. I don't want to even talk about the conversation. I don't want to have it." That is when courage is required. Is this an actual fear? Am I in danger or am I safe?

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Well, technically I'm sitting in my office, but I feel like there is a lion outside of my door ready to eat me, right? So this conversation between courage and fear. We have to have awareness that we're in fear, that we're in fight or flight, and we have to also be able to discern whether or not you are in actual danger. Am I safe physically? Am I safe emotionally right now? You might not feel safe, but am I safe?

Oftentimes, the fears that we're feeling, it's while we're driving and we're thinking about work on our way to work, or it's coming home and we're thinking about the conversation we had with our friend or our partner. We're still upset with the teacher that we talked with today and we're just, we're in our mind, but we're feeling the fear, the frustration, the feelings, right? Am I in actual danger? Do I not have a place to come home to? Do I not have a bed, food, shelter, electricity, water, clothing, warmth? Or am I worried about the heat bill being high this month? And what can I do? Do you see what I'm saying there? It's like, you have to have the wherewithal to notice the fear and then tap into the other part of your brain that's like, "Wait a minute. Am I actually in danger or am I actually safe? Technically, am I safe?" There's feeling safe and there's being safe.

If a tornado blows through your community, you might not feel safe, but after the tornado, even if a tree falls down on your property, as long as you're living and breathing, you might mark yourself safe. Technically I'm safe, but I'm not feeling very safe right now in my body. There's a difference, okay? So discerning whether or not you are safe can help you regain and step back into your personal power.

I have found that questions, when I ask myself questions, it pauses my brain long enough to give me time to go back from my amygdala into my prefrontal cortex. You got to give your brain a hot minute to get back out of that fear or even to assess the fear. Is the fear accurate? You'll know when you're in physical danger. Your body will override, it will take over, and you will do the thing you need to do to try and stay alive.

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When you're in distress, emotional, mental distress, financial worries, worried about your kids, worried about your spouse, worried about your best friend, all of those things, you can say, okay, now what I want to do is start asking some questions to get into my prefrontal cortex, to rationalize what's going on. Is this fear rational or irrational? So am I safe in the moment? It's a yes or no. And I'll tell you, if you're actually in danger, you won't ask that question. You'll just act. Okay?

So what I do is when I'm starting to panic about something in my life, a relationship, a financial situation, a legal situation, a business situation, anything, am I safe in this moment? I look around. I look at my feet on the ground, my buns in the seat, wherever I'm at, whether I'm standing or sitting or lying down. I'm either standing, sitting, or lying down physically with my body. Am I safe? Okay. I'm in my office. Oh, okay. I'm in my bedroom. Oh, I'm in the car. Oh, I'm standing in my kitchen. I look at my surroundings. I ground myself. And I physically look around. Yes, I'm safe. There are no tigers, lions, or bears in my vicinity at the moment. Maybe I won't be safe in a moment. For now, no bears have entered onto my property, okay?

I'm safe. Then I slow my breathing. Give your nervous system a moment to regulate. You can also move your eyes around up, down, side to side. You can physically ground yourself. You can rub your arms. You can put your hands on your legs, or I like to put one hand on my heart, one hand on my belly, and breathe to tell my body, you are okay right now. You're not going to be eaten alive. You're not in danger. You don't feel safe, but you are safe. Just feel your physical presence in the world, in your space. Put your hands on your lap, your steering wheel if you're in the car, wherever you are in the moment, ground your body in that space.

And breathe. Just breathe slow and deep for as long as it takes for your mind to shift in and say, okay, I'm having thoughts that don't feel safe, but I'm safe. There's a difference. And once you do that, then you can start asking the questions. What kind of danger do I feel like I'm in? What

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doesn't feel safe? Am I concerned physically, mentally, emotionally? Am I concerned financially? Am I concerned professionally? Am I worried about my career? Am I worried about my impact? What kind of fear am I feeling? What kind of concerns do I have? Is it psychological? Is it a social situation? Is it a career? Is it financial? Is it a relationship with your kids, your family, friends, anybody?

Questions, what it does is it invites your brain to think, and thinking happens in the prefrontal cortex. So when you want to get back into your power and you feel threatened, let's say somebody at school has said, "I'm going to go to the newspaper, or I'm going to go to the superintendent, I'm going to go on social media, I'm going to blast you, I'm going to get you fired." This is exactly what somebody said to me, okay? That did not feel safe. I felt under attack. I was afraid that this person was going to actually have a negative impact on my career, and that I would forever be fired and banned from being able to teach or to lead ever again. Of course, your brain goes down that rabbit hole.

And then you have to say, okay, in this moment, I am safe. That didn't feel safe. I felt under attack. Now, what am I fearing? And then I dig down the rabbit hole, and I let my brain say, well, this and then this and then this. Okay, fair enough. But let's talk about that. Is it true? Will it actually happen? What's the probability? What else might be true? Is it true that everyone's going to believe this one person's perspective? Is it also true they might work with you? They might listen to your side? Is it also true that you've been in integrity? Is there a part where you weren't in integrity and you need to own that, which feels scary as well, but can you handle it? Get coaching if you need to, get support, but go into the place where you can start to understand and shift from fear back into courage because that's where your empowerment lies. That's where your personal power lies.

These questions shift you back into the part of your brain that allows you to explore and examine those thoughts and the beliefs that are rising and creating fear. So there are fear-based thoughts and courageous based

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thoughts, empowerment thoughts. But then once you get back into knowing that you're safe, you can start to brain drain and separate yourself and your safety from your thoughts. There are thoughts that don't feel safe, but they're thoughts, and they can feel scary, but the thought itself is just a sentence. And when you put it onto paper, you're like, there's a sentence that when I read that, it feels bad, or when I read that, it feels scary. But it's a sentence that's not happening to my body right now. And then if it did, here's how I would handle it, staying in my power. And if I feel out of power, I now know what to do. I physically regulate. I remind myself I'm safe. I ground myself. And then I can start to question and look into what else might be true that allows me to step back into my power.

So try that. Let us know, does it work? Does it not? What questions do you have? As simple as this sounds, it's one of the hardest things we do as school leaders, and I invite you into EPC. You can do one-on-one coaching from now until the end of this year and then jump into EPC for next year. But hey, if you want to just start in EPC, I've got you. We've got a great group of people. Would love to have you there. I feel like this work is the heart and soul of leadership. It is the internal leadership work that we do, staying in your power, knowing how to get into your power, what to do when you get out so that you can realign and get back into your own personal power.

That is empowerment. That is The Empowered Principal way, The Empowered Principal process. And I really do believe it's how we're going to learn how to lead in a way that expands the quality of experience, the quality of education, the quality of impact that we have for staff, students, and our communities. Have a beautiful week, take good care of yourselves, and please, please let me know how this practice of staying in your own power works for you. Take good care. Talk to you next week. Bye.

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